Syllabus subtopic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Prelims and Mains focus: About the recent meet between the foreign ministers and the discussions held; about ETCA and its significance; About Mahabodhi Temple

News: India and Sri Lanka on Thursday discussed the “entire gamut of bilateral ties”, during talks between the visiting Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Relations, Skills Development, Employment and Labour Relations, Dinesh Gunawardena, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday.

Background

The visit by the Sri Lankan Minister, his first visit abroad after taking charge, comes after the visit by Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in November as “a follow- up” to his discussions with PM Modi.

Discussions held in the meeting

- Emphasis on Skilling and opportunities for people to people ties: The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister reiterated the importance laid by President Rajapaksa on exploring newer areas of cooperation with India with emphasis on skill development, vocational training and capacity building and requested India’s support.

- The ministers also discussed issues of climate change and terrorism.

- However, officials declined to comment on whether the meeting with the new Sri Lankan Foreign Minister had discussed taking forward some of the commitments made by the previous Sri Lankan government on infrastructure projects in Trincomalee and Colombo as well as the Northern region, or about taking forward the Economic and Technical Cooperation (ETCA) preferential trade agreement talks that have been stalled for several years.
Mr. Gunawardena will also visit the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya.

India-Srilanka ETCA

- The Economic and Technical Co-operation Agreement (ETCA) is a proposed diplomatic arrangement that seeks to add to the existing free trade agreement between the Republic of India and the Republic of Sri Lanka, primarily in relation to trade-in services and the service sector; it seeks to emulate a proto freedom-of-movement system and a single market.

- The proposal is championed by supporters as a method to introduce low-cost goods for low-income people in Sri Lanka and increase sales of high-end goods to India, while also making Sri Lanka more attractive for FDI. But many lobby groups have become concerned that India would flood Sri Lanka with cheaper labour, with the IT industry in particular worried about the influx of cheaper Indian tech workers. The high unemployment rate of India has been pointed out by many nationalist groups.

- The proposed agreement's impact has been estimated to be an increase of $500 billion to the common economy. It has been likened to the economic union undertaken between the North-East Asian countries of Taiwan and People's Republic of China called the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement, and both agreements share issues with the island nation's people worrying about being undercut by cheaper labourers from the mainland.

About Mahabodhi Temple

- The Mahabodhi Temple Complex in Bodh Gaya is located in the central part of the state of Bihar, in the northeastern part of India. It is the part of the great Ganges plains.
- The Mahabodhi Temple is located at the place of Lord Buddha's enlightenment.
- Bihar is one of the four holy sites related to the life of the Lord Buddha, and particularly to the attainment of Enlightenment.
- The first temple was built by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century B.C.
and the present temple dates from the 5th or 6th centuries.

- It is one of the earliest Buddhist temples **built entirely with brick, still standing in India, from the late Gupta period.**
- The site of the Mahabodhi Temple provides exceptional records of the events associated with the life of Buddha and subsequent worship, particularly since Emperor Ashoka built the first temple, the balustrades, and the memorial column. The sculpted stone balustrades are an outstanding early example of sculptural relics in stone.