

SHANTI ACT: POWER, PROGRESS AND NUCLEAR RESPONSIBILITY

The enactment of the SHANTI Act marks a significant moment in India's long and cautious engagement with nuclear energy. More than a legislative update, the Act signals a strategic recalibration of how nuclear power and ionising radiation are positioned within India's developmental, technological and sustainability ambitions. At a time when energy security, climate commitments and digital infrastructure are converging priorities, the SHANTI Act seeks to place nuclear energy firmly at the centre of India's future-ready growth model.

One of the Act's most consequential implications lies in its recognition of nuclear energy as an enabler of emerging technologies. Stable, round-the-clock electricity is indispensable for data centres, artificial intelligence research, high-performance computing, quantum technologies and semiconductor fabrication. As India pushes to become a global hub for digital innovation and indigenous manufacturing, nuclear power offers a reliable low-carbon alternative that complements renewables, whose intermittency remains a challenge. In this sense, the SHANTI Act aligns energy policy with India's aspirations in advanced science, space technologies and precision manufacturing.

Beyond power generation, the Act underscores the expansive civil applications of nuclear science. From healthcare and food preservation to water management, agriculture and environmental research, ionising radiation has long played a quiet but transformative role. By explicitly linking nuclear technologies with innovation and sustainable development goals, the SHANTI Act broadens public understanding of nuclear energy beyond reactors and megawatts, highlighting its everyday relevance to national welfare.

Equally important is the Act's focus on safety, security and regulation. Public confidence has always been the cornerstone of nuclear policy, and the SHANTI Act strengthens this foundation by providing statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB). Until now, the absence of a clear legislative mandate for the regulator was often cited as a structural gap. By formally establishing AERB through law, the Act reinforces regulatory independence, transparency and accountability-critical factors in maintaining the highest safety standards. The provisions for continuous monitoring, accounting and surveillance of nuclear materials and facilities further demonstrate a commitment to robust safeguards. Empowering AERB inspectors to conduct regular inspections, issue corrective guidance and, in extreme cases, suspend or revoke licences, ensures that safety oversight is not merely advisory but enforceable. This approach reflects international best practices and strengthens India's credibility as a responsible nuclear state. However, the success of the SHANTI Act will ultimately depend on implementation. Regulatory autonomy must be matched with adequate technical capacity, skilled manpower and institutional transparency. Public communication will also be key-nuclear expansion without sustained engagement risks misunderstanding and resistance. As India moves forward, balancing rapid technological progress with uncompromising safety will remain the central test. In essence, the SHANTI Act is not just about nuclear energy; it is about the kind of future India seeks to build-innovative, sustainable and secure. If executed with rigour and openness, the Act has the potential to power India's development while keeping public trust firmly intact.

DECODING MOTHER (INDO-EU FTA) OF ALL DEALS

DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

We did it and we delivered the mother of all deals. When India succeeds, world is more stable, more prosperous and more secure and we all benefit.' These were the words of Ursula von der Leyen, the president of European Commission while sealing the historic Indo-European Free Trade Agreement at the 16th Indo-EU summit at New Delhi on January 27. She further said that we are creating a market of two billion people and this is tale of two giants, the world's second and fourth largest economies, two giants who choose partnership in a true win-win fashion, a strong message that cooperation is the best answer to global challenges.

Being described as a strategic breakthrough in country's global trade engagements, the deal between India 4th largest economy and the European Union (EU) the 2nd largest economy, comprising 25% of Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is yet another example of trusted Partnership of India with countries across the globe. The European Union consists of 27 member states and as a result of this FTA and the unprecedented market access, over 99% of Indian exports will gain preferential entry into the European Union unlocking massive growth potential. The FTA will open new opportunities for Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and create jobs for women, artisans, youth and professionals besides an export that is poised to take off to INR 6.41 Lakh Crore (USD 75.75 Billion) and a 33 billion USD of exports in labour-intensive sectors like textiles, leather, marine products, gems and jewellery set to gain immensely from preferential access under the FTA. Beyond goods, it unlocks high-value commitments in services complemented by a comprehensive mobility framework enabling seamless movement of skilled Indian professionals. The agreement carefully calibrated with reciprocal market access lays the foundation for inclusive, resilient, and future-ready growth to propel Make in India trajectory to new heights. Last year too, India signed trade deal with Oman and United Kingdom and also trade deal with Newzealand. The Indo-EU trade deal effectively opens with entire European market for Indian businesses, exporters and entrepreneurs. As India and EU sealed the FTA, Hon'ble PM used the diplomatic milestone to turn it into a personal outreach to millions across Europe by posting about the deal in 24 different EU lan-

guages of the member countries of EU.

The FTA has come after intense negotiations since the re-launch of negotiations in 2022. The announcement of the FTA just a day after the country celebrated its 77th year of being a republic is a consequence of years of sustained dialogue and cooperation between India and the EU. It also demonstrated a political will and shared vision of both economies to deliver a balanced, modern, and rules-based economic and trade partnership. The European Union is India's one of the largest trading partner, with bilateral trade in goods and services growing steadily over the years. In 2024-25, India's bilateral trade in goods with the EU stood at INR 11.5 Lakh Crore (USD 136.54 billion) with exports worth INR 6.4 Lakh Crore (USD 75.85 billion) and imports amounting to INR 5.1 Lakh Crore (USD 60.68 billion). India-EU trade in services reached INR 7.2 Lakh Crore (USD 83.10 billion) in 2024. The India-EU trade pact covers conventional areas such as trade in goods, services, trade remedies, rules of origin, customs and trade facilitation, as well as emerging areas such as SMEs and digital trade, amongst others.

The India-European Union Free Trade Agreement gives a decisive boost to its labour-intensive sectors. Textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, marine products, gems and jewellery, handicrafts, engineering goods and automobiles will witness a steep decline in tariffs down to just 10%. A fifty lakh vehicle produced in EU and sold in the country at one crore because of huge tariffs will now be available in the country at just rupees fifty five lakh. It is not only about reduced or no tariffs; it is much more beyond that. Beyond enhancing competitiveness, it will lead to empowerment of the workforce engaged in these sectors. Various categories of workers, artisans, women and youth will be more empowered. The Micro Small and Medium Enterprises which contribute to economic diversification by operating in various sectors such as manufacturing, services, agribusiness and technology will also get new opportunities to showcase their innovations, creativity through various products and services. Through these MSMEs, Indian businesses will be more deeply integrated into global value chains thereby reinforcing India's role as a key player and supplier in global trade.

India has secured EU duty concessions for several agricultural exports including processed foods, tea and coffee, spices, table grapes and sheep and lamb meat. Preferential

access will also cover gherkins, cucumbers, sweet corn, dried onion, and select fruit and vegetable products boosting competitiveness and exports across the EU. Sectors such as Dairy, cereals, poultry, soy meal, and select fruits and vegetables will remain protected with no import duty concession as they re not in the exclusion list. EU duties of 0-26 percent on select marine products will be reduced. With India's marine exports to the EU at about \$1 billion (rupees 8300 crore) the deal is set to boost shipments of shrimp, frozen fish, value added sea food benefitting coastal communities in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Kerala. Under trade deal, India has decided to open its domestic automobile market to EU imports slashing tariffs on most cars to 30-35%. It will be subsequently phased out to 10 per cent over several years. Carefully crafted quota based auto liberalization package will not only allow EU auto makers to introduce their models in India in higher price bands but also open the possibilities for Make in India and exports from India in future. The reciprocal market access in EU market will also open up opportunities for India made automobiles to access EU market.

Besides tariff barriers, non tariff barriers will also be eliminated. The FTA provides measures to tackle non-tariff barriers through strengthened regulatory cooperation, greater transparency, and streamlined customs, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) procedures. Commitments have been secured including a forward-looking most-favored nation assurance extending flexibilities if any granted to third countries under the regulation, enhanced technical cooperation on recognition of carbon prices, recognition of verifiers, as well as financial assistance and targeted support to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and comply with emerging carbon requirements.

Services being dominant and fastest growing sector of both economies will also be benefitted a lot. Increased market access to EU's 144 subsectors which includes IT/ITES, Professional Services, Other Business Services and Education Services will provide boost to Indian service providers and enable them to provide competitive world class Indian services to EU's consumers while EU's access to 102 subsectors offered by India will bring in high tech services, investment into India from EU resulting in a mutually beneficial arrangement., non-discriminatory treatment, focus on digitally delivered services, ease of mobility will provide the ne-

cessary boost to India's services exports. On mobility, the Indo-EU FTA provides a facilitative and predictable framework for business mobility covering short-term, temporary and business travel in both directions. It will enable professionals to travel between the two economies to provide services under different scenarios. Both are providing mobility commitments to each other for Intra-Corporate Transferees (ICT) and business visitors, along with entry and working rights for dependents and family members of ICTs. The European Union has also offered commitments in 37 sectors/sub-sectors for Contractual Service Suppliers (CSS) and 17 sectors/sub-sectors for Independent Professionals (IP), many of which are sectors of interest to India, including Professional Services, Computer and related Services, Research and Development Services, and Education Services.

India has also secured a framework to constructively engage on social security agreements over a five-year horizon, together with framework supporting student mobility and post-study work opportunities. Additionally, India has also secured access for practitioners of Indian Traditional Medicine to work under home title in EU Member States where traditional medical practices are not regulated. The FTA reinforces intellectual property protections provided under TRIPS relating to copyright, trademarks, designs, trade secrets, plant varieties, enforcement of IPRs, affirms Doha Declaration and recognizes the importance of digital libraries, specifically the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) project initiated by India.

With the Indo-EU FTA, EU becomes India's 22nd FTA partner. The Government since 2014 has signed trade deals with Mauritius, UAE, UK, EFTA, Oman and Australia, and announced trade deal with New Zealand. The FTA is expected to substantially scale up trade, enhance export competitiveness, and integrate Indian businesses more deeply into the European and global value chains. The India-EU FTA marks a new chapter in bilateral economic engagement between India and the 27-member EU bloc. The trade deal aligns with India's vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047,' it confirms India's role as a tried, tested and trusted partner across the global platform paving the way for an all inclusive, resilient, and sustainable growth for both the economies.

(The author writes on agriculture and social issues)

WHO Calls for Healthier Food in Schools Worldwide

SAMIKSHA MISHRA

The World Health Organization (WHO) has urged governments across the world, including India, to urgently improve school food environments as childhood obesity rises and undernutrition persists in many regions. In a new global guideline released on 27 January 2026, WHO calls on countries to ensure that all foods and beverages provided and sold in schools support healthy diets, stressing that school nutrition policies are essential for life-long health and learning. For the first time, WHO has recommended a "whole-school approach" to nutrition that extends beyond formal school meal programmes to include canteens, vendor stalls, snack corners and food marketed around school premises. The guideline underscores that unhealthy food environments during school hours shape children's eating habits, academic performance, and long-term risk of non-

communicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. WHO's call comes at a time when the world is facing a double burden of malnutrition, with overweight and obesity rising even as undernutrition remains entrenched in many communities.

In 2025, nearly 188 million school-aged children and adolescents worldwide were living with obesity, overtaking the number of underweight children for the first time, according to WHO's estimates. In India, this global trend is mirrored by growing concerns about childhood overweight and poor diets, even as efforts continue to reduce hunger and malnutrition through flagship programmes such as PM POSHAN. Public health experts note that rapid urbanisation, increased consumption of packaged foods, and sedentary lifestyles have contributed to shifting nutrition patterns among children.

Jammu and Kashmir illustrates this

complex nutrition landscape. Data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-21) show that more than 26 per cent of children under five in the Union Territory are stunted-a marker of chronic undernutrition-while nearly 19 per cent are wasted, indicating recent weight loss or insufficient intake. Anaemia remains a severe concern, affecting over 70 per cent of children under five, underscoring persistent micronutrient deficiencies across the region. Although the prevalence of overweight and obesity in young children in Jammu and Kashmir is lower than in some urban Indian centres, studies show that nutrition challenges coexist with early signs of unhealthy weight gain, particularly among older children.

In the Kashmir Valley, hospital-based research offers more insight into school-age nutrition patterns: among children aged 5-15 years, nearly one in four were found to be overweight and around one

in ten were classified as obese, highlighting a worrying trend in the very age group that spends much of their day in school. The study, conducted by the endocrinology department at Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, reflects how undernutrition and overweight can exist alongside each other within the same communities, pointing to the need for balanced school nutrition strategies.

Experts say that while India's Mid-Day Meal Scheme remains one of the largest school feeding initiatives globally, its impact can be undermined if the surrounding food environment promotes unhealthy choices. "School meals have been instrumental in improving attendance and basic nutrition, but children are simultaneously exposed to high-sugar snacks and sugary drinks sold near or within school grounds," said Dr Ramanan Laxminarayan, public health economist. "Without regulating what

surrounds the school, the benefits of healthy meals can be diluted." WHO's guideline urges countries to establish clear nutrition standards that increase the availability and consumption of healthy foods while limiting those high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats. It also recommends behavioural "nudging" strategies, such as placing healthier options at eye level, improving presentation, or offering pricing incentives for nutritious choices, which evidence shows can influence children's food selections. However, WHO stresses that policies must be supported by effective monitoring and enforcement. According to the WHO Global database on the Implementation of Food and Nutrition Action, fewer than half of the countries with school food policies restrict the marketing of unhealthy foods to children, a gap that many health advocates say is evident in Indian cities and towns alike.

The guideline was developed through a rigorous, evidence-based process and supports broader WHO initiatives like the Acceleration Plan to Stop Obesity and the Nutrition-Friendly Schools Initiative. It also recognises the pivotal role of local, state and municipal authorities in adapting and implementing school food policies, a factor of particular relevance in India's federal governance system. As childhood obesity and undernutrition continue to challenge health systems globally and in India, WHO officials say that transforming school food environments is a long-term investment in public health. "Getting nutrition right at school is not just about meals-it is about giving children a healthier future," WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at the guideline launch.

(The writer is Indian Institute Of Mass Communication (IIMC) Jammu)

Global Media and Leaders Hail India-EU FTA

The conclusion of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement has drawn strong and positive reactions globally, cutting across international media, foreign political leadership, global business heads and respected policy experts. The deal is widely being described as historic, strategic and timely, both economically and geopolitically.

International Media

Leading global media outlets have highlighted the scale, ambition and strategic timing of the India-EU FTA. The Telegraph, in an article by James Crisp titled 'Modi is real winner in 'mother of all trade deals' with EU', described the agreement as the "mother of all trade deals", arguing that India has emerged as the real strategic winner. The paper noted that the deal eliminates or reduces tariffs on 96.6% of EU exports to India, while the EU will cut tariffs on 99.5% of Indian goods over seven years.

Bloomberg in an article by Dan Strumpf titled 'All Roads Lead to Modi as World Hedges Trump', said that the "mother of all deals" concluded between India and the European Union is the latest example of an emerging pattern: New Delhi as the go-to partner for countries.

The Wall Street Journal framed the agreement as a response by middle powers to global tariff disruptions, highlighting how India and the EU are expanding alliances amid uncertainty created by U.S. trade policies.

The New York Times stressed that the deal brings together the world's largest economic bloc and the fastest-

growing major economy after nearly two decades of negotiations.

The Washington Post called it a historic deal with its headline saying 'India and EU clinch the 'mother of all deals' in a historic free trade agreement'.

The Guardian referred to it as 'Mother of all deals': EU and India sign free trade agreement'.

A similar headline was also reported by BBC - India and EU announce 'mother of all trade deals'.

Bloomberg in another article discussed the possibilities of deeper supply-chain integration, noting that duties on cars will fall as low as 10%, compared to earlier levels of over 100%, and that duties on auto components will be eliminated.

Associated Press highlighted the scale of the deal with its headline saying that 'India and the European Union reach a free trade deal representing a third of global trade'.

The scale was also highlighted by Al Jazeera, which said "Mother of all deals: How India-EU trade deal creates \$27 trillion market".

Reuters called it a landmark deal saying 'India, EU reach landmark trade deal, tariffs to be slashed on most goods'.

On Fox News, Pakistani journalist Qamar Cheema said India is set to benefit from this agreement, as tariffs will be reduced to zero in several key sectors. He said that neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh will no longer be able to compete with India in the European market.

Foreign Leaders

Several senior political leaders across Europe publicly welcomed the agreement.

Friedrich Merz, Chancellor of Germany, called the conclusion of negotiations a "very positive sign" and urged swift implementation to boost growth and prosperity.

Alexander Stubb, President of Finland, described the India-EU FTA as historic and the largest trade deal ever concluded by either side, saying it would significantly intensify economic and political ties.

Ulf Kristersson, Prime Minister of Sweden, said the agreement marks the launch of a new era of cooperation, strengthening prosperity, competitiveness and security through trade and partnership.

Christian Stocker, Chancellor of Austria, said the deal creates a free trade zone benefiting two billion people, calling it a major step for Europe's resilience in a rapidly changing global order.

Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Foreign Minister of Denmark, extended full support to the agreement, calling it geopolitically crucial and highlighting the first-mover advantage in a combined market of two billion people.

Nicolas Forissier, France's Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness, termed the EU-India accord a major political step, stressing that "this is not an agreement like the others."

Sandro Gozi, Member of the European Parliament, said the agreement clearly reflects the EU's need to

diversify partnerships and increase its autonomy and independence. He highlighted India as a major global actor, noting that from a geopolitical and diplomatic perspective, the deal opens up significant opportunities for both Europeans and Indians.

Business Leaders and organizations

European and global business leaders operating in India responded with strong optimism, calling the agreement a long-awaited breakthrough.

Jürgen Westermeier, President and Managing Director for India and South Asia at Airbus and President of the Federation of European Business in India, described the FTA as a "big moment" after 20 years of discussions and said it would act as an accelerator of opportunities for both sides.

Wouter van Wersch, President of Airbus International, called it a "fantastic day," reiterating Airbus' long-term commitment to Make in India, technology transfer, defence, space and advanced manufacturing.

Jan Noether, Director General of the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce, said the agreement brings together two billion people and nearly a quarter of global GDP, describing it as the "mother of all free trade agreements."

President of the Berlin Chamber of Commerce (IHK Berlin), Sebastian Stiezel, described the India-EU FTA as an important step towards opening up in an increasingly tense global situation and India is no longer a future market, but a market of the present, in which Berlin should now seize the opportunities.

Leading industry representatives,

including CEOs from key German car-makers such as Volkswagen, BMW, and Mercedes-Benz, praised the deal's potential to boost German exports to India and strengthen global supply chains.

Croatian Employers' Association (HUUP) and BusinessEurope called the EU-India FTA one of the EU's most important trade moves amid global protectionism.

Swedish business organisations such as Svenskt Näringsliv and Företagarna have described it as a major opportunity, citing reduced tariffs and better market access.

Irish economic and business bodies have welcomed the EU-India FTA. Chambers Ireland described it as a historic agreement that enhances market access and diversification for Irish exporters, particularly machinery and agri-food sectors.

Other senior business voices including Frank Schlöder (Managing Director, Häfele South Asia), Thomas Wolter (Managing Director, Kronos Machinery India), Lars Eric Johansson (Executive Vice President, Oxea GmbH), Jan-Olof Jacke (CEO, Confederation of Swedish Enterprise) and Fredrik Persson (President, BusinessEurope) welcomed the deal as a strong signal for rules-based trade, supply-chain resilience, SME growth and long-term competitiveness.

International Experts and Think Tanks

Global policy experts and think tanks described the agreement as substantively strong and strategically well-

timed.

Richard Rossow, Senior Advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said the deal brings together a quarter of the world's population and a massive share of global trade, adding that the positive optics reflect strong substance. He also noted that India's recent FTAs show a clear shift toward deeper and more ambitious trade commitments.

Michael Kugelman, Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, called the India-EU FTA the "right deal at the right time," stressing that it goes beyond cushioning U.S. tariffs and instead consolidates a broader, fast-growing strategic partnership.

Velina Tehakarova, geopolitical strategist, called it one of the most consequential geopolitical agreements of the decade, both in scale and in strategic intent.

Kiel Institute for the World Economy said that deeper EU-India integration could boost bilateral trade by 41 to 65 percent, raise real incomes by 0.12-0.13 percent of GDP on both sides.

The European Council on Foreign Relations called the EU-India FTA as one of the largest trade agreements concluded in recent years, covering goods, services, investment, digital trade and regulatory cooperation.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) said that India's recent focus on pursuing trade agreements with several partners - signifies a move towards a more open economy and will boost India's chances of achieving its longer-term development goals.

