

# India-EU FTA talks today

NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (IANS)

**INDIA** and the European Union are scheduled to begin the next round of talks for a proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) from Monday in Brussels with the aim of concluding the talks by the end of this year, a senior official said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had agreed to expedite the conclusion of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by the end of the year at their meeting in Delhi last month.

"A Free Trade Agreement between the EU and India would be the largest deal of this kind anywhere in the world. I am well aware it will not be easy. But I also know that timing and determina-



**PM Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had agreed to expedite the conclusion of FTA by the end of the year.**

tion count and that this partnership comes at the right

moment for both of us," Von der Leyen, said during her two-day visit to India.

Her statement came against the backdrop of massive tariff hikes proposed against all countries by US President Donald Trump under his 'America First' policy which is threatening to disrupt global trade and heighten uncertainty in the global economy.

# CDS visit solidified **India-Aus** Defence partnership: MoD

NEW DELHI, Mar 9 (PTI)

CHIEF of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan concluded a successful visit to Australia from March 4 to 7 during which the deliberations focused on strengthening military cooperation, with the emphasis on maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region and other key aspects, the Defence Ministry has said.

The Ministry said the visit underscored the growing engagement between the two nations under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, emphasising shared commitment towards regional security and military collaboration.

During his visit, General Chauhan was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour and tra-

ditional welcome upon his arrival at the Russell Offices of the Australian Defence Force, where he held high-level discussions with Admiral David Johnston, Australia's Chief of Defence Force and with the Chiefs of Staff Committee, it said.

The CDS also visited Headquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC), gaining insights into Australia's operational command structure and exploring avenues for enhanced joint operations.

He also paid a visit to Forces Command Headquarters, Australian Army and Fleet Headquarters, Royal Australian Navy, fostering deeper coordination in maritime security and strategic operations, the statement said.



# China defends its **USD 249 bn** defence budget in Parliament

China has the world's second-largest military budget after the US, whose latest defence spending amounted to over USD 890 billion as proposed by President Donald Trump.

BEIJING, Mar 9 (PTI)

CHINA on Sunday defended its USD 249 billion defence budget, which is next only to the US, saying it faces tough challenges in safeguarding sovereignty and the increased amount will be used to develop new-domain forces with the latest combat capabilities and joint strikes by its armed forces. Chinese Premier Li Qiang announced on Wednesday in the parliament that the planned defence expenditure for the country this year is 1.784665 trillion yuan (about USD 249 billion).

"The Chinese military faces tough challenges in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Defence Spokesperson Sr. Co. Wu Qian said during the ongoing annual parliament session. Last year,

China increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about USD 232 billion (1.67 trillion yuan). China has the world's second-largest military budget after

the US, whose latest defence spending amounted to over USD 890 billion as proposed by President Donald Trump. While China cites the heavy US budget, its increasing defence spending is putting pressure on neighbours, especially India.

The Chinese defence spending amounted to three times that of India's Rs 6,81,210 crore (about USD 78.8 billion). China's defence budget figures are viewed by critics with scepticism in light of massive military modernisation, including building aircraft carriers, rapid construction of advanced naval ships and modern stealth aircraft being carried out at a feverish pitch by the Chinese military.

Wu said the increased expenditure will be mainly used to develop new-domain forces with new combat capabilities and to enhance systems and capacity for reconnaissance and early warning, joint strikes, battlefield support and integrated logistics support.



# Madhav National Park in MP India's 58th tiger reserve now

## JOURNEY OF TIGER CONSERVATION IN INDIA

### LANDMARK YEARS

**1969** | Ban on the export of all wild cat skins

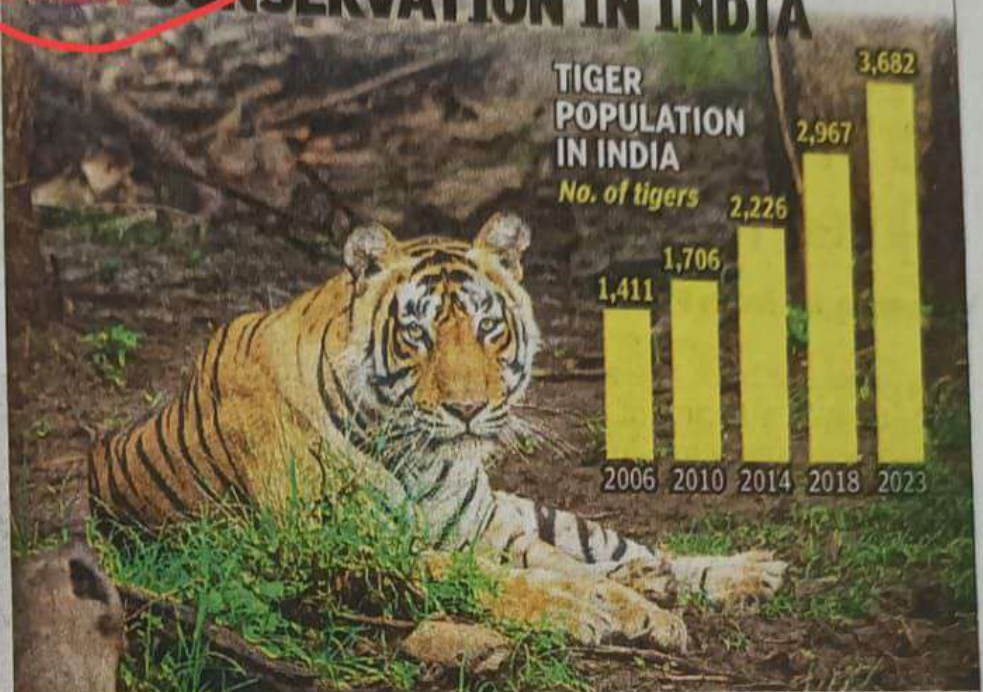
**1972** | Wildlife Protection Act enacted

**1973** | Project Tiger launched

**2006** | Amendment in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, resulting in establishment of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)

**2010** | Global Tiger Reserve Day celebrated to bolster international efforts for tiger conservation

**2023** | International Big Cats Alliance (IBCA) launched



### STATE-WISE LIST OF TIGER RESERVES



State/Region	No. of TR
Madhya Pradesh	9
Maharashtra	6
Karnataka, Rajasthan and TN	5 each
Assam and Chhattisgarh	4 each
Arunachal Pradesh and UP	3 each
Kerala, Odisha, Telangana, U'khand & WB	2 each
Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand & Mizoram	1 each

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**New Delhi:** India has added the 58th tiger reserve to its tally with the latest entrant being Madhav National Park in Madhya Pradesh. The expansion of such reserves underscores the country's commitment to provide extensive and diverse habitats for the big cats.

Tiger reserves, spread across 18 of India's tiger range states, cover an area of more than 82,836 sq km. Such

reserves are constituted using a core/buffer method to promote tiger conservation through multiple efforts on the ground, including protecting habitats of the big cats. The Madhav Tiger Reserve has become the ninth tiger reserve of Madhya Pradesh, the highest in any state.

PM Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed the development, saying the country will always be at the forefront of protecting animals and contributing to a sustainable planet. He underlined that In-

dia is blessed with wildlife diversity and a culture that celebrates wildlife.

"With historic emphasis laid on restoring the ecological diversity on planet Earth by PM Narendra Modi, India continues to make great strides in environmental protection and wildlife conservation... The development is a testament to the relentless efforts of our forest officials who are selflessly working towards the cause," environment minister Bhupender Yadav said.



# 'Make in India' boost as pvt sector produces key Tejas component

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The first rear fuselage for the Tejas Mark-1A jet produced by the private sector was handed over to defence PSU Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which is struggling to produce the indigenous fighter, in the presence of defence minister Rajnath Singh in Bengaluru on Sunday.

"This is a testimony to India's progress towards Aatmanirbharta in defence and the govt's commitment towards enhanced public-private partnership. HAL and the private sector are playing a key role in strengthening the armed forces with the latest platforms and technologies," Singh said, in the presence of IAF chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh. "HAL, through its integrated model and strategies, is not only bolstering India's defence capabilities but also adding new dimensions to Indian defence manufacturing," Singh added.

HAL had placed orders with various Indian private companies such as L&T, Alpha Tocol Engineering Services, Tata Advanced Systems Ltd, VEM Technologies and Lakshmi Mission Works for supplying major modules for the Tejas Mark-1A fighters.

This comes even as the IAF chief has publicly lashed out at HAL in recent weeks.

The IAF till now has got 38 of the first 40 Tejas Mark-1



The first rear fuselage for the Tejas Mark-1A jet produced by the private sector was handed over to HAL in the presence of defence minister Rajnath Singh in Bengaluru on Sunday

fighters ordered for Rs 8,802 crore under two contracts inked in 2006 and 2010. The first "improved" Tejas Mark-1A jet, out of the 83 contracted from HAL under the Rs 46,898 crore deal in Feb 2021, is yet to be delivered. The order for another 97 Tejas Mark-1A fighters for Rs 67,000 crore is also in the pipeline. The almost two-year delay in delivery of 99 GE-404 engines by US firm General Electric is one of the main reasons for the delay in the Tejas fighters.

The MoD, on its part, said HAL has already manufactured 12 rear fuselages for the Tejas Mark-1A fighters, which are on the aircraft in the manufacturing line. "With this supply, a major structure module produced by an Indian private partner will be integrated into the Mark-1A aircraft, enabling HAL to meet additional delivery commitments for the IAF from 2025-26 onwards," an official said.



NEXT 007 SHOULD BE BRITISH, SAYS HE'D BE IN

# Russia forces use gas pipeline to reach Ukrainians in Kursk

## Kyiv Says Russians Detected And Hit With Rockets, Drones; Sat Maps Show Ukraine's Contingent Nearly Surrounded After Rapid Advances By Moscow

**Moscow:** Russian special forces crept miles through a gas pipeline near the town of Sudzha in an attempt to surprise Ukrainian forces as part of a major offensive to eject Ukrainian soldiers from the western Russian region of Kursk, pro-Russian war bloggers said.

The ruse was among moves aimed at cutting off thousands of Ukrainian soldiers in the region ahead of Ukrainian talks with the US on a possible peace deal to end the war. Ukrainian troops seized about 1,300sqkm of Russia's Kursk region in Aug in what Kyiv said was an attempt to gain a bargaining chip in future negotiations and to force Russia to shift forces from eastern Ukraine.

Russia has been pressing its push to regain control of the region with some success in recent days. Open source maps on Friday showed Kyiv's contingent in Kursk nearly surrounded after rapid Russian advances. "The lid of the smoking cauldron is almost closed," former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said on Telegram. "The offensive continues."

**Yuri Podolyaka, a Ukrainian-born, pro-Russian military blogger, said Russian special forces crept nearly 16 km along the inside of the 1.5 metre wide gas pipeline and spent several days in the pipe before surprising Ukrainian forces from the rear near Sudzha. Pro-Russian war blogger Two Majors said a**



President Zelensky quipped about his attire on Sunday, in apparent reference to his spat with Trump. Concluding his speech at an event in Kyiv on Sunday, he joked, 'Sorry I'm not in a suit', earning applause

### Musk threatens to shut Starlink for Ukraine; Poland to seek options

Poland, which pays for Ukraine's Starlink internet services, may seek an alternative if Elon Musk's company proves to be "unreliable", the foreign minister said Sunday. Musk said in a post on X, that Ukraine's "entire front line would collapse if I turned it (Starlink) off". He said he was "sickened by ... years of slaughter in a stalemate that Ukraine will inevitably lose". Polish foreign minister Radoslaw Sikorski called out "ethics" of Musk's "threatening the victim of aggression". REUTERS

### major battle was under way.

Ukraine's airborne assault forces said that Russian soldiers had used the pipeline in an attempt to gain a foothold, but

### Thank Starlink. Without it, Russia would be near Poland: Rubio to Warsaw

US secretary of state Marco Rubio accused Poland's foreign minister Radoslaw Sikorski of "making things up" and suggested he was ungrateful, in a rebuke after Sikorski said Ukraine may need an alternative to Starlink. "Say thank you because without Starlink Ukraine would have lost long ago and Russians would be on the border with Poland right now," he said. In reply to Sikorski's post, Musk wrote: "Be quiet, small man. You pay a tiny fraction of the cost. There is no substitute for Starlink."

the Russians were promptly detected and attacked with rockets, artillery and drones.

Russian advances in 2024 and Trump's upending of US

policy on Ukraine and Russia have raised fears among European leaders that Ukraine will lose the war and that Trump is turning his back on Europe. The US paused military aid and the sharing of intelligence with Ukraine after a meeting between Trump and President Volodymyr Zelensky on Feb 28 descended into acrimony.

In its daily update on the situation in Kursk, Russia's defence ministry said its forces had retaken the village of Lebedevka, as well as seizing Novenke, a hamlet across the border in Ukraine's neighbouring Sumy region. Moscow made no official mention of the pipeline operation, but Major General Ahti Alaudinov, commander of Chechnya's Akhmat special forces, reposted pictures on Telegram of special forces inside a gas pipeline. "I am surprised by people who really think that Russia could lose," he said. "It is a good day." Russian Telegram channels showed pictures of special forces in gas masks as they made their way along the inside of what looked like a large pipe. Owing to battlefield reporting restrictions on both sides, Reuters was unable to verify the reports.

The Soviet-era Urengoy-Pomary-Uzhgorod pipeline used to bring gas from western Siberia via Sudzha to Ukraine but Ukraine terminated all Russian gas transit through its territory from Jan 1. REUTERS



# Carney or Freeland? Liberals to elect party chief & Canada PM

Matina Stevis-Gridneff  
and Vjosa Isai

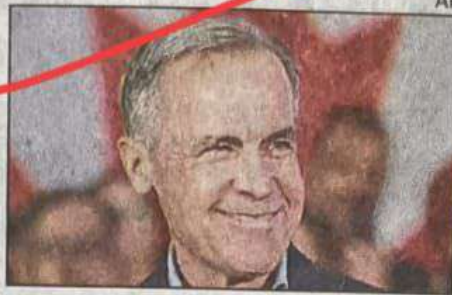
Two friends from Alberta, both with strong careers overseas and similar backgrounds — Harvard and Oxford graduates, members of the liberal global elite — are vying to replace Justin Trudeau as leader of the Liberal Party and of the country just as Canada faces a generational crisis because of Trump's tariffs and sovereignty threats.

Some 4,00,000 Liberal Party members have been casting ballots in their party's important leadership race to decide who will succeed Trudeau and mark a new era in Canadian politics. Whoever wins will have to call a general election, which must be held by Oct, but could take place sooner. The results of the election will be announced at an event in Ottawa, the capital, at 6.30pm Sunday (4am IST Monday).

## Who are the candidates?

The race is between Mark Carney, 59, the former governor of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England and a prominent green investor, and ex-finance minister Chrystia Freeland, 56, whose resignation triggered Trudeau's decision to step down. Surveys have shown Carney is the front-runner.

A third candidate, Karina Gould, 37, has been trying to make her mark as a future leader of the party, differentiating herself from the two others as more plainly spoken and more left-leaning. Frank Baylis, 62, a businessperson



Mark Carney, 59, the former governor of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England



Chrystia Freeland, 56, the former FM whose resignation triggered Trudeau's decision to step down

and former member of parliament, is also running.

Freeland and Carney share similar backgrounds and are both considered technically competent centrists with a preference for fiscal discipline. Freeland had a successful career in international journalism but has been a prominent politician in Canada for the past 10 years. Her record as finance minister and, previously, foreign minister, is being closely scrutinised. Her detractors hold her accountable for not standing up to Trudeau.

She has tried to reintroduce herself to the Canadian public as a more grassroots candidate who has listened to critiques and will abandon unpopular policies such as Trudeau's tax on carbon emissions. She's pitched herself as the best person to stand up to Trump.

Carney has not been a traditional politician. He joined the public sector as a senior official in the finance ministry in 2004 and was later tapped to lead the central banks in Canada and Britain. He was praised for his performance in both posts, helping Canada weather the 2008 financial crisis and steering the UK through Brexit, though

critics accused him of inciting fear by suggesting Brexit would hurt the economy.

## Their campaign promises

Carney's plan is centered on boosting Canada's economy, which has been hobbled by inflation and low productivity. The high costs of housing has become a central issue in Canada, and Carney has pledged to build 4 million homes over several years. Like Freeland, Carney also plans to jettison Trudeau's carbon tax.

Freeland's platform focuses on policy areas that have become liabilities for the Liberal Party, including an emphasis on tackling Canada's physician shortage, increasing military spending and countering foreign interference in politics.

## What happens next?

What happens next will depend on who the new leader is. Carney does not hold a seat in parliament. His campaign has indicated he would call elections soon after. Freeland, who holds a parliamentary seat, told NYT that she'd consider whether a quick election was a good idea given the tariff row and its impact on economy. NYT