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Civil Accounts Day

Context:

The Finance Minister spoke at the inaugural session of the 44th Civil Accounts Day function.

Background:

- The Union Government initiated a major reform in Public Financial Management in 1976.

- The Audit and Accounts functions were separated by relieving the Comptroller and Auditor General of his responsibility of preparation of the Union Government accounts.

- The accounting function was brought directly under the control of the Executive. Consequently, the Indian Civil Accounts Service (ICAS) was established.

- The ICAS was carved out from the Indian Audit & Accounts Service (IA & AS), initially through the promulgation of an ordinance amending the C & AG's (Duties, Powers and Conditions of Service) Amendment Act, 1976.

- Later on, the Departmentalization of Union Accounts (Transfer of Personnel) Act, 1976 was enacted by the Parliament.

The Act was deemed to have come into force with effect from 1st March 1976. Accordingly, the ICAS celebrates March 1 every year as the **"Civil Accounts Day".**

About the ICAS:

- The ICAS provides accounting and auditing services to the Government of India. It functions through the Indian Civil Accounts Organisation under the Ministry of Finance.

- It is a Group 'A' service through which people are recruited by the UPSC civil services exam.

- The service is headed by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA).

- Since its inception, the Indian Civil Accounts Organisation has steadily grown in stature and now plays an important role in strengthening of governance through excellence in the management of public finances of the Union Government.

- The mission of the organization is to administer an effective, credible and responsive system for budgeting, payment, accounting and pension disbursements. The aim has been to provide a world-class and robust Government-wide integrated financial information system.

- The organisation launched the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) in 2009 in order to leverage information technology (IT) for enhancing the efficiency of the payment, accounting, internal auditing and financial reporting systems of the Government of India.

- The Government has positioned the PFMS as a key decision support system not only for tracking of the flow of funds to the last beneficiary or implementation level but also to ensure just-in-time release of funds through an effective management of fund float.

- The Government is looking at PFMS for facilitating effective monitoring and control of unspent balances or parking of funds to check blockade of Government money.

- PFMS is now being used as the core IT platform for regular activities of CGA, such as payments, receipts, accounting, expenditure control, management of provident fund and pensions, etc.

- One of the biggest achievements of the PFMS is the implementation of the Central Sector Scheme, PM – KISAN Yojana.

Ekam Fest

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Context:

Week-long Ekam Fest is being conducted to promote craftsmanship & products of divyang (physically-challenged) artisans and entrepreneurs.

Details:

- The fest is organised by the National Handicapped Finance Development Corporation (NHFDC) under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

- EKAM Fest is an effort for promoting entrepreneurship and knowledge among the physically-challenged community, generating awareness among society about the potentialities of this community and also providing a major marketing opportunity to physically-handicapped entrepreneurs.

- The Ekam Fest will also host a number of activities like cultural extravaganza including performances by Divyang artists and well-known professionals. Additional highlights of the event will be astrological consultations and foot massage by Divyang professionals.

- The fest, which is also an exhibition-cum-sale event, will see the display of products made by the disabled community across many categories like home décor, lifestyle, textiles, stationery products, packed food, organic products, toys and gifts, jewellery and accessories, etc.

- The event will also showcase the new initiatives taken by NHFDC such as:

  - **NHFDC Swavalamban Kendra (NSK):** NHFDC has taken an initiative to establish PWD owned micro skill training centres throughout the country for skill training of PwDs. These NSKs will have the capacity to provide quality skill training to around 120 PwDs per year per NSK. The PwD owner of the NSK is expected to earn around Rs 20,000 per month.

  - **Safe Cabs** in Delhi and Indore: Through an arrangement with a private taxi aggregator (that employs only women drivers and runs exclusively for women passengers) they provide opportunities for disabled commercial vehicle owners to offer their cars as cabs.

  - **Safe Drinking Water E Carts:** NHFDC has agreed to finance E-carts fitted with RO water dispensing vending machines. These carts will sell water in paper glasses maintaining hygiene. The carts will be supported in operation by Bharat Jal. The PwD owner is expected to earn Rs 10,000/- to Rs 15,000/- per month in the operation of these carts.

About NHFDC:

- It is an apex corporation under the aegis of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

- It started functioning in 1997 and is registered as a not-for-profit organisation.

- It provides financial assistance to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) for their economic rehabilitation and provides a number of skill development programmes to empower them to grow & sustain their enterprises.

- It established the NHFDC Foundation which is engaged in brand development and providing a platform for the marketing of products of PwD entrepreneurs.

Nominations for World Heritage List for the year 2020

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Context:

Nomination dossiers of 'Dholavira: A Harappan City' and 'Monuments and Forts of Deccan Sultanate' have been submitted for inclusion in the World Heritage List for the year 2020 – Culture Minister.

UNESCO World Heritage List:

- This list comprises the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. A **World Heritage Site** is a landmark or an area selected by the UNESCO for having cultural, historical, scientific or other form of significance, which is legally protected by international treaties.

- The sites are regarded important for the collective and preservative interests of humanity.

- To be selected, a World Heritage Site must be an already-classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance.

- The sites are intended for practical conservation for posterity, which otherwise would be subject to risk from human or animal trespassing, unmonitored/uncontrolled/unrestricted access, or threat from local administrative negligence.

- The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Program administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 "states parties" that are elected by their General Assembly.

- As of July 2019, a total of 1,121 World Heritage Sites exist across 167 countries. The maximum number of sites in one country is 55, both China and Italy having 55 each. India is in fifth position with 38 sites.

- The first place to be declared a World Heritage Site: City of Quito (capital of Ecuador) in 1978.

Also read: UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India

Tentative Lists

- States Parties are encouraged to submit Tentative Lists to the UNESCO.

- This list consists of properties which they consider to be cultural and/or natural heritage of outstanding universal value and therefore suitable for inscription on the World Heritage List.

- The Tentative List should be submitted at least one year prior to the submission of any nomination.

- Nominations to the World Heritage List will not be considered unless the nominated property has already been included on the State Party's Tentative List.

- Both Dholavira and the Deccan Sultanate forts and monuments are included in India's Tentative List. There are another 40 sites in the Indian list.

- Both were submitted in 2014.

Dholavira: A Harappan City

- Dholavira is located in the Khadir Island in the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat.

- It belonged to the Mature Harappan Phase.

- It is a fortified quadrangular city set in a harsh and arid land. It was once a thriving metropolis for 1200 years between 3000 BCE and 1800 BCE.

- It had access to the sea.

- The city's ruins show large-scale use of dressed stone in construction.

- Highly polished stone pillars of square or circular section having a central hole are also seen. To create a pillar, such segments were piled to attain the requisite height and a wooden pole was inserted to ensure stability. This method of constructing a column was an ingenious alternative to a monolithic column.

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- The city also had an excellent water conservation system that ensured regular water supply to the parched land.

- Many antiquities have also been found during excavations.

- **Why is it included in the list?**

    - The excavated site demonstrates the ingenuity of the Harappan people to evolve a highly organised system of town planning with perfected proportions, interrelation of functional areas, street pattern and an efficient water conservation system that supported life for more than 1200 years in a hot and arid climate.

    - Its water management system was one of the most efficient in the ancient world.

    - The city had a three-tier zonation comprising of distinct upper (citadel, bailey) and middle (having a distinct street-pattern, large scale enclosure and a ceremonial ground) towns enclosed by a lower town (with narrower streets, smaller enclosures and industrial area – this feature distinguishes it from the other metropolises of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

    - The importance of Dholavira's planning was furthered with the excavation of Kampilya in Uttar Pradesh, a city considered of mythical origin in the Gangetic plains. Belonging to the Gangetic Civilization, which is considered the second phase of urbanization of the Indian subcontinent, Kampilya adopted the town planning principles (in terms of scale, hierarchy of space and road network) established in Dholavira.

- The area is protected and managed by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

- Globally, Dholavira can be compared to the cities of the Ancient River Valley Civilization, the urban metropolises of the Egyptian, Chinese and Mesopotamian civilisations.

- In the region, Dholavira can be compared to the other major cities of Harappan culture like Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Kalibangan, Rakhigarhi, Banavali and Lothal. The excavated remains of the complete water system distinguish this site from others.

Monuments and Forts of the Deccan Sultanate

- The 'Monuments of the Deccan Sultanate' is a serial property comprising of four components.

- They constitute the most representative, most authentic and best-conserved examples of Deccani Sultanate monuments in India.

- The series demonstrates the exemplary convergence of national and international styles of Islamic architecture and their intersections with the prevalent Hindu architecture of the period in southern India, in present-day Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

- The contributions of Deccan Sultanate to the arts and architecture of India is impressive with iconic Indo-Islamic monuments constructed in Gulbarga, Bidar, Bijapur and Hyderabad.

- These sites emerged as important medieval fortifications and walled cities of the Deccan Sultanates with a vigorous new architectural style of the sultanate that emerged from encounters with the Deccan Hindu heartland of the period.

- Individually, each of the components of the Deccan Sultanate cover important aspects of Sultanate history with Gulbarga evolving as the first capital of the Bahmani Kingdoms in mid-14th century CE including its impressive fortifications, Jami Masjid and royal tombs

- Bidar emerged as the next Bahmani capital in the mid-15th Century CE.

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- Further evolution of the Deccani Sultanate style was done by the Adil Shahi dynasty in the monuments at Bijapur such as the Gol Gumbaz that stands as the 2nd largest dome in world history.

- The final diversification and manifestation of the style is seen in the Qutub Shahi monuments of Golconda fort, tombs and the Charminar at Hyderabad. The iconic Charminar is a ceremonial gateway built to celebrate the foundation of Hyderabad in 1591 A.D.

- Subtly blending influences from Iran, West Asia, southern India, and sometimes Europe, as well as southern and northern India, the arts produced under these Deccan sultanates are markedly different from those of the rest of India and especially from those created under the Mughal patronage.

- The monuments and citadels provide a unique testimony to the social, economic, cultural, political and technological landscape of the period as well as unique expressions of the religious and artistic flowering of the Islamic Sultanate in Southern India.

- The monuments were also accompanied by the development of syncretic forms of art, architecture, language, literature, music, cuisine and costume.

Ministry of Jal Shakti

Details:

Climate Change and Water Contamination:

- Climate model simulation studies done by various agencies including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) project possible linkages of climate change with frequency and intensity of weather related events. However, any direct link between climate change and flooding resulting in water contamination has not been established.

- The flow in rivers is dynamic and depends on many parameters such as rainfall, its distribution and intensity in the catchment, catchment characteristics and withdrawals/utilisations of water basins.

- The Central Water Commission (CWC) monitors major rivers.

  - Considering the annual average flow of the last 20 years of terminal sites of major rivers, no appreciable increasing/decreasing trend in total water availability in the country has been observed.

- The Ministry of Jal Shakti has drafted bills namely National Water Framework Bill, River Basin Management (RBM) Bill and Model Bill to 'Regulate and Control the Development and Management of Ground Water' for bringing reforms in the water sector.

  - The draft RBM Bill proposes optimum development of inter-State rivers by facilitating inter-State coordination ensuring scientific planning of land and water resources taking basin/sub-basin as unit with unified perspectives of water in all its forms (including soil moisture, ground and surface water).

  - The National Water Framework Bill provides an overarching national legal framework based on principles for protection, conservation, regulation and management of water as a vital and stressed natural resource, under which legislation and executive action on water can take place at all levels of governance.

  - The Model Bill will enable states/UTs to enact suitable ground water legislation for regulation for its development which includes provision of rain water harvesting.

Per Capita Availability of Water:

- Water availability per person is dependent on population of the country and for India, per capita water availability in the country is reducing due to increase in population.

- The average annual per capita water availability in the years 2001 and 2011 was assessed as 1816 cubic meters and 1545 cubic meters respectively which may further reduce to 1486 cubic meters and 1367 cubic meters in the years 2021 and 2031 respectively.

- As per Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 135 litres per capita per day (lpcd) has been suggested as the benchmark for urban water supply. For rural areas, a minimum service delivery of 55 lpcd has been fixed under Jal Jeevan Mission, which may be enhanced to higher level by states.

Piped Water Connection to every Household:

- In 2019, the Government of India, in partnership with the States, had launched the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) which aims at providing potable water at service level of 55 litre per capita per day (lpcd) to every rural household through Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) by 2024.

Zonal Cultural Centers

Context:

To preserve and promote various forms of folk art and culture of the tribals throughout the country including West Bengal, the Government of India has set up seven Zonal Cultural Centres (ZCCs).

Details:

- Sahitya Akademi, an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Culture, encourages the preservation and promotion of languages, especially the unrecognized and tribal languages.

- The Akademi periodically organizes language conventions throughout the country in this regard.

- No funds are provided directly to States/UTs. However, annual grant-in-aid is provided to all the ZCCs for organizing various cultural activities and programmes in their member States

- **The Zones are also implementing a number of schemes to promote folk/tribal art and culture:**

- **Award to Young Talented Artists**: Talented youngsters of the age group 18-30 years are selected and given a one-time cash award of Rs. 10,000/-.

- **Guru Shishya Parampara**: Disciples are trained under veterans in art forms which are rare and vanishing. The Guru and artists under him/her are given monthly remuneration.

- **Theatre Rejuvenation**: To promote theatre activities including stage shows and production-oriented workshops, etc. honorarium up to Rs. 30,000/- per show are given.

- **Research & Documentation**

- **Shilpgram**: To promote folk and tribal art and crafts of the zone by organizing seminars, workshops, exhibitions, craft fairs, design development and marketing support to the artisans living in the rural areas.

- **Octave**: To promote and propagate the rich cultural heritage of the North East region.

- **National Cultural Exchange Programme (NCEP)**: Artists from different zones showcase their talent in other parts of the country. The main aim of this scheme is exchange of artistes, musicians, performers and sculptors, etc. between different regions with in the country for the promotion of rich cultural heritage of India.

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Decrease in Agricultural Holdings

Details:

- The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare conducts agriculture census every five years to collect data on structural characteristics of the agricultural sector including the size of agriculture land holdings in the country.

- As per the latest information available from the Agriculture Census, the average size of operational holdings has decreased as follows:

- Considering the declining trends observed in the size of agricultural holdings in the past and the prospective increase in population over time, the fragmentation of holdings is likely to continue and the average size of operational holdings is expected to further decrease in the country.

- In order to make small holdings more viable and to assist augmentation of farm incomes, the

1970-71	2.28 hectares
1980-81	1.84 hectares
1995-96	1.41 hectares
2015-16	1.08 hectares

Government has taken several measures including adoption of modern technologies and practices like multiple cropping, intercropping and integrated farming systems.

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is conducting research programmes to develop location-specific varieties and technologies for enhancing the production and productivity of farm holdings.

- Support is also provided to farmers (including small and marginal farmers) through initiatives and programmes of the Government such as:

  - Interest Subvention Scheme

  - Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)

  - National Food Security Mission (NFSM)

  - Neem Coated Urea

  - Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)

  - Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)

  - National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)

- Except in the years of adverse weather, rainfall, temperature conditions, natural calamities, etc., the production and productivity (per hectare production) of agriculture crops in the country has been generally increasing.

- Thus, there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that fragmentation of land holdings has resulted in an adverse impact on agricultural production/yield.

Interest Subvention Scheme

- The Interest Subvention Scheme for farmers provides short term credit to farmers at subsidised interest rates.

- The scheme started in 2006-07.

- The scheme is implemented by NABARD and the RBI.

- The interest subvention will be given to Public Sector Banks (PSBs), Private Sector Banks, Cooperative Banks and Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) on use of own funds and to NABARD for refinance to RRBs and Cooperative Banks.

Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)

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To know more about MIDH, check PIB dated Dec 10, 2019.

National Food Security Mission (NFSM)

- NFSM is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2007.

- The aim of the mission was to increase the production of rice, wheat and pulses by a certain amount through area expansion and productivity enhancement; restoring soil fertility and productivity; creating employment opportunities; and enhancing farm level economy.

Also read: National Food Security Act, 2013

You can read about Neem Coated Urea on PIB dated 16th June 2019 under the headline, 'Neem coated urea'.

Context:

The above information was given by the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare in the Lok Sabha.

Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)

Context:

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has taken several initiatives to achieve the vision of being a facilitator of world-class governance of corporates and the mission of easing compliance, balancing the interest of stakeholders and achieving excellence in service delivery.

The following initiatives have been taken by the MCA:

1. Ease of Doing Business: In order to facilitate Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) in India and to improve India's ranking, the Ministry has strengthened effective enforcement of Companies Act 2013, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016, Competition Act 2002, Limited Liability Partnerships Act 2008 and other allied Acts.

2. MCA-21: It is an end-to-end holistic e-Governance project which has been running successfully and has enabled the Ministry to achieve very high standards of service delivery, besides providing the Government with a comprehensive National Corporate Information Database. MCA21 system is also integrated with the registration of EPFO, ESIC, GST, PAN and TAN at the time of incorporation of companies.

3. "RUN": It is a web service facility called "Reserve Unique Name" (RUN) for name reservation for companies & LLPs which dispenses with the need for filing a detailed six-page application form, (erstwhile e-form INC-1) and replaces it with a simple web service wherein only three fields are required to be filed after login.

4. Central Registration Center (CRC): A Central Registration Centre is been set up at Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA), Manesar for processing applications for name reservation and incorporation of companies & Limited Liability Partnership (LLPs), within 1-2 days as opposed to an average of at least 15 days earlier.

5. SPICe and SPICe+: The Ministry introduced an Integrated Incorporation Form – a Simplified Proforma for Incorporating Company Electronically (SPICe) which extends over 8 different services from three Ministries in a single form.

Foreign Direct Investment policy on Civil Aviation

Context:

Cabinet approves the Foreign Direct Investment policy on Civil Aviation.

Details:

- To permit foreign investment up to 100% by those NRIs who are Indian Nationals, in case of M/s Air India Ltd., the Union Cabinet has approved to amend the extant FDI Policy to permit Foreign Investment (s) in Air India by NRIs who are Indian Nationals, up to 100% under automatic route.

- As per the present FDI Policy, 100% FDI is permitted in scheduled Air Transport Service/Domestic Scheduled Passenger Airline (Automatic up to 49% and Government route beyond 49%).

- However, for NRIs, 100% FDI is permitted under automatic route in Scheduled Air Transport Service/Domestic Scheduled Passenger Airline.

- Further, FDI is subject to the condition that Substantial Ownership & Effective Control (SOEC) shall be vested in Indian Nationals as per Aircraft Rules, 1937.

- However, for Air India, as per the present policy, foreign investment(s) including that of foreign Airline(s) shall not exceed 49%, either directly or indirectly, subject to the condition that substantial ownership and effective control of Air India shall continue to be vested in Indian Nationals.

- Therefore, although 100% FDI is permitted under automatic route for NRIs in Scheduled Air Transport Service/Domestic Scheduled Passenger Airline, it is restricted to be only 49% in case of M/s Air India.

Benefits:

- In light of the proposed strategic disinvestment of 100% of Air India by the Government of India, the airline will have no residual Government ownership and will be completely privately owned; it has been decided that foreign investment in Air India be brought on a level playing field with other scheduled airline operators.

- The amendment in FDI policy will permit foreign investment in Air India at par with other Scheduled Airline Operators i.e. up to 100% in Air India by those NRIs who are Indian Nationals.

- The proposed changes in FDI Policy will enable foreign investment by NRIs into M/s Air India Ltd. Up to 100%, under the automatic route.

Background:

- FDI is a major driver of economic growth and a source of non-debt finance for the economic development of the country.

- FDI policy provisions have been progressively liberalized across various sectors in the recent past to make India an attractive investment destination.

  - Some of the sectors include defence, construction development, trading, pharmaceuticals, power exchanges, insurance, pension, other financial services, asset reconstruction companies, broadcasting, single-brand retail trading, coal mining, digital media, etc.

Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase-II

Context:

The Union Minister for Jal Shakti launched Phase II of Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) [SBM (G)].

Details:

- Phase – II of the SBM (G) will focus on sustaining the gains made under the programme

in the last five years in terms of toilet access and usage, ensuring that no one is left behind.

- It will ensure that effective solid and liquid waste management (SLWM) is instituted in every Gram Panchayat of the country.

- The scheme will be implemented from 2020-21 to 2024-25 in a mission mode with a total outlay of Rs. 1,40,881 crores.

- This will be a novel model of convergence between different verticals of financing. Of this Rs. 52,497 crore will be allocated from the budget of the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, while the remaining amount will be dovetailed from the funds being released under the 15th Finance Commission, MGNREGS and revenue generation models particularly for solid and liquid waste management.

- The Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) component of Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus, ODF Plus, will be monitored on the basis of output-outcome indicators for four key areas:

    - Plastic waste management

    - Bio-degradable solid waste management (including animal waste management)

    - Greywater management

    - Faecal sludge management

- The SBM-G Phase II will continue to generate employment and provide impetus to the rural economy through construction of household toilets and community toilets, as well as infrastructure for SLWM such as compost pits, soak pits, waste stabilisation ponds, material recovery facilities, etc.

- Since the launch of the SBM-G in 2014, over 10 crore toilets have been built in rural areas; over 5.9 lakh villages, 699 districts, and 35 States/UTs have declared themselves Open Defecation Free (ODF).

- A study was done by the UNICEF and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) on the impact of the SBM (G) on rural women, titled "Impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) on the convenience, safety and self-respect of women in rural India".

    - The Study surveyed 6,993 women across the 5 states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, in February 2020.

    - It indicated that the increased access to household toilets has led to the improvement in the Suvidha, Suraksha and Swabhimaan of women in rural India.

    - Key findings:

        - 93% of women feel safer from assault by not going out in the open to defecate.

        - 91% of women save up to one hour of their day, earlier spent on walking to defecation sites.

        - 88% of women are proud to own a toilet

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) - 5

Context:

DAY-NULM signed an MoU with Amazon for e-marketing of products made by Self Help Groups (SHGs) across the country in urban areas.

Details:

- With an underlying narrative of women empowerment, the collaboration aims to provide access to a wider customer base for products made by SHGs and strengthening the mission of creating sustainable livelihoods in urban areas.

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- By promoting the products made by SHGs, the initiative will be helpful in documenting and preserving the unique traditional art and crafts of different states.

- The Mission had previously undertaken a similar collaboration with Flipkart.

About Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM):

- The Mission functions under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

- Its chief aim is to reduce poverty and vulnerability of the urban poor households by enabling them to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities, resulting in an appreciable improvement in their livelihoods on a sustainable basis, through building strong grassroots level institutions of the poor.

- The mission would aim at providing shelters equipped with essential services to the urban homeless in a phased manner.

- In addition, the mission would also address livelihood concerns of the urban street vendors by facilitating access to suitable spaces, institutional credit, social security and skills to the urban street vendors for accessing emerging market opportunities.

- The core belief of the mission is that the poor are entrepreneurial and have an innate desire to come out of poverty.

- DAY-NULM would aim at universal coverage of the urban poor for skill development and credit facilities. It will strive for skills training of the urban poor for market-based jobs and self-employment, facilitating easy access to credit.

- **Street vendors** constitute an important segment of the urban population at the bottom of the pyramid.

  - Street vending provides a source of self-employment, and thus acts as a measure of urban poverty alleviation without major government intervention.

  - They have a prominent place in the urban supply chain and are an integral part of the economic growth process within urban areas.

  - DAY-NULM aims at facilitating access to suitable spaces, institutional credit, social security and skills to the urban street vendors for accessing emerging market opportunities.

- **Urban homeless** persons who live without shelter or social security/ protection are the most vulnerable class, even while they contribute towards sustaining cities with their cheap labour.

  - Life on the streets involves surviving continuously at the edge, in a physically brutalized and challenging environment.

  - There is a need for appropriate policy intervention to address the challenges faced by homeless people, with regard to shelter, social housing and social protection.

  - Accordingly, DAY-NULM aims at providing shelter equipped with essential services to the urban homeless in a phased manner.

- DAY-NULM would aim at partnership with the private sector in providing skill training, employment and operation of shelter for homeless.

  - It will strive for active participation of private and civil society sectors in providing shelter to the urban homeless, skill training and placement of the urban poor and also in facilitating technological, marketing and hand holding support for the urban poor entrepreneurs who want to be self-

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employed and set up their own small businesses or manufacturing units.

Background (Need for such a mission/scheme):

- Urban poverty being multi-dimensional, various vulnerabilities faced by the poor in cities and towns: occupational, residential and social need to be addressed simultaneously in a comprehensive and integrated manner with a targeted focus on the vulnerable groups so that a definitive impact can be made on ground.

- Residential vulnerability issues are being addressed through programmes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban).

- The other two vulnerabilities: **occupational** and **social** can be best addressed by creating opportunities for skill development leading to market-based employment and helping them to set up self-employment ventures.

- Urban poverty alleviation programmes need to be based on skill development and easy access to credit.

- It is in this context that a mission-mode approach to urban livelihoods is considered necessary in the form of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM).

Ministry of Minority Affairs

Context:

The Ministry of Minority Affairs is implementing various schemes for the socio-economic and educational empowerment of six centrally notified minorities (Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Jains and Buddhists).

Details:

The details of the various schemes, as given by the Minister, are mentioned below:

Educational Empowerment of Minorities:

- Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme – For Class I to X

- Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme – For Class XI to Ph.D.

- Merit-cum-means based Scholarship Scheme – For Professional and Technical Courses.

- Maulana Azad National Fellowship – For M.Phil. and Ph.D.

- Free Coaching and Allied Scheme (**Naya Savera**) – For Competitive Examination of Professional Courses and Government Jobs.

- Begum Hazrat Mahal National Scholarship for Meritorious Girls.

- "Padho Pardesh"– Scheme of Interest Subsidy on Educational Loans for Overseas Studies.

- Nai Udaan – Support for students clearing Prelims conducted by UPSC, SSC, State Public Service Commission, etc.

Economic Empowerment of Minorities:

- Seekho Aur Kamao: It is a placement linked skill development programme.

- Nai Manzil: A scheme for formal school education & skilling of school dropouts.

- Gharib Nawaz Employment Training for providing short-term job oriented skill development courses to youths belonging to minority communities.

- National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC): It provides concessional loans to minorities for self-employment and income generating ventures.

Improving Living Conditions of Minorities:

Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK): this programme seeks to provide better socio economic infrastructure facilities to the minority communities particularly in the field of education, health & skill development which would

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further lead to lessening of the gap between the national average and the minority communities with regard to backwardness parameters.

Fuel Cell Technology

Context:

ARCI develops Fuel Cell Technology for Disaster Management.

Details:

- Scientists at International Advanced Research for Powder Metallurgy & New Materials (ARCI), Hyderabad, an autonomous R&D Centre of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) have developed **Polymer Electrolyte Membrane fuel cells (PEMFC).**

- PEMFC, in its entireness, have an advantage of operational capability at low-temperatures with applications in decentralised power generation systems.

- The ARCI at its Centre for Fuel Cell Technology, Chennai has developed in-house PEMFC systems in the power range of 1 to 20 kilowatt (kW) and demonstrated the same in stationary (1-20 kW) and transport applications (1,3,5 kW).

- Emergency Operation Centres (EOC) backed with 10 kW systems along with fuel cell stack (providing sustainable electricity using hydrogen gas without the need of grid power), air moving subsystems, power control devices and control and monitoring system are being planned as a natural disaster management measure.

- **Background:**

    - Natural disasters are consequences of calamities like earthquake, landslide, cyclone, flood, tsunami, and so on that affects human activities.

- Tamil Nadu is generally affected by five to six cyclones every year, of which two to three are severe.

- There has been a paradigm shift in the focus of Disaster Management, from response-centric (rescue, relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction) to laying greater emphasis on the other elements of disaster management cycle (prevention, mitigation, and preparedness) as a means to avert the impact of future emergencies.

- The latest concept in disaster management all over the world is about conversion of Control Rooms to Emergency Operation Centres (EOC).

- EOCs respond immediately during an emergency situation with State-of-the-Art communication systems. This helps in providing immediate support during the Golden Hour of the disaster.

SAKSHAM portal

What's in News?

To mark the occasion of the lnternational Women's Day, 2020, Union Minister for Human Resource Development launched the SAKSHAM portal.

- The SAKSHAM portal aims towards empowerment of women in campuses through creating awareness on the existing opportunities and initiatives, support and redressal mechanism.

- The web resources (Government and United Nations policy documents) are made available to women students and employees of Higher Education Institutions through the portal.

- It brings together information on all women-oriented initiatives.

- It also provides a platform for registering complaints related to violence and harassment through a National helpline number.

Special Gram Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas in Gram Panchayats

What's in News?

The Centre has directed all States and Union Territories to organise Special Gram Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas (Women's Assemblies) in all Gram Panchayats on March 8, 2020 to mark International Women's Day.

International Women's day:

- International Women's Day is celebrated on the 8th of March every year. It is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

- The theme this year will be "Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Right".

Details:

- The Gram Sabhas will hold discussions on "Poshan Panchayat", land rights, education, safety, reproductive health and equal opportunity.

- The Special Gram Sabhas will focus on issues such as:

  - Ban on sex determination tests and celebrating birth of a girl child.

  - Pre-natal and neo-natal care, immunization and nutrition for all women.

  - Ensuring every girl child receives due care, nutrition and immunisation.

  - Encouraging girls to go to schools and complete their schooling with focus on safe environment at home and in school.

- Ban on child marriage.

- Reporting violence, abuse or injustice against women and girl children.

- Ensuring active participation of elected women representatives in Gram Panchayats and their contribution to decision making.

- Encouraging women to participate in Gram Sabhas.

Panchayati Raj Institutions:

- The role of Panchayati Raj Institutions is very important in strengthening community mobilization and working as a catalyst for behavioural change in the community.

- The 73rd Constitutional Amendment provided autonomy to rural local governments and brought governance closer to people.

- Significantly, the amendment ushered in feminization of local governance by mandating 33.3% reservation for women in Panchayats at all decision-making levels.

- Going a step further, so far 20 States have enacted legislation to raise women's reservation to 50% in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

  - As a result, out of the 30.41 lakh elected representatives of PRIs, 13.74 lakh (45.2%) are elected women, some of them from socially disadvantaged groups and are in leadership positions.

Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP):

- The Ministry of Panchayati Raj framed the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) for integrated development planning at the Gram Panchayat level to focus on the community's needs and priorities.

- Some of the key aspects of GPDP guidelines, as revised in the year 2018, that are relevant to Women Empowerment include:

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- Proactive participation of women in budgeting, planning, implementation and monitoring of GPDP

- Convening Mahila Sabhas prior to the general Gram Sabhas.

- Inclusion of women in Gram Sabhas.

- All these are part of the Vision Document-2024 of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj that focusses on capacitating the Elected Representatives in sectoral areas to make them the Agents of Change.

Genome India

What's in News?

'Genome India: Cataloguing the Genetic Variation in Indians' project has been sanctioned by Department of Biotechnology (DBT) for a period of 3 years to 20 institutions from varied disciplines across the country.

What is a Genome?

- A genome is an organism's complete set of DNA, including all its genes.

- It contains all the information needed to build and maintain that organism.

- By sequencing the genome, researchers can discover the functions of genes and identify which of them are critical for life.

Details:

- The proposed target of Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) is to do it for total 10,000 individuals representing the country's diverse population in 3 years.

- The information generated from whole genome sequencing can facilitate future human genetics research in the country with greater precision, and help to design a genome wide association array for the Indian population to develop precision healthcare and diagnostics for major diseases at affordable costs.

- The Genome India project will aim to make predictive diagnostic markers available for some priority diseases such as cancer and other rare and genetic disorders.

- It is a move that will help researchers get closer to developing effective therapies for treating various diseases.

Concerns:

- There are concerns over the use of genetic data.

- Some of the red lines raised are genetic engineering, use of genomic data to differentiate groups within society, and predictive insurance tests and targeted marketing.

  - There must be clear limits for how far the public thought genomic data and the information derived from it should be used.

De-identification:

- The data security and sharing measures for this project will be governed by the rules and regulations formulated by Government of India.

- The personal information of all individuals consenting to participate in the study is stripped off from any further records in this project.

- This process of de-identification ensures that the personal information of the participants is not compromised. Additionally, ethical measures are strictly adhered to in order to maintain data security and protection.

Genome sequencing in other countries:

- Several countries have embarked on mapping the genetic mark up of their own population to better understand disease profiles.

- UK said in 2013 that it will undertake the sequencing of 100,000 whole genomes of patients suffering from cancer and rare diseases.

- The project was extended to 1 million in 2018.

- Genomic England, the organisation that runs the programme, has said that its aim is to create a new genomic medicine service for the National Health Service – transforming the way people are cared for.

Schemes for Welfare of Women

There are a number of Schemes being implemented by various Ministries of the Government of India through State Governments/UT Administrations which allocate and disburse funds for welfare and development of women in distress like aged single women, widows with no support as well as young women from very poor background. The major schemes of Government of India are as under:

Swadhar Greh Scheme:

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development implements Swadhar Greh Scheme.

- The scheme envisions a supportive institutional framework for women victims of difficult circumstances so that they could lead their life with dignity and conviction.

Home for Widows:

- A Home for Widows has been set up in Vrindavan, UP with a capacity of 1000 inmates to provide widows a safe and secure place of stay, health services, nutritious food, legal and counselling services.

Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS):

- The Ministry of Rural Development is implementing Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS) under which Pension Scheme for Widows as well as Pension

Scheme for the Elderly below poverty line are operated.

The Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme:

- The Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme of Ministry of Women and Child Development aims to empower rural women through community participation and to create an environment in which they realize their full potential.

Prime Minister Awaas Yojana (PMAY-G):

- The Prime Minister AwaasYojana (PMAY-G) of Ministry of Rural Development and the Prime Minister AwaasYojana (PMAY-U) of the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs aims at providing affordable housing to women beneficiaries also.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana:

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is implementing the "Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM)", to reduce poverty and vulnerability of urban poor households by enabling them to access self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities.

Raksha Mantri sets defence export target at $5 billion in next five years

What's in News?

Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh has called for an increased participation of the private sector in defence manufacturing to realise the Government's vision of making India a $5 trillion economy by 2024.

- A slew of structural reforms has been undertaken by the Government to create increased synergy between the industry and the

public sector to overcome the challenges of private investment in defence.

- Several steps have been taken under the 'Make in India' initiative, including:

  - Providing greater scope for domestic industry in defence tenders

  - Simplification of the industrial licensing process

  - Hike in FDI cap

  - Making defence export less stringent

  - Streamlining the defence offset policy

  - Opening the government-owned trial and testing facilities for the private sector

  - Setting up of two defence industrial corridors and promotion of innovation through participation of start-ups and small and medium enterprises.

- Defence Production Policy has been envisaged with clearly spelt out goal to achieve a turnover of $26 billion in aerospace and defence goods & services by 2025.

- Government has decided to enhance foreign equity cap from earlier 26 per cent to 49 per cent under the automatic route and beyond 49 per cent to up to 100 per cent under the government approval route

National Company Law Appellate Tribunal

What's in News?

CGST Delhi detects Input Tax Credit fraud worth more than Rs 12 crore from 30 fake firms.

Goods and Service Tax (GST):

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is an indirect tax (or consumption tax) used in India on the supply of goods and services. The GST is a comprehensive, multistage, destination-based tax: comprehensive because it has subsumed almost all the indirect taxes except a few state taxes.

What is Input Credit (set off)?

- "Input Tax Credit" is an aggregate total amount of tax paid by a registered dealer on the total purchases made by him within the State from other dealers.

- It the tax that a business pays on a purchase and that it can use to reduce its tax liability when it makes a sale.

- In other words, businesses can reduce their tax liability by claiming credit to the extent of GST paid on purchases.

Salient features of Input tax credit:

- It can be adjusted against the tax payable by the purchasing dealer on his sales.

- It is available for purchase of goods made within the state by a registered dealer from another registered dealer.

- It is allowed for both manufacturers and traders.

KIRAN-Women Scientist Scheme

Context:

The Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Science and Technology, GOI has started several pioneering initiatives for promoting women in science.

Details:

- In 2014, DST restructured all women-specific programmes under one umbrella called **Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN)**, which encompasses women-exclusive schemes

and encourages them to foster their career by not only undertaking research in Science and Technology (S&T) but also focusing on S&T solutions of issues & challenges at the grassroots level for social benefits.

- The mandate of the KIRAN Program is to bring gender parity in S&T through gender mainstreaming.

- **Women Scientist Scheme (WOS)** addresses the challenges faced by S&T qualified women primarily due to social responsibilities.

- Its two components WOS-A and WOS-B are directly implemented by the KIRAN Division and the third component WOS-C or KIRAN-IPR is implemented by TIFAC with grant-in-aid from DST.

  - TIFAC is an autonomous think tank under the DST. It was established in 1988.

  - It was mandated to assess the state-of-art of technology and set directions for future technological development in India in important socio-economic sectors.

- The WOS was launched to address the critical issues of "career-break", identify neglected well-qualified women in the field of S&T and to provide opportunities to women scientists.

- To encourage women to continue the research in S&T, the Ministry provides fellowships through the following categories:

  - Women Scientist Scheme-A (WOS-A) – Research in Basic/Applied Science

  - Women Scientist Scheme-B (WOS-B) – S&T interventions for Societal Benefit

  - Women Scientist Scheme-C (WOS-C) – Internship in Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) for the Self-Employment

National Archives of India

Context:

130th Foundation Day of National Archives of India (NAI).

About the National Archives of India (NAI):

- The National Archives of India is an Attached Office under the Ministry of Culture.

- The NAI acts as the Secretariat of the Indian Historical Records Commission (IHRC) (re-designated as Indian Historical Records Committee in 2011) and the National Committee of Archivists (NCA) to provide guidance in management, administration, preservation and use of records.

  - The IHRC was set up in 1919 and is a high-powered body headed by the Union Minister of Culture and comprises eminent historians, administrators and archivists. However, the NCA is a professional platform of archivists from all States/UTs.

- **NAI Origins:**

  - The NAI was established on 11 March 1891 at Kolkata as the Imperial Records Department (IRD).

  - Following the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, the present building of the National Archives of India was constructed in 1926 which was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. The transfer of all records from Calcutta to New Delhi was completed in 1937.

  - After independence, the Government of India rechristened IRD as the National Archives of India with the Director of Archives as its head. In 1990, the Director of Archives was re-designated as the Director-General of Archives.

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- The NAI is the nodal agency for the implementation of the Public Records Act, 1993 and Public Record Rules, 1997.

- The NAI has a regional office at Bhopal and three Records Centres at Bhubaneswar, Jaipur and Puducherry.

- **NAI Mission:**

  - To encourage the scientific management, administration and conservation of records all over the country.

  - To foster close relations between archivists and archival institutions, both at the national and international levels.

  - To encourage greater liberalization of access to archival holdings.

To help in developing greater professionalism and a scientific temper among creators, custodians and users of records for proper care and use of our documentary heritage.

COVID-19

Context:

Evacuation by India of its citizens and other nationals from COVID-19 affected countries.

Details:

- The Government of India undertook evacuation operations from several countries in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

- There were hundreds of Indians stranded in Wuhan, which was the epicentre of the outbreak.

- India engaged with China to safely evacuate its citizens and citizens of other friendly nations on a priority basis.

- Air India operated two special flights for the evacuation efforts which brought back 654 passengers that included 647 Indian citizens.

- The Indian Air Force also evacuated 112 passengers from Hubei province in China. Among these, 76 were Indian citizens. The other nationals evacuated included citizens of Myanmar, Bangladesh, Maldives, China, USA, Madagascar and South Africa. The IAF flight had also carried medical supplies which were given as a goodwill gesture to China.

- All the evacuated people were placed in isolation facilities for 14 days. They were tested twice and were found negative for COVID-19, after which they were discharged.

- Air India also evacuated 124 people from the Japanese cruise ship 'Diamond Princess' that included 16 Indian nationals. They tested positive for the virus and are now undergoing treatment.

- As it became clear that Iran was also facing a COVID-19 outbreak, the Government started to undertake measures to ensure the safety and security of its citizens in the country. Indian nationals in Iran include pilgrims, students and fishermen. On 7th March, 108 samples were received from Iran. These samples are being tested at the laboratory of AIIMS. Also, six scientists from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) have been stationed in Iran. Equipment and reagents have also been dispatched to enable them to setup a lab. India is expected to undertake operations to evacuate its citizens soon.

- So far, the Government of India has evacuated 890 passengers from COVID-19 affected countries. Out of these, 842 were Indian citizens and 48 belonged to different nationalities including Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh, China, US, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Africa and Peru.

Nuclear Power Plants

Details:

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- Nuclear reactors are used at nuclear power plants for electricity generation. A nuclear reactor is a device used to initiate and control a sustained nuclear chain reaction.

- Heat from nuclear fission is passed to a working fluid (water or gas), which runs through steam turbines. All commercial power reactors are based on nuclear fission.

Nuclear reactors in India:

The Department of Atomic Energy is engaged in the development of nuclear power technology in India. It was formed in 1954.

List of nuclear power projects in India

Projects under construction:

1. Kakrapar, Gujarat
2. Rawatbhata, Rajasthan
3. Gorakhpur, Haryana
4. Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu
5. Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu

New projects accorded administrative approval & financial sanction:

1. Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu
2. Chutka, Madhya Pradesh
3. Kaiga, Karnataka
4. MahiBanswara, Rajasthan
5. Gorakhpur, Haryana

Installed nuclear power plants:

1. Tarapur, Maharashtra
2. Rawatbhata, Rajasthan
3. Narora, Uttar Pradesh
4. Kakrapar, Gujarat
5. Kaiga, Karnataka
6. Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu

7. Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu

Startup India

Context:

Salient features of Startup India action plan.

Details:

To know more about Startup India scheme of the government, click on the linked article.

The scheme is an ongoing initiative of the GOI. The salient features of the scheme are given below:

- **Compliance Regime based on Self-Certification** with an objective to reduce the regulatory burden on Startups thereby allowing them to focus on their core business and keep compliance cost low.

- **Startup India Hub** with an objective to create a single point of contact for the entire Startup ecosystem and enable knowledge exchange and access to funding.

- **Rolling out of Mobile App and Portal** with an objective to serve as the single platform for Startups for interacting with Government and Regulatory Institutions for all business needs and information exchange among various stakeholders.

- **Legal Support and Fast-tracking Patent Examination at Lower Costs** with an objective to promote awareness and adoption of IPRs by Startups and facilitate them in protecting and commercializing the IPRs by providing access to high quality Intellectual Property services and resources, including fast-track examination of patent applications and rebate in fees.

- **Relaxed Norms of Public Procurement for Startups** with an objective to provide an equal platform to Startups across sectors vis-à-vis the

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experienced entrepreneurs/companies in public procurement.

- **Providing Funding Support through Fund of Funds with a Corpus of Rs. 10,000 crores** with an objective to provide funding support for development and growth of innovation driven enterprises.

- **Faster Exit for Startups** with an objective to make it easier for Startups to wind up operations.

- **Credit Guarantee fund for Startups** with an objective to catalyze entrepreneurship by providing credit to innovators across all sections of society.

- **Tax Exemptions on Capital Gains** with an objective to promote investments into Startups by mobilizing the capital gains arising from sale of capital assets.

- **Tax Exemptions to startups for 3 Years** with an objective to promote the growth of Startups and address working capital requirements.

- **Tax Exemption on Investments above Fair Market Value** with an objective to encourage seed-capital investment in Startups.

- **Organizing Startup Fests** for Showcasing Innovation and Providing a Collaboration Platform.

- **Launch of Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)**

- **Harnessing Private Sector Expertise for Incubator Setup** with an objective to ensure professional management of Government sponsored/funded incubators; the government will create a policy and framework for setting-up of incubators across the country in public private partnership.

- **Building Innovation Centres and Research Parks at National Institutes** with an objective to propel successful innovation through augmentation of incubation and R&D efforts.

- **Promoting Startups in the Biotechnology Sector** with an objective to foster and facilitate bio-entrepreneurship.

- **Launching of Innovation Focused Programs for Students** with an objective to foster a culture of innovation in the field of Science and Technology amongst students.

- **Annual Incubator Grand Challenge** with an objective to support creation of successful world class incubators in India.

Imparting new technologies to farmers through electronic media

What's in News?

Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare is taking various measures and initiatives in educating farmers through following use of electronic media:

- **Kisan Suvidha mobile app** facilitates the dissemination of information to farmers on critical parameters such as Weather; Market Prices; Plant Protection; Input Dealers (Seed, Pesticide, Fertilizer) Farm Machinery; Soil Health Card; Cold Storages & Godowns, Veterinary Centres and Diagnostic Labs.

- Crop related advisories are regularly sent to the registered farmers through SMSs on **mKisan Portal**.

- The Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) has compiled **more than 100 mobile apps** in the areas of crops, horticulture, veterinary, dairy, poultry, fisheries, natural resources management and integrated subjects.

- **Awareness** is being created among farmers **through various electronic mass media mediums** like DD Kisan Channel, Doordarshan, All India Radio etc.

- Apart from the above, Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube are being used to educate farmers, across the country.

The Government is implementing the following schemes aimed at imparting training to farmers in the agriculture and allied sectors:

1. A Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 'Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms' popularly known as **Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) Scheme** is under implementation. The extension activities under ATMA, inter-alia, include Farmers' Training.

2. Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) with its network of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) has mandate of technology assessment, demonstration and capacity development of farmers. KVKs are imparting training to farmers for getting higher agricultural production and income.

3. Four Farm Machinery Training & Testing Institutes (FMTTIs) are engaged in imparting training to various categories of trainees including farmers, in the field of Farm Mechanization.

4. National Food Security Mission (NFSM) is being implemented in identified districts of 28 States and 2 UTs viz. Ladakh and J&K of the country to increase the production and productivity of rice, wheat, pulses, coarse cereals and nutri- cereals (millets) through area expansion and productivity enhancement.

5. Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme is being implemented for holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables, root and tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut,

cashew, cocoa and bamboo. All States and UTs are covered under MIDH.

Private Investment in Jammu and Kashmir

In order to facilitate investments in Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the following incentives are offered to attract entrepreneurs by the UT:

- Allotment of land at a subsidized rate.

- Cheaper Power Tariffs.

- Subsidy on purchase & installation of DG set.

- Subsidy on the installation of Quality Control/Testing Equipments.

Additionally Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade is also implementing different Packages for providing incentives to industries in UT of Jammu & Kashmir.

Average Life Expectancy

What's in News?

As per the report titled SRS Based Life Table 2013-17 published by the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Government of India, the average life expectancy at birth has increased from 49.7 during 1970-75 to 69.0 in 2013-17, registering an increase of 19.3 years during this period.

Details:

- A cross-sectional multi-centric community based study of elderly population aged 60 years and above conducted jointly by the Government of India and WHO Country Office in India has revealed that diseases like hypertension, diabetes mellitus, ischaemic heart disease, poor vision, difficulty in hearing, anaemia, arthritis, fall/fractures, bowel complaints, urinary complaints, depression, weight loss, asthma,

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chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, TB etc. are common among older patients.

- Recognizing the need for specialized accessible health care for the elderly, the Government of India has launched various programmes, including the National Programme for Health Care of Elderly (NPHCE) and Integrated Programme for Older Persons such as Ayushman Bharat. These programmes aim to provide health care facilities to senior citizens (aged 60 years and above) at primary, secondary and tertiary health care delivery system and to further increase the average life expectancy of people.

- The Government of India has also enacted 'Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007'.

The measures taken for providing better health services to ensure a healthy life and to further improve the average life expectancy:

- Mobilization of public health action at multiple levels.

- The Ayushman Bharat effort, with its two components of Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) and Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), addresses the disparity in access and reduces out of pocket expenditure for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization for 40% of India's population.

- National Health Mission (NHM) is creating a network of 1,50,000 HWCs by upgrading existing Sub Centres (SCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) to provide Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC), which is universal and free to all those who access public health facilities.

- The CPHC basket of services cover 12 key service areas, which go beyond the Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) services to include screening and care for NCDs (diabetes, high blood pressure, oral, breast, cervical

cancers etc.), elderly care, palliative and rehabilitative care, Oral, Eye and ENT care, mental health and first level care for emergencies and trauma etc.

- Continuum of care is being provided to all elderly citizen of age above 60 years under the National Programme for Healthcare of Elderly (NPHCE).

- Palliative care is being provided to terminal cases of Cancer, AIDS etc. under the National Programme for Palliative Care (NPPC).

- Government is providing financial support in the form of untied funds, annual maintenance grants and Rogi Kalyan Samiti (RKS) funds for development of health facilities and ensuring services.

- It is providing infrastructural support to State/UTs in constructing new health facilities and/or for up-gradation of infrastructure, Mother & Child Health (MCH) wings, up-gradation of the trauma centres & First Referral Units, Operationalization of the blood banks etc.

- It is operationalizing health facilities in rural areas (through placement of human resources in difficult areas, supply of equipment, drugs and diagnostics).

- In addition, certain new initiatives have been undertaken, like the Screening for Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs), Mothers Absolute Affection (to promote exclusive breastfeeding), Pradhan Mantri Shurakshit Matratva Abhiyan (to improve access to specialist maternal care through voluntary participation of private providers), Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Program, Mission Indradhanush (to immunise partially or uncovered population), Rashtriya Swasthya Bal Karyakram (RBSK), Kayakalp (to promote cleanliness, hygiene and Infection Control Practices in public Health Care Facilities), Labour room quality improvement initiative-LAQSHYA (Initiative to reduce preventable

maternal and new-born mortality, morbidity and stillbirths associated with the care around delivery in Labour room and Maternity OT and ensure respectful maternity care), Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan (SUMAN) (to end all preventable maternal and neonatal deaths) etc.

National Biopharma Mission

- The National Biopharma Mission (NBM) is an industry-Academia Collaborative Mission for accelerating biopharmaceutical development in the country.

- Under this Mission, the Government has launched Innovate in India (i3) programme to create an enabling ecosystem to promote entrepreneurship and indigenous manufacturing in the sector.

- The mission will be implemented by the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC).

- The mission was approved in 2017 at a total cost of Rs 1500 crore and is 50% co-funded by World Bank loan.

- Together with National and International experts, the most promising projects are selected in response to open Request for Applications issued by the PMU.

- The program is promoting entrepreneurship by supporting small and medium enterprises for indigenous product development (Novel Cell lines, indigenously developed Biologics, devices and Raw materials for Biologics manufacturing) and through establishment of shared facilities and Technology Transfer Offices.

This scientifically driven enterprise aims at developing an ecosystem for affordable product development and is focused on the following 4 verticals:

1. Development of product leads for Vaccines, Biosimilars and Medical Devices that are relevant to the public health need by focussing on managed partnerships.

    - Presently the mission is supporting the development of candidate vaccines for Cholera, Influenza, Dengue, Chikungunya and Pneumococcal disease;

    - Biosimilar products for Diabetes, Psoriasis, emergency situations & Oncology;

    - Products for development of MedTech Devices for Imaging, Pumps for dialysis, MRI and Molecular Biology devices.

2. Upgradation of shared infrastructure facilities and establishing them as centres of product discovery/discovery validations and manufacturing.

    - Support is being extended by the Mission for establishing shared facilities.

    - 15 facilities have been funded for – Biopharmaceuticals development (7), MedTech device development (6) and Vaccine Development (2).

3. Develop human capital by providing specific training to address the critical skills gap among the nascent biotech companies across the product development value chain in areas such as product development, intellectual property registration, technology transfer and regulatory standards.

4. Technology Transfer Offices: To help enhance industry academia inter-linkages and provide increased opportunities for academia, innovators and entrepreneurs to translate knowledge into products and technologies, 5 Technology Transfer Offices are being considered for funding under NBM.

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Changes in GST rates on supply of goods and services

Context:

- Recommendations of the GST council related to changes in GST rates on the supply of goods and services.

Fitment Committee

- It consists of the nominated officials of the Tax Research Unit in Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), and officials of the commercial taxes department from some states.

- It is tasked with evolving a principle and a subsequent methodology to determine rates for various supplies under GST

Details:

- The recommendation of the Fitment Committee for calibrating the GST rate structure to correct the inverted duty structure on various items like Mobile phones, Footwear, Textiles, and Fertilizers was placed before the GST Council for discussion.

- The Council had a detailed discussion on the matter. Upon discussion the Council made the following recommendations:

  - To raise the GST rate on Mobile Phones and specified parts presently attracting 12 percent to 18 percent.

  - GST rate on all types of matches (Handmade and other than Handmade) has been rationalized to 12% (from 5% on Handmade matches and 18% on other matches).

  - To reduce GST rate on Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) services in respect of aircraft from 18% to 5% with full ITC and to change the place of

supply for B2B MRO services to the location of recipient.

- This change is likely to assist in setting up of MRO services in India. Domestic MRO will also get protection due to the 5% tax paid under section 3(7) of the Customs Tariff Act, 1975.

PM interacts with SAARC leaders to combat COVID-19 in the region

Context:

Prime Minister interacted with the leaders of the SAARC countries through video conference to chart out a common strategy in order to combat COVID-19 in the region.

Details:

- In the spirit of collaboration, Prime Minister Modi proposed the creation of a **COVID-19 Emergency Fund** based on voluntary contributions from all the countries, with India making an initial offer of US $10 million for the fund.

- The fund can be used by any of the partner countries to meet the cost of immediate actions.

- He informed that India is assembling a Rapid Response Team of doctors and specialists, along with testing kits and other equipment, which will be on stand-by, to be placed at the disposal of the countries, if required.

- Prime Minister also offered to arrange for online training capsules for the emergency response teams of the neighbouring countries and sharing of the software behind India's Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal to help trace possible virus carriers and the people they contacted.

- He suggested that existing mechanisms like **SAARC Disaster Management Centre** can be used to pool in best practices.

- He also suggested the creation of a common Research Platform to coordinate research on controlling epidemic diseases within the South Asian region.

Unnat Bharat Abhiyan

About the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA):

- Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is inspired by the vision of transformational change in rural development processes by leveraging knowledge institutions to help build the architecture of an Inclusive India.

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) launched UBA with an aim to connect institutions of higher education, including Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs) and Indian Institutes of Science Education & Research (IISERs), etc. with local communities to address the development challenges through appropriate technologies.

- **Mission:**

  - The Mission of the scheme is to enable higher educational institutions to work with the people of rural India in identifying development challenges and evolving appropriate solutions for accelerating sustainable growth.

  - It also aims to create a virtuous cycle between society and an inclusive academic system by providing knowledge and practices for emerging professions and to upgrade the capabilities of both the public and the private sectors in responding to the development needs of rural India.

- **The main objectives of UBA are:**

  - To engage the faculty and students of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in identifying development issues in rural areas and finding sustainable solutions for the same.

  - Identify & select existing innovative technologies, enable customisation of technologies, or devise implementation methods for innovative solutions, as required by the people.

  - To allow HEIs to contribute to devising systems for the smooth implementation of various Government programmes.

- Currently, under the scheme UBA, 13072 villages have been adopted by 2474 Institutes.

- The technology interventions under the scheme have been able to transform the living conditions in villages.

- The technological interventions under the UBA cover different subjects broadly categorized as follows:

  - Sustainable agriculture

  - Water resource management

  - Artisans, industries and livelihood

  - Basic amenities (infrastructure & services) and rural energy system

- With the interventions in the above-mentioned areas, various new and old technologies have been developed which have transformed the living conditions in villages.

- Some of the technological interventions done under the scheme are:

  - Mushroom Cultivation done in Gendikata cluster (IIT Delhi)

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- Environment Controlled Automated Green House For High Valued Agro Produce (HVPM College of Engineering and Technology, Amravati)

- Safe Drinking Water (NIT Manipur and IIT Jodhpur)

- Paper bag making (BITS Mesra)

- Pattal crockery making (NIT Hamirpur)

- Cloth Bag making (Fatima College, Madurai)

- Revamping of Govt. schools in Vrindavan Cluster (IIT Delhi)

- Improved Pottery Kiln in Farrukhnagar cluster (IIT Delhi)

- Thread winding machine for weavers (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University, Etcherla, AP)

- Agriculture drone system (Santhiram Engineering College, Nandyal, AP)

National Ayush Mission

Context:

The Ministry of AYUSH has established Central Council for Research in Siddha (CCRS) and Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS).

Details:

- The CCRS is the apex organisation for developing and promoting research & development in the Siddha system of medicine in India.

- The CCRAS is the apex organisation for developing and promoting research & development in the Ayurveda system of medicine in India.

- CCRAS has a total of 30 Ayurvedic Research Institutes/Centres/Units located all over India and CCRS has a total of 08 Siddha Research Institutes/Units functioning under it.

Prelims Fact:

- **Nilavembu Kudineer**, a Siddha medicine has proven effect in the prevention and management of Dengue and Chikungunya in epidemic out breaks.

- It is a concoction of nine herbs.

- According to the Ministry, it has antipyretic (used to prevent/reduce fever), analgesic (pain-relieving) and anti-dengue activity.

- Under in vitro conditions, the medicine was found to provide protection against chikungunya virus while it was effective as a treatment during the acute phase of dengue infection.

- Dengue subtype-2, which is the most prevalent subtype in India, was used for testing the formulation.

About Siddha medicine system:

- Siddha is a traditional Indian medicinal system, and is now a component of AYUSH.

- It has a Dravidian origin and its literature is entirely in Tamil.

- Its fundamental concepts are similar to those of Ayurveda.

- An individual is a microcosm of the universe, whose body consists of 5 primordial elements – earth, fire, water, air and space.

- It is believed to have been founded by the Siddhars (individuals who had achieved the ashta siddhis or the 8 supernatural powers).

Impact of Climate Change on Farmers

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Details:

- In order to address the problems likely to arise due to climate change, the government has been taking actions in terms of programs focused on climate resilient agriculture, and adaptation strategies for ensuring food security, enhanced livelihood opportunities and economic stability.

National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA):

- It is one of the missions under the National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC).

- The NMSA has been made operational from the year 2014-15 and it aims at making agriculture more productive, sustainable, remunerative and climate resilient by promoting location specific integrated/composite farming systems; soil and moisture conservation measures; comprehensive soil health management; efficient water management practices and mainstreaming rainfed technologies.

- It includes programmatic interventions like:

  - Soil Health Card (SHC) Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)

  - Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER)

    - It is a Central Sector Scheme launched by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

    - It is for implementation in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

    - The scheme aims at the development of certified organic production in a value chain mode to link growers with consumers and to support the development of entire value chain starting from inputs, seeds, certification, to the creation of facilities for collection, aggregation, processing, marketing and brand building initiative.

- Rainfed Area Development (RAD)

- National Bamboo Mission (NBM)

- Sub-mission on Agro Forestry (SMAF)

  - The aim of this mission is to promote tree plantation on farmland along with the productivity enhancement of crops and cropping system.

  - The principal objective of implementing this scheme is to address the development of agroforestry practices for the increased crop production and economic gain in the country.

  - The scheme is being performed in the States which have exempted selected tree species under transit regulations.

  - The scheme also aims at popularising agroforestry methods and practices.

WTO Ruling against India

Details:

- A Dispute Settlement Panel of WTO has ruled India's export promotion schemes (e.g. Merchandise Exports from India Scheme, Export Oriented Units Scheme, Special Economic Zone Scheme, Export Promotion Capital Goods Scheme and Duty Free Imports for Exporters Scheme, etc.) to be export contingent and in the nature of prohibited

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subsidies under the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures and thus inconsistent with WTO

- The Panel has given time-frame of 90-180 days for withdrawal of these schemes. However, India has appealed the Panel Report on 19 November, 2019 and due to non-functioning of Appellate Body, the appeal has been kept in suspension.

- Till the appeal is disposed of, India is under no obligation to implement the recommendations of the Panel.

- Though the US has claimed that India is providing subsidies on the above-mentioned schemes, India has taken the stand in dispute that the subsidies are not export contingent and thus consistent with WTO norms.

APEDA signs MoU with SFAC

Context:

Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) signed an MoU with the Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) to have a better sync with their activities for the benefit of farmers.

Details:

- APEDA has been in dialogue with SFAC for linking of Farmer Producer Organizations, farmers' cooperatives to the export value chain through capacity building, production of the quality produce as per the requirement of importing countries, creation of infrastructure, facilitating primary and secondary processing in the clusters and also by linking them to the exporters.

- As per the MoU, both organisations will work towards capacity development, outreach programs, awareness programs and workshops of various stakeholders.

- APEDA will facilitate the certification of organic produce/areas by the FPCs assisted or identified by SFAC.

- It is expected that with the approach of joint collaboration with the organizations like SFAC, APEDA will be able to reach to a large farmer base for improving the production base of agri products quantitatively and qualitatively both for maintaining the consistency of supply and establish an image of quality supplier in the international market leading to increase in export volume and value and indirectly contribute to doubling of farmers' income.

About Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC):

- SFAC is an exclusive Society focused on increasing incomes of small and marginal farmers through aggregation and development of agribusiness.

- It is a Society promoted by the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, GOI.

- SFAC has pioneered the formation and growth of Farmer Producer Organizations/Farmer Producer Companies, which is now being implemented across the length and breadth of the country.

- SFAC is progressing towards establishing an ecosystem for FPOs/FPCs to make them sustainable and viable in the long run.

- SFAC offers schemes like Equity Grant and Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme to FPCs to improve availability of working capital and development of business activities.

- SFAC is also implementing the National Agriculture Market Electronic Trading (e-Nam) platform. The purpose is to provide for a single unified market for agricultural products with much higher price discovery for farmers.

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Subsidies provided in Agricultural Sector

Some of the component/schemes through which the Government provides subsidies to farmers are as follows:

1. **Seeds:**

- The Department is implementing **Sub-Mission on Seeds & Planting Materials (SMSP)** to promote production and multiplication of quality seeds of agricultural crops.

- To upgrade the quality of farmers' saved seeds, financial assistance for distribution of foundation/certified seeds at 50% cost of the seeds for cereal crops and 60% for pulses, oilseeds, fodder and green manure crops for the production of quality seeds is available /provided for one acre per farmer under the component **Seed Village Programme** of SMSP.

- The objective of this scheme is to make available improved /high yielding varieties of seeds to farmers in time and to achieve self-sufficiency in respect of seeds at the village level itself.

2. **Mechanization & Technology:**

- Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) provides a suitable platform for converging all activities for inclusive growth of agricultural mechanization by providing a 'single window' approach for implementation with a special focus on small & marginal farmers.

- A new Central Sector Scheme on 'Promotion of Agricultural Mechanization for In-Situ Management of Crop Residue' in the States of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and NCT of Delhi has been launched.

3. **Irrigation:**

- There are three components of the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY): PMKSY(Har Khet Ko Pani), PMKSY (Watershed), PMKSY (Per Drop More Crop), being implemented for precision irrigation and better on-farm water management practices to optimize the use of available water resources

4. **Godowns:**

- To promote the creation of scientific storage capacity for storing farm produce, processed farm produce and agricultural inputs etc., to reduce post-harvest & handling losses, promote pledge financing and market access including marketing infrastructure (other than storage), a capital subsidy sub-scheme "Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure (AMI)" of Integrated Scheme for Agricultural Marketing (ISAM) is being implemented across the country.

4. **Fertilizers:**

- Urea is being provided to farmers at a statutory notified Maximum Retail Price (MRP).

- Also with respect to Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) Fertilizers, subsidy is being provided.

4. **Other subsidies:**

- Subsidies to the farmers are also given as part of various other schemes such as National Food Security Mission (NFSM), Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) and Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) etc for the benefits of the farmers.

Strengthening Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Regime in India

What's in News?

- Intellectual Property (IP) intensive industry is not defined.

- However, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has taken various initiatives to strengthen Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Regime in India like legislative improvements, use of IT and technology in e-filing of applications, acceptance of email in all Indian Patent Office (IPO) transactions, online delivery of certificates of grant/registration of patent, trademark and designs in digital format, use of video-conferencing for hearing of IP applications, expedited examination of IP applications, spreading awareness in IPR.

- India's accession to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) administered treaties and signing of pilot Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) project with Japan in December 2019 are noteworthy initiatives.

- The Government of India has been working steadily to improve India's ranking in Global Innovation Index (GII) and this is evident from the fact that India has been consistently moving up on global ranking in past few years.

  - India's ranking has improved from 81 in 2015 to 52 in 2019 in GII.

Impacts of the initiatives taken during last 5 years are as under:

- Period of examination of new Trademarks applications has been reduced from 13 months to less than 30 days.

- Trademark is registered in less than 7 months, if there are no objections or opposition filed, as compared to 3-5 years required earlier.

- The time required for patent examination reduced from average of 72 months in 2014-2015 to average around 36 months in 2019.

- Grant of patents has increased.

Factors affecting life expectancy and death

What's in News?

- The report -"World Health Statistics 2019 – Monitoring Health for the SDGs" published by the World Health Organization is intended to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- As per the report, globally the disparities in health, survival and longevity depends upon access to food, safe drinking water, sanitation, medical care and other basic human needs, as well as behavioural choices and societal contexts that affect the survival of individuals.

- According to the report, global life expectancy at birth (for both sexes combined) has increased by 5.5 years, from 66.5 in 2000 to 72.0 years in 2016.

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has taken various measures to provide better health services to ensure a healthy life and to further improve the average life expectancy of the people in the country:

- In order to mitigate the effect of the increasing burden of diseases associated with increased life expectancy National Health Mission has initiated various programs like National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS), National Programme for Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment (NPCBVI), National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), National Programme for Healthcare of Elderly(NPHCE), National Programme for the Prevention and Control of Deafness(NPPCD) etc.

- The Ayushman Bharat effort, with its two components of Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) and Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), addresses the disparity in access and reduces out of pocket expenditure for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization for 40% of India's population.

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- National Health Mission (NHM) is creating a network of 1,50,000 HWCs by upgrading existing Sub Centres (SCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) to provide Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC), which is universal and free to all those who access public health facilities.

  - The CPHC basket of services cover 12 key service areas, which go beyond the Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) services to include screening and care for NCDs etc.

- National Health Policy, 2017 also emphasises on the provision of availability of free, comprehensive primary health care services, for all aspects of reproductive, maternal, child and adolescent health and for the most prevalent communicable, non-communicable and occupational diseases in the population.

In order to improve the health norms in the country, the Government of India has taken the following steps:

- Continuum of care is being provided to all elderly citizen of age above 60 years from preventive and promotive up to rehabilitation in Geriatric units of District Hospital, Community Health Centres and Primary Health Centres under National Programme for Healthcare of Elderly (NPHCE).

- Financial support is being provided in the form of untied funds, annual maintenance grants and Rogi Kalyan Samiti (RKS) funds for the development of health facilities and ensuring services.In addition, certain new initiatives have been undertaken like the Screening for Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs), Mothers Absolute Affection, Pradhan Mantri Shurakshit Matratva Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Program, Mission Indradhanush, Rashtriya Swasthya Bal Karyakram (RBSK), Kayakalp, Labour room quality improvement initiative – LAQSHYA, Surakshit Matritva

Aashwasan (SUMAN) (to end all preventable maternal and neonatal deaths), National Health Mission Free Drugs and Free Diagnostics, National Programme for Palliative Care (NPPC) etc.

National Policy on Skill Development

Recognizing the need for skill development, the National Skill Development Policy was formulated in 2009. Given the paradigm shift in skilling and entrepreneurship ecosystem in the country and the experience gained through the implementation of various skill development programmes, the policy was revised and the second National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015 was notified.

- The primary objective of this Policy is to meet the challenge of skilling at scale with speed, standard (quality) and sustainability.

- It aims to provide an umbrella framework for all skilling activities being carried out within the country, to align them to common standards and link skilling with demand centres.

- The Policy also seeks to coordinate and strengthen factors essential for the growth of entrepreneurship across the country.

Initiatives taken by the Government to meet the objectives of the Policy:

- Launching of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), for imparting short-term skill training to the youth.

- Notification of common norms for bringing about uniformity and standardization in the implementation of various skill development schemes by different Central Ministries/Departments.

- Setting up of Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) as industry-led bodies to develop National Occupation Standards (NOSs).

- Implementation of Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP), an outcome-oriented World Bank supported project for strengthening institutional mechanisms at both national and state levels.

- Implementation of Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE) scheme, a World Bank assisted project launched with the objective of improving the relevance and efficiency of skills training provided through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and apprenticeships.

- Launching of Skill India Portal to provide information of trainees, training providers and trainers.

- Mobilisation/ outreach activities through Kaushal/Rozgar Melas, Skills Career Counselling Scheme in making skilling aspirational.

Action-Plan to tackle Adverse Impact of Global Warming on Food Crops

What's in News?

- Global Warming associated with the increase in the concentration of Green House Gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere is one of the reasons for the increase in extreme weather events.

- Due to global warming agriculture sector is likely to be affected and climate change is expected to impact yields of agriculture crops in a business as usual scenario.

- Simulation studies using integrated modelling framework showed that rain-fed rice yields in India are projected to reduce marginally ($<2.5\%$) in 2050 and 2080 scenarios while irrigated rice yields are projected to reduce by 7% in 2050 and 10% in 2080 scenarios.

Tackling Adverse Impact of Global Warming on Food Crop

- During XII Plan (2012-2018), more than 400 climate-resilient germ-plasm lines and genotypes characterised with high water and nutrient use efficiency have been identified by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

- National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) one of the missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) aims to evolve and implement strategies to make Indian agriculture more resilient to the changing climate.

- National Food Security Mission (NFSM) programme is implemented in the identified districts across the country with the objective of increasing food grain production through area expansion and productivity enhancement, restoring soil fertility and productivity at individual farm level and enhancing farm level economy.

- ICAR has launched a flagship network project National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA).

The NICRA aims at strategic research on adaptation and mitigation, demonstration of technologies on farmers' fields and creating awareness among farmers and other stakeholders to minimize the impacts of global warming on agriculture.

Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme

Context:

1. The Union Cabinet has approved financial assistance to the Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC2.0) Scheme which would support setting up of both **Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs)** and **Common Facility Centres (CFCs).**

Details

1. The **EMCs** will aid the growth of the Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) sector, help the development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, drive innovation and catalyse the economic growth of the region by attracting investments in the sector.

   - EMCs would be set up in geographical areas of certain minimum extent, preferably contiguous, where the focus is on development of basic infrastructure, amenities and other common facilities for the ESDM units.

2. For the **CFC,** there should be a significant number of existing ESDM units located in the area and the focus is on upgrading common technical infrastructure and providing common facilities.

Benefits

The Scheme will create a robust infrastructure base for the electronic industry to attract flow of investment in the ESDM sector and lead to greater employment opportunities. Following are the expected outputs/outcomes for the Scheme:

1. Availability of ready infrastructure and Plug & Play facility for attracting investment in electronics sector.

2. New investment in electronics sector

3. Jobs created by the manufacturing units;

4. Revenue in the form of taxes paid by the manufacturing units

Digital E-Learning Platforms

Context:

1. Union Human Resource Development Minister has asked students to continue their learning by making full use of the available digital e-Learning platforms during the period the educational institutions are closed as a precautionary measure against COVID-19.

2. Educational institutions have been urged to promote digital learning and make students aware of the various digital/e-learning platforms which are provided by MHRD for online education.

The digital learning platforms of Ministry of HRD:

1. **DIKSHA:** Diksha has more than 80000 e-Books for class 12th created by CBSE, NCERT and States/UTs which are available in multiple languages.

2. **e- PATHSHALA:** In this web portal NCERT has deployed 1886 audios, 2000 videos, 696 e-books (e-Pubs) and 504 Flip Books for classes 1st to 12th in different languages.

3. **National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER):** It is an initiative to bring together all digital and digitisable resources across all stages of school education and teacher education.

The e-platforms of Ministry of HRD for school education & Higher Education are as under:

- **SWAYAM:** SWAYAM is the national online education platform hosting 1900 courses covering both school (class IX to XII) and

Higher Education (undergraduate, post graduate programs) in all subjects.

*
    o
        * A unique feature of SWAYAM is that it is integrated with conventional education.
        * Credit transfers are possible for SWAYAM courses

* **SWAYAM PRABHA:** It has 32 D2H TV channels transmitting educational content on a 24/7 basis.

    * The channels cover both **school education** (class IX to XII) and **Higher Education** (undergraduate, post graduate, engineering, out of school children, vocational courses and teacher training) in arts, Science, commerce, performing arts, Social Sciences and Humanities subjects, engineering, technology, law, medicine, and agriculture.

Technology Development Board

Context:

Technology Development Board under DST invites technology proposals for fighting COVID 19.

About the Technology Development Board (TDB):

* The Government of India constituted the Technology Development Board (TDB) in September 1996, under the Technology Development Board Act, 1995, as a **statutory body**, to promote the development and commercialization of indigenous technology and adaptation of imported technology for wider application.

* The TDB is the first organization of its kind within the government framework with the sole objective of commercializing the fruit of indigenous research.

* The Board plays a pro-active role by encouraging enterprises to take up technology oriented products.

* The TDB provides equity capital or loans to industrial concerns and financial assistance to research and development institutions.

TDB Functions:

* Facilitates interaction between industry, scientists, technocrats and specialists.

* Fosters an innovation culture through contract and cooperative research between industry and institutions.

* Provides an interface with financial institutions and commercial banks for leveraging funds.

* Facilitates the creation of a new generation of entrepreneurs.

* Assists partnerships with other, similar technology financing bodies.

* Provides vistas for venturing into hi-tech areas.

* Creates new job opportunities.

TDB Objectives:

* To promote new ideas from small enterprises even at the risk of failures.

* To encourage production of competitive consumer products.

* To motivate industries and R&D institutions for product innovation.

* To develop socially relevant and profitable technologies.

* To identify and act in areas requiring strategic interventions.

* To invest in core technological strengths to enable India industry to stand-up to the

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competitive pressure and become a global player.

TDB Members:

- Secretary, Department of Science & Technology – Ex-officio Chairperson

- Secretary, Department of Expenditure – Ex-officio Member

- Secretary, Department of Defence Research and Development Organization – Ex-officio Member

- Secretary, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research – Ex-officio Member

- Secretary, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion – Ex-officio Member

- Secretary, Department of Rural Development – Ex-officio Member

- Secretary, Technology Development Board – Ex-officio Member Secretary

COVID Emergency Fund

Context:

Prime Minister Modi expressed gratitude to the heads of several SAARC countries for their contribution to the Fund.

Details:

- India had extended $10 million to this Fund.

- Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan contributed $5 million, $1.5 million and $1 million respectively to the COVID Emergency Fund.

National Supercomputing Mission

Context:

National Supercomputing Mission: a transformative approach in supercomputing.

About the National Supercomputing Mission (NSM):

- The Mission envisages empowering our national academic and R&D institutions spread over the country by installing a vast supercomputing grid comprising of more than 70 high-performance computing facilities.

- These supercomputers will also be networked on the **National Supercomputing Grid** over the **National Knowledge Network (NKN)**.

  - The NKN is another programme of the government which connects academic institutions and R&D labs over a high speed network.

- The mission was set up to provide the country with supercomputing infrastructure to meet the increasing computational demands of academia, researchers, MSMEs, and startups by creating the capability design, manufacturing, of supercomputers indigenously in India.

- The mission is steered jointly by the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST), and implemented by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.

- The target of the mission was set to establish a network of supercomputers ranging from a few Tera Flops (TF) to Hundreds of Tera Flops (TF) and three systems with greater than or equal to 3 Peta Flops (PF) in academic and research institutions of national importance across the country by 2022.

- This network of Supercomputers envisaging a total of 15-20 PF was approved in 2015 and was later revised to a total of 45 PF (45000 TFs), a jump of 6 times more computing power within

the same cost and capable of solving large and complex computational problems.

- With the revised plan in place, the **first supercomputer assembled indigenously**, called **Param Shivay**, was installed in IIT (BHU).

- Similar systems Param Shakti and Param Brahma were installed at IIT-Kharagpur and IISER, Pune. They are equipped with applications from domains like Weather and Climate, Computational Fluid Dynamics, Bioinformatics, and Material science.

- There are plans to have more supercomputers in various institutes of higher learning in the country.

- **Objectives of NSM:**

    - To make India one of the world leaders in Supercomputing and to enhance India's capability in solving grand challenge problems of national and global relevance.

    - To empower our scientists and researchers with state-of-the-art supercomputing facilities and enable them to carry out cutting-edge research in their respective domains.

    - To minimize redundancies and duplication of efforts, and optimize investments in supercomputing.

    - To attain global competitiveness and ensure self-reliance in the strategic area of supercomputing technology.

Application areas of NSM:

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Climate Modelling	Weather Prediction	Aerospace Engineering including CFD, CSM, CEM
Computational Biology	Molecular Dynamics	Atomic Energy Simulations
National Security/Defence Applications	Seismic Analysis	Disaster Simulations and Management
Computational Chemistry	Computational Material Science and Nanomaterials	Discoveries beyond Earth (Astrophysics)
Large Complex Systems Simulations and Cyber Physical Systems	Big Data Analytics	Finance
Information repositories/Government Information Systems		

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National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)

Context:

The Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare visits NCDC Control Room.

About the NCDC:

- The NCDC is an institute under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

- It was previously known as the National Institute of Communicable Diseases.

- It has its origins as the Central Malaria Bureau, established at Kasauli (Himachal Pradesh) in 1909.

- The institute engages in research, and it has several sections and laboratories dealing with different communicable diseases. The divisions have well equipped laboratories with modern equipment capable of undertaking tests using latest technology.

- **NCDC Functions:**

  - Special emphasis is given to trained health manpower development that is essential for the successful implementation of different health programmes in the country.

  - The NCDC also conducts customized training programmes for international participants. These courses are sponsored by international agencies like WHO, UNICEF, CDC and USAID.

  - It also carries out applied research in various aspects of communicable as well as non-communicable diseases.

    - Applied research in the field of bacteriology, virology, mycology, immunology, parasitology and quality control of diagnostic reagents with an aim of improving diagnostic capabilities of diseases of public health importance and giving laboratory support to the investigation and control of disease outbreaks. The important diseases include Cholera, Dengue, Diphtheria, Filaria, Fungal infections, Hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, Influenza, JE, Kala-azar, Leptospirosis, Malaria, Measles, Meningitis, Rabies, Rubella, Scrub Typhus, Soil Transmitted Helminthis, Tuberculosis, and Zika Virus Disease, etc.

  - Field based research through longitudinal studies of various epidemic prone diseases.

  - Laboratory and field oriented research in the transmission dynamics of arthropod borne diseases with the ultimate objective of vector control.

  - Evaluation of new formulations of insecticides and biocides and screening of indigenous herbs to evaluate their insecticidal properties

  - Studies on biological hazards of pesticides.

  - In-vitro culture of pathogens, rapid diagnostic tests including molecular techniques.

- The NCDC also offers specialised services like diagnostics, storage and supply of diagnostic reagents, entomological services, quality control of insecticides, supplying research materials, outbreak investigations, etc.

Regional Rural Banks

Context:

Cabinet approves recapitalization of Regional Rural Banks to improve their Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio.

Details:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has given its approval for continuation of the process of recapitalization of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) by providing minimum regulatory capital to RRBs for another year beyond 2019-20, that is, up to 2020-21 for those RRBs which are unable to maintain minimum Capital to Risk weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) of 9%, as per the regulatory norms prescribed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

- The CCEA also approved utilization of Rs.670 crore as central government share for the scheme of Recapitalization of RRBs (i.e. 50% of the total recapitalization support of Rs.1340 crore), subject to the condition that the release of Central Government's share will be contingent upon the release of the proportionate share by the sponsor banks.

Benefits:

- Financially stronger and robust Regional Rural Banks with improved CRAR will be able to meet the credit requirement in the rural areas.

- As per RBI guidelines, the RRBs have to provide 75% of their total credit under PSL (Priority Sector Lending).

- RRBs primarily cater to the credit and banking requirements of the agriculture sector and rural areas with focus on small and marginal farmers, micro & small enterprises, rural artisans and weaker sections of the society.

- In addition, RRBs also provide lending to micro/small enterprises and small entrepreneurs in rural areas.

- With the recapitalization support to augment CRAR, RRBs would be able to continue their lending to these categories of borrowers under their PSL target, and thus, continue to support rural livelihoods.

Background:

- Consequent upon RBI's decision to introduce disclosure norms for the CRAR of RRBs with effect from March 2008, a committee was set up under the chairmanship of Dr. K.C. Chakrabarty.

- Based on the Committee's recommendations, a Scheme for Recapitalization of RRBs was approved by the Cabinet in its meeting held in 2011 to provide recapitalization support of Rs. 2,200 crore to 40 RRBs with an additional amount of Rs. 700 crore as contingency fund to meet the requirement of the weak RRBs, particularly in the North Eastern and Eastern Region.

- Therefore, based on the CRAR position of RRBs, as on 31st March of every year, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) identifies those RRBs, which require recapitalisation assistance to maintain the mandatory CRAR of 9%.

- Post 2011, the scheme for recapitalization of RRBs was extended up to 2019-20 in a phased manner with a financial support of Rs. 2,900 crore with 50% Government of India's share of Rs. 1,450 crore.

- During this period, the Government has also taken various initiatives for making the RRBs economically viable and sustainable institutions.

  - With a view to enable RRBs to minimize their overhead expenses, optimize the use of technology, enhance the capital base and area of operation and increase their exposure, the Government has initiated structural consolidation of RRBs in three phase,

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thereby reducing the number of RRBs from 196 in 2005 to the present 45.

What is Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR)?

The CRAR, also known as the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR), is the ratio of a bank's capital to its risk.

- It is a measure of the amount of a bank's core capital expressed as a percentage of its risk-weighted asset.

- The enforcement of regulated levels of this ratio is intended to protect depositors and promote stability and efficiency of financial systems around the world.

- It determines the bank's capacity to meet the time liabilities and other risks such as credit risk, operational risk, etc.

- In the most simple formulation, a bank's capital is the "cushion" for potential losses, and protects the bank's depositors and other lenders.

- Banking regulators in most countries define and monitor CAR to protect depositors, thereby maintaining confidence in the banking system.

Glaciers in Sikkim are losing mass faster than other parts of the Himalayas

Context:

Scientists from the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG), Dehradun an autonomous research institute for the study of Geology of the Himalayas under the Department of Science and Technology, have found that glaciers in Sikkim are melting at a higher magnitude as compared to other Himalayan regions.

Details:

- The study assessed the response of 23 glaciers of Sikkim to climate change for the period of 1991-2015 and revealed that glaciers in Sikkim have retreated and deglaciated significantly from 1991 to 2015.

- Small-sized glaciers in Sikkim are retreating while larger glaciers are thinning due to climate change.

- Compared to other Himalayan regions, the magnitude of dimensional changes and debris growth are higher in the Sikkim.

  - A major shift in glacier behaviour has occurred around 2000.

  - Contrary to the western and central Himalaya, where glaciers are reported to have slowed down in recent decades, the Sikkim glaciers have shown negligible deceleration after 2000.

  - Summer temperature rise has been the prime driver of glacier changes.

- The behaviour of glaciers in the region is heterogeneous and found to be primarily determined by glacier size, debris cover, and glacial lakes.

- Though a generalized mass loss is observed for both small (less than 3 km square) and large-sized glaciers (greater than 10 km square), they seem to adopt different mechanisms to cope with the ongoing climatic changes.

  - While the first adjust mostly by deglaciation, the latter lose mass through down wasting or thinning.

Benefits of studying glaciers:

- Accurate knowledge of magnitude as well as the direction of glacier changes can lead to awareness among common people regarding water supplies and possible glacier hazards, particularly to those communities that are living in close proximity.

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- Such studies can provide ample baseline data on glacier changes and systematically explore the causal relationship between glacier parameters and various influencing factors.

- A clear understanding of glacier state will help orienting future studies as well as taking necessary measures.

- Glaciers reveal clues about global warming.

  - How much does our atmosphere naturally warm up between Ice Ages?

  - How does human activity affect climate?

  - Because glaciers are so sensitive to temperature fluctuations accompanying climate change, direct glacier observation may help answer these questions.

About Glaciers:

- Glaciers are made up of fallen snow that, over many years, compresses into large, thickened ice masses.

- Glaciers form when snow remains in one location long enough to transform into ice.

- What makes glaciers unique is their ability to flow. Due to sheer mass, glaciers flow like very slow rivers.

- Some glaciers are as small as football fields, while others grow to be dozens or even hundreds of kilometres long.

- Presently, glaciers occupy about 10 percent of the world's total land area, with most located in polar regions like Antarctica, Greenland, and the Canadian Arctic.

- Glaciers can be thought of as remnants from the last Ice Age, when ice covered nearly 32 percent of the land, and 30 percent of the oceans.

- Most glaciers lie within mountain ranges that show evidence of a much greater extent during the ice ages of the past two million years, and more recent indications of retreat in the past few centuries.

- Gangotri glacier is one of the largest in the Himalaya region. Gangotri has been receding since 1780, although studies show its retreat quickened after 1971.

- Since the early twentieth century, with few exceptions, glaciers around the world have been retreating at unprecedented rates.

- Some scientists attribute this massive glacial retreat to the Industrial Revolution, which began around 1760.

- In fact, several ice caps, glaciers and ice shelves have disappeared altogether in this century.

- Many more are retreating so rapidly that they may vanish within a matter of decades.

Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)

Context:

Finance Minister announces Rs 1.70 Lakh Crore relief package under **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana** for the poor to help them fight the battle against Corona Virus.

Details of the package:

- Insurance scheme for health workers fighting COVID-19 in Government Hospitals and Health Care Centres.

  - Safai karamcharis, ward-boys, nurses, ASHA workers, paramedics, technicians, doctors and specialists and other health workers would be covered by a Special insurance Scheme.

  - Any health professional, who, while treating Covid-19 patients, meet with some accident, then he/she would be

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compensated with an amount of Rs 50 lakh under the scheme.

- All government health centres, wellness centres and hospitals of Centre as well as States would be covered under this scheme; approximately 22 lakh health workers would be provided insurance cover to fight this pandemic.

- PM Garib Kalyan Ann (अन्न) Yojana

  - 80 crore individuals, i.e, roughly two-thirds of India's population would be covered under this scheme.

  - Each one of them would be provided double of their current entitlement over the next three months.

  - This additionality would be free of cost.

  - To ensure adequate availability of protein to all the above mentioned individuals, pulses (1 kg per family) would be provided according to regional preferences for the next three months. This would be free of cost.

- Farmers will be given the first instalment of Rs 2,000 due in 2020-21 under the PM KISAN scheme, in April 2020 itself.

- Cash transfers under the PMGKY:

  - A total of 20.40 crores Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) women account-holders would be given an ex-gratia of Rs 500 per month for the next three months.

- Under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, gas cylinders, free of cost, would be provided to 8 crore poor families for the next three months.

- Help to low wage earners in organised sectors:

  - Wage-earners below Rs 15,000 per month in businesses having less than 100 workers are at risk of losing their employment.

- Under this package, government proposes to pay 24 percent of their monthly wages into their PF accounts for next three months.

- This would prevent disruption in their employment.

- Support for senior citizens (above 60 years), widows and physically-handicapped:

  - Government will give them Rs 1,000 to tide over difficulties during the next three months.

- MNREGA wages would be increased by Rs.20/- w.e.f 1st April, 2020.

- For Self-help Groups (SHGs), the limit of collateral free lending would be increased from Rs.10 lakh to Rs.20 lakh.

- For the organised sector, the Employees' Provident Fund Regulations will be amended to include Pandemic as the reason to allow non-refundable advance of 75 percent of the amount or three months of the wages, whichever is lower, from their accounts.

- A Welfare Fund for Building and Other Constructions Workers has been created under a Central Government Act.

  - State Governments will be given directions to utilise this fund to provide assistance and support to these workers to protect them against economic disruptions.

- The State Government will be asked to utilise the funds available under the **District Mineral Fund (DMF)** for supplementing and augmenting facilities of medical testing, screening and other requirements in connection with preventing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic as well as treating the patients affected with this pandemic.

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Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF)

- PMNRF was established with public contributions to assist displaced persons from Pakistan.

  - The fund was first consolidated during the time of the first prime minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru.

- The resources of the PMNRF are now utilized primarily to render immediate relief to families of those killed in natural calamities, and to the victims of the major accidents and riots.

  - Assistance from PMNRF is also rendered, to partially defray the expenses for medical treatments.

- The fund consists entirely of public contributions and does not get any budgetary support.

  - **PMNRF accepts only voluntary donations by individuals and institutions.**

- The corpus of the fund is invested in various forms with scheduled commercial banks and other agencies.

  - Disbursements are made with the approval of the Prime Minister.

- The fund is recognized as a Trust under the Income Tax Act and the same is managed by the Prime Minister or multiple delegates for national causes.

- **PMNRF is exempt under Income Tax Act, 1961 under Section 10 and 139 for return purposes.**

  - Contributions towards PMNRF are notified for 100% deduction from taxable income under section 80(G) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

- The Prime Minister is the Chairman of PMNRF and is assisted by Officers/ Staff on honorary basis.

Context:

- Vice President donates a month's salary to Prime Minister's National Relief Fund.

Fight Corona IDEAthon

Context:

- Fight Corona IDEAthon is a 2-day online ideathon to mitigate the uncertainties arising in light of the rampaging Pandemic.

- MHRD Innovation Cell, AICTE, MEITY Startup Hub, InnovatioCuris and other institutions of global and national prominence have jointly organized it.

Details

- **It endeavours to scout for accessible and affordable technological solutions that can contain the rapid spread of infection, ease the mounting pressure and ensure a quick return to normalcy.**

- The event is being held in partnership with Forge & InnovatioCuris.

How does it work?

- Challenges and problem statements have been sought from healthcare professionals, government officials and other stakeholders working on the ground.

- The problems and challenges are curated under 8 different categories such as – *Personal Hygiene & Protection, Awareness, Preparedness & Responsible Behavior, Medical Systems – Diagnostic & Therapeutic, Screening, Testing & Monitoring – Devices & IT/Digital/Data Solutions, Protecting Most Vulnerable Groups, Community Task*

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Forces/Working Groups, Remote Work & Remote Education, Stabilizing Affected Businesses and the Open Category.

- Problem statements of high magnitude soliciting innovative technological solutions are put forth for student innovators, educators, researchers, professionals and startups to ideate and innovate feasible products.

- During the IDEAthon, Startups and innovators shall be guided by Domain experts, Healthcare providers and professionals, Innovation experts, etc. from across the country through a virtual platform.

- Few international agencies like worldstartup.co, United Nations Technology and Innovation lab, and Crowdera have also come forward to support the participants.

COVID-19 National Teleconsultation Centre (CoNTeC)

Context:

1. The Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare Dr. Harsh Vardhan launched the National Teleconsultation Centre (CoNTeC)

Details:

1. It has been conceptualised by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and has been implemented by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi.

2. The CoNTeC is a Telemedicine Hub wherein expert doctors from various clinical domains will be available 24×7 to answer the multifaceted questions from specialists from all over the country.

3. It is a multi-modal telecommunications hub through which 2 way audio-video and text communications can be undertaken from any part of the country as well as the world at large.

- The modes of communication will include simple mobile telephony as well as two way video communications, using WhatsApp, Skype and Google Duo.

4. CoNTeC has been made operational at AIIMS with a view to connect the Doctors across the country to AIIMS in real time for treatment of the COVID-19 patients.

- CoNTeC has been set up in the AIIMS so that the small states should also make use of the vast experience of the Doctors at AIIMS.

5. The CoNTeC is also fully integrated with the National Medical College Network (NMCN) to conduct a full fledged Video Conference (VC) between the 50 Medical Colleges connected through the NMCN with its National Resource Centre located at SGPGI, Lucknow.

6. The patient management advice offered will be standardized as per the national guidelines supplemented protocols developed by the team at AIIMS, nominated by the Director, AIIMS.

Significance:

1. The goal of the facility is to at least connect the doctors in the country together to discuss amongst themselves the protocols undertaken and provide the best treatment accordingly.

2. The telemedicine guidelines have also been notified by the Government of India and with the help of digital platform and technology, the public at large will get the benefit not only for COVID- 19 but other diseases also.

Way Forward:

1. All the medical colleges and AIIMS need to be connected together so that they can interact and help in the policy implementation for the country in the health sector.

2. AIIMSs should become the hub of activity for the district hospitals to connect with them for

consultation, telemedicine, education, training, interaction and exchange of protocols between themselves.

Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH)

Context:

The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) has cancelled the 49th edition of the IHGF – Delhi Fair Spring-2020 in view of the present status of COVID-19 in India and abroad.

About the EPCH:

1. The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), under the aegis of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, is a non-profit organization, established under the EXIM policy of the Government of India in the year 1986-87.

2. It was established under the Companies Act to promote, support, maintain and increase the export of handicrafts.

3. It is an apex body of handicrafts exporters for the promotion of exports of handicrafts from India and projection of India's image abroad as a reliable supplier of high quality handicrafts goods & services.

4. **Activities of EPCH:**

   - Providing commercially useful information and assistance to members in developing and increasing exports.

   - Offering professional advice and services to members in areas of technology up gradation, quality and design improvement, standards and specifications, product development, innovation, etc.

- Organising visits of delegation of its members abroad to explore overseas market opportunities.

- Participating in specialized International Trade Fairs of handicrafts & gifts.

- Organizing Indian Handicrafts and Gifts Fair (IHGF) at New Delhi.

- Interaction between exporting community and Central and State governments at various levels.

- To create an environment of awareness through Workshops on "Export Marketing, Procedures and Documentation", Packaging, Design Development, Buyer Seller Meet, Open House, etc. interaction with Central and State Govt. and various other similar programmes.

- Dissemination of government notification, orders, information on trade and other relevant information to members.

Tech For Tribals

Context:

Braving all odds, "The Tech for Tribals", a project to train tribal entrepreneurs at 16 premier IITs & IIMs of the country, was launched online. This scheme will link almost 3.5 lakh tribal entrepreneurs living in villages to the premier institutions of the world.

About Tech for Tribals:

1. It was launched by TRIFED, along with IIT Kanpur, IIT Roorkee, IIM Indore, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, Bhubaneswar and SRIJAN, Jaipur.

2. Tech for Tribals, supported by the Ministry of MSME, aims at capacity building and imparting

entrepreneurship skills to tribal forest produce gatherers enrolled under the Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY).

3. The trainees will undergo a 30 days program over six weeks comprising 120 sessions.

4. Under the program, the Partners will develop course contents relevant to Entrepreneurship in Value Addition and Processing of Forest Produces.

5. The course curriculum will include Achievement Motivation and positive psychology, Entrepreneurial Competencies, Identification of locally available NTFP based Business Opportunities, Round the Year capacity utilization, Product positioning – Grading/Sorting, Branding, Packaging, Product certifications, Bankable Project Report preparation, Market Survey, Business Plan Preparation, Distribution Channels – Retail sales, supply contracts with manufacturers, Good Manufacturing Practice(GMP), Total Quality Control(TQC), Hygienic Operations management, Operational and Financial statements, Business Strategy & Growth, Digital literacy& IT adoption, etc.

6. The Tech for Tribals capacity building program will ensure higher success rate of the Tribal Entrepreneurs by enabling and empowering them to run their business with marketable products with quality certifications.

About TRIFED:

1. The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) came into existence in 1987. It is a national-level apex organization functioning under the administrative control of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GOI. TRIFED has its registered and Head Office located in New Delhi and has a network of 13 Regional Offices located at various places in the country.

2. TRIFED, a multi-State Cooperative Society, is promoting and marketing tribal products, tribal art and crafts within the country and abroad by providing marketing support to tribal products through its network of 31 retail outlets "TRIBES INDIA", 37 consignment outlets of various State Emporia and 16 franchise outlets.

3. It organizes exhibitions like National Tribal Craft Expo called "Aadi Mahotsav" and others in which it promotes and markets tribal products.

4. It has also begun providing e-commerce platforms to the tribal artisans to sell their products. Towards this, TRIFED has entered into agreements with e-commerce platforms like Snapdeal and Amazon who will offer their customers various tribal products and produce through their portals.

Special Economic Zones (SEZs)

Context:

Relaxations provided on compliances to be met by units/developers/co-developers of SEZs.

Details:

- In view of the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nation-wide lock-down, most government offices are closed and a few involved in emergency services etc., are functioning with skeletal staff.

- The Department of Commerce has therefore decided to provide suitable relaxations on compliances to be met by units/developers/co-developers of Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

- Such compliances to which the relaxations will apply, include:

  - Requirement to file Quarterly Progress Report (QPR) attested by Independent Chartered Engineers by Developers/Co-developers.

- SOFTEX form to be filed by IT/ITES units.

- Filing of Annual Performance Reports (APR) by SEZ units.

- Extension of Letter of Approvals (LoA) which may expire, in the cases of:

    - Developers/co-developers who are in the process of developing and operationalising the SEZ;

    - Units which are likely to complete their 5 year block for NFE assessment;

    - Units which are yet to commence operations.

- Development Commissioners of SEZs have been directed to ensure that no hardship is caused to Developers/Co-Developer/Units and no punitive action is taken in cases where any compliance is not met during this period impacted by the above disruption.

IBBI amends CIRP Regulations

Context:

IBBI amends CIRP Regulations to provide relief in corporate insolvency resolution process due to COVID-19 outbreak.

Details:

- To address the difficulty faced by the lockdown due to COVID-19, the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)** amended the CIRP (corporate insolvency resolution process) Regulations to provide that the period of lockdown imposed by the Central Government in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak shall not be counted for the purposes of the time-line for any activity that could not be completed due to the lockdown, in relation to a corporate insolvency resolution process. This would, however, be subject to the overall time-limit provided in the Code.

About the IBBI:

- The IBBI was formed in 2016 under the IBC.

- It is the regulator responsible for overseeing the insolvency proceedings.

- It is responsible for the implementation of the IBC that consolidates and amends the laws relating to reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals.

- It has regulatory oversight over:

    - Insolvency Professionals

    - Insolvency Professional Agencies

    - Insolvency Professional Entities

    - Information Utilities

- It frames and enforces rules for:

    - Corporate insolvency resolution

    - Corporate liquidation

    - Individual insolvency resolution

    - Individual bankruptcy

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)

Context:

In the wake of COVID-19 spread, ICAR issues Advisory to farmers for Rabi crops.

Details:

- Amidst the threat of COVID-19 spread, the Rabi crops are approaching maturity.

- Harvesting and handling of the produce including its movement to the market are

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inevitable as the agricultural operations are time-bound.

- The ICAR has asked the farmers to follow precautions and safety measures to prevent the disease spread.

  - Simple measures include social distancing, maintaining personal hygiene by washing hands with soap, wearing a face mask, protective clothing, and cleaning implements and machinery.

  - Workers to follow safety measures and social distancing at each and every step in the entire process of field operations.

About ICAR:

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India.

- It was established in 1929 as the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research.

- Headquartered in New Delhi, it is the apex body for coordinating, guiding and managing research and education in agriculture including horticulture, fisheries and animal sciences in the entire country.

- With 101 ICAR institutes and 71 agricultural universities spread across the country, this is one of the largest national agricultural systems in the world.

- The ICAR has played a pioneering role in ushering the Green Revolution and subsequent developments in agriculture in India through its research and technology development that has enabled the country to increase the production of food grains by 5.4 times, horticultural crops by 10.1 times, fish by 15.2 times, milk 9.7 times and eggs 48.1 times since 1951 to 2017, thus making a visible impact on the national food and nutritional security.

- It has played a major role in promoting excellence in higher education in agriculture.

- It is engaged in cutting edge areas of science and technology development and its scientists are internationally acknowledged in their fields.

- **ICAR Functions:**

  - Plan, undertake, coordinate and promote research and technology development for sustainable agriculture.

  - Aid, impart and coordinate agricultural education to enable quality human resource development.

  - Frontline extension for technology application, adoption, knowledge management and capacity development for agri-based rural development.

- Policy, cooperation, and consultancy in agricultural research, education & extension.

Foreign Trade Policy 2015-2020

Context:

Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2015-2020 extended for one year.

About the Foreign Trade Policy 2015 – 20:

- The FTP incorporates provisions relating to the export and import of goods and services.

- It is also called the Export-Import (EXIM) Policy.

- The FTP was introduced by the Government to grow the Indian export of goods and services, generating employment and increasing value addition in the country.

- The Government, through the implementation of the policy, seeks to develop the manufacturing and services sectors.

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- **Key Focus Area:** The Government, through the policy, primarily focuses on adopting a twin strategy of promoting traditional and sunrise sectors of exports including services. Further, it intends to simplify the process of doing business.

- **Objectives of FTP 2015 – 20:**

    - To increase India's merchandise and services exports from US$ 465. 9 billion in 2013-14 to US$ 900 billion by 2019-20.

    - To increase India's share in the world exports to 3.5 percent from the present figure of 2%.

    - To ensure a stable and sustainable policy environment for promoting merchandise and services trade.

    - Linking the rules, procedures, and incentives for the imports and exports with other government schemes like Make in India, Skill India, Digital India, etc. for the purpose of the export promotion.

    - To diversify India's export basket by ensuring that the different sectors of the Indian economy are able to achieve global competitiveness for export promotion.

    - To improve India's global trade engagement and expand its markets and improve its integration with major regions which will ultimately increase the demand for India's exports. This would contribute to the Indian government's flagship schemes such as the Make in India initiative, etc.

    - To provide a regular appraisal mechanism for rationalizing the imports and reducing trade imbalances.

- **Salient features of the FTP 2015 – 20:**

- The policy replaced all existing focus products and focus market schemes for goods with a single Merchandise Export from India Scheme. Under the scheme, incentives will be given for the export of specific goods to specific markets.

- For services, all schemes have been replaced by a Services Export from India Scheme, with a greater thrust on notified services.

- Duty credit scrips issued under MEIS and SEIS and the goods imported against these scrips are fully transferable and usable for payment of customs duty, excise duty, and service tax.

- Extended benefits of both incentive schemes for export of goods & services to units in Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

- Export obligation under Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme reduced to 75% to promote domestic capital goods manufacturing.

- **FTP Schemes to improve the Ease of Doing Business:**

    - Niryat Bandhu Scheme: This scheme aims to mentor first-generation entrepreneurs and growing exporters on the intricacies of foreign trade using counselling, training and outreach programmes.

    - Electronic IEC: Import exporter code, or in casual terms, an export permit is mandatory for carrying out exports and imports from/to another country. The DGFT has facilitated the online filing of the IEC application.

    - E-BRC (Electronic Bank Certificate): This enables DGFT to capture essential details of realization of export proceeds

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directly from the banks by means of secured electronic mode. This paves the way for the implementation of various export promotion schemes without any physical interface with the stakeholders.

- Many other initiatives have been launched by the GOI to improve EoDB.

All the Best
Jai Hind ☺

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