

C.A From 25th June to 1st July 2018

General Studies-1

Ambubachi Mela

Why in News?

Ambubachi Mela, a four-day fair to mark the annual menstruation of the goddess is being held at Kamakhya temple in Guwahati.

About Ambubachi Mela:

- The Ambubachi Mela symbolises the *fertility cult of goddess Kamakhya*.
- There is *no idol in the temple*, the goddess is worshipped in the form of a yoni-like stone over which a natural spring flows.
- Also known as *Siddha Kubjika*, the goddess is a Hindu tantric goddess of desire who evolve in the Himalayan hills. She is also identified as Kali and Maha Tripura.
- The festival is also known as '*Mahakumbh of the East*' as it draws lakhs of devotees from all over the world.

Social significance of the festival:

The ritualistic fair celebrating the goddess' period is one of the reasons why the taboo associated with menstruation is less in Assam compared with other parts of India.

The attainment of womanhood of girls in Assam is celebrated with a ritual called 'Tuloni Biya', meaning small wedding. Ambubachi Mela serves as an occasion to promote awareness on menstrual hygiene.

About Kamakhya:

Kamakhya, *atop Nilachal Hills in Guwahati*, is one of 51 shaktipeeths or seat of Shakti followers, each representing a body part of the Sati, Lord Shiva's companion.

National Statistics Day.

In recognition of the notable contributions made by Late Professor Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis in the fields of statistics, statistical

system and economic planning, Government of India in 2007, has designated 29th June as the “Statistics Day” in the category of Special Days to be celebrated every year at the National level.

29th June, 2017 marked the beginning of the 125th year of birth of Prof. P.C. Mahalanobis.

ISI has held year-round celebrations which will be culminated on 29th June, 2018.

Objective of celebration :

to create public awareness about the importance of statistics in socio-economic planning and policy formulation, to acknowledge the contribution of Prof. Mahalanobis, and to pay homage to him.

The theme selected for the Statistics Day this year is **“Quality Assurance in Official Statistics”**.

The theme has been chosen to underscore the importance of compliance with essential parameters of quality in statistical systems and products.

About ISI:

The Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) at Kolkata, set up by Prof. Mahalanobis in 1931, and was declared an autonomous “Institute of National Importance” through an act of Parliament in 1959, celebrates 29th June as the “Worker Day”.

2+1 Dialogue Format

The spirit of the Wuhan informal summit echoed strongly last week during the visit of Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Oli to Beijing, with [China](#) proposing a new dialogue mechanism that would also involve India.

Chinese side proposed to Mr. Oli a “two plus one” format for dialogue.

What is it?

This is different from a trilateral mechanism.

Under the Chinese proposal, China and India can jointly conduct a dialogue with a third regional country,” the source said.

The Chinese initiative is not Nepal-specific.

During Mr. Oli's visit, the Chinese side made its intent clear to engage deeply with [Nepal](#), and develop special ties with its Himalayan neighbour.

Yet, Beijing also made it plain that China-Nepal ties would be docked with India's shared interests as well.

Why shift in Chinese policy?

China was inclined to fulfill its ambitious agenda with Nepal gradually, after ensuring that such steps were in sync with India's interests.

Analysts say, that the Nepali side has understood the "big picture", appreciating that China is keen to build bridges with India, as Beijing's friction with the U.S. under the Trump administration begins to mount.

Besides, bringing India on board is essential for enhanced regional connectivity, including a trans-Himalayan corridor through Nepal, if President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative is to achieve its full potential," the source observed.

Women in Prisons' report

Why in News?

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has come up with its report titled '*Women in Prisons*' which aims to build an understanding of the various entitlements of women in prisons, the various issues faced by them and possible methods for resolution of the same.

Highlights of the report- important recommendations:

Who is vulnerable? Women- elderly, disabled, pregnant, mothers who have recently given birth but whose children are not with them in prison, those who have miscarried, or those who have recently undergone abortion.

Arrangements for women with care-giving responsibilities: Prior to their imprisonment, women with care-giving responsibilities must be allowed to make arrangements for their children, and a reasonable suspension of detention may also be provided for this purpose. Provisions for

extended and frequent visits, and admission of children into Childcare institutions have also been proposed.

Bail: Bail should be granted to those under-trial women who have spent one-third of their maximum possible sentence in detention, by making necessary changes in Section 436A of the CrPC which provides for release after half of the maximum sentence has been served.

Special care for pregnant and lactating women: A separate accommodation for mothers in post-natal stage to maintain hygiene and protect the infant from contagion, for at least a year after childbirth has been proposed. There are special provisions relating to health and nutrition be made for women who have recently given birth outside prison, or who have undergone abortion or miscarriage. Instruments of restraint, punishment by close confinement or disciplinary segregation should never be used on pregnant and lactating women. Pregnant women must be given information and access to abortion during incarceration, to the extent permissible by law.

Legal aid: To make legal aid more effective, legal consultations must be conducted in confidentiality and without censorship. For persons with language barriers or sensory disabilities, adequate arrangements must be made by the prison administration to ensure that such persons do not face any disadvantage by providing an independent interpreter.

Rehabilitation: A comprehensive after-care programme to be put in place, covering employment, financial support, regaining of child custody, shelter, counselling, continuity of health care services etc. Counselling should also be provided to family members and employers to adequately receive the woman after release.

Grievance redressal: Apart from the prisoner herself, her legal adviser or family members should be allowed to make complaints regarding her stay in prison. An inmate register can also be placed at an accessible spot in the prison for submitting grievances. All official visitors must hold special one-on-one interviews with prisoners away from prison authorities during inspection visits.

Challenges faced by women in prisons:

- Women in prisons face *greater hardships than their male counterparts* due to many factors such as social stigma, financial dependence on their families or husbands etc. These difficulties are further exacerbated when the woman has children.

- Women have to face numerous problems in prisons owing to *inadequacy of female staff* which often translates to the reality that male staff becomes responsible for female inmates, which is undesirable.
- Women are not provided with *meals that are nutritious* and according to their bodily requirements.
- Women are at a most disadvantageous position when it comes to *their reintegration in society after release*. Many are abandoned or harassed post-release, mainly due to the stigma attached with incarceration, which is even more pronounced in cases of women.
- Women also tend to *lose ties with their children* over the years, due to inadequate child custody procedures. Also, a robust grievance redressal mechanism was required to tackle cases of sexual harassment, violence and abuse against women in jails.

Governors vs CM:

Why in News?

The Opposition in Tamil Nadu is speaking out against Governor Banwarilal Purohit.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Ministers staged a nine-day sit-in inside the Lieutenant Governor's residence demanding a meeting, and Puducherry Lt. Governor Kiran Bedi has had frequent run-ins with the government.

Here's a look at what powers the post of a Governor holds.

How powerful is a Governor?

The powers a Governor has in the state they administer is equivalent to that of the President.

They can appoint Chief Ministers, Ministers, the State Election Commissioner and judges of the District Courts. They also serve as Chancellors of all the universities in the state.

The Governor can also dissolve the state Assembly if they see the need, and if the Assembly is not in session, they can promulgate ordinances.

Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission, the Governor can also disqualify a legislator.

Another power the Governor holds is to rule the state in case the ruling party loses its majority in the Assembly, as in Jammu and Kashmir now.

What about a Lieutenant Governor?

A Lieutenant Governor also has the same powers. Only three Union Territories — Andaman and Nicobar, Delhi and Puducherry — have Lt. Governors.

These powers are in place to ensure checks and balances for the state government and its functioning.

Why is there a hue and cry when the Governors impose their powers?

Well, that's because of another set of powers the Governor has, called discretionary powers.

It is here that the Governor differs from the President, in that their powers are far larger, and ill-defined.

One such power is that the Governor can use his discretion to select a chief ministerial candidate.

As seen in Karnataka recently, Governor Vajubhai Vala invited the BJP, the single-largest party to form the government, even after the Congress-JDS combine had the numbers to prove a majority.

Meanwhile, Governors in Goa and Manipur invited the BJP to form the government, using their discretionary powers, and the party formed post-poll alliances to supplement its numbers in the states.

Moreover, the Governor can report to the President about the failure of constitutional machinery in the state. The Governor can also reserve or refuse to sign a Bill that has been passed by the Assembly.

Is it true that the Lt. Governor of Delhi has more power?

In an observation made in November 2017, the Supreme Court said that the Lt. Governor of Delhi has more powers than the Governor of a State — he does not have to listen to the advice of the Council of Ministers.

In the case of Delhi, since portfolios like land, police and public order fall under the domain of the Centre, of which the Lt. Governor is a representative, he holds more powers than a Governor

Oxytocin formulations ban to come into effect

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has restricted the manufacture of Oxytocin formulations for domestic use to public sector only from 1st July 2018.

It has also banned the import of Oxytocin and its formulations.

From 1st July 2018, no private manufacturer will be allowed to manufacture the drug for domestic use.

Only Karnataka Antibiotics & Pharmaceuticals Ltd (KAPL), a public sector company, would be manufacturing this drug for domestic use from that date.

About Oxytocin:

The Union government banned the hormone oxytocin to stop its misuse in the livestock industry, where activists say it causes hormonal imbalances and shortens the lives of milch animals.

Often called the 'love hormone', oxytocin is released naturally in human bonding activities such as sex, childbirth and breastfeeding.

The drug's abuse in animals shortens their lives and makes them barren sooner, India's Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi has said.

General Studies-2

National Awards for Outstanding Services in the Field of Prevention of Alcoholism and Substance (Drug) Abuse

The President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind will present the “Fourth National Awards for outstanding services in the field of Prevention of Alcoholism and Substance (Drug) Abuse” to the institutions and individuals on the occasion of ‘International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking(IDDAIT).

About IDDAIT

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment celebrates 26th June every year as International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

The Government of India has instituted a Scheme of the National Awards for outstanding services in the field of prevention of Alcoholism & Substance (Drug) Abuse from the year 2013.

The Awards were earlier conferred annually till 2014. However, the Scheme of the Award has now been revised and the Awards are now conferred biennially.

The Scheme is applicable to Institutions and individuals working in the field of Prevention of Drug and Alcoholism Abuse.

Selection procedure:

A National Selection Committee under the chairmanship of Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment considered the shortlisted nominations by the Screening Committee and approved the names of the awardees.

Other Steps taken by Govt.:

About one lakh drug/alcohol addicts are benefitted every year under the Scheme.

A National Toll Free Helpline (1800-11-0031) has also been launched to assist the alcoholics and drug dependent persons, their family members and community.

Ratnagiri Refinery project in Maharashtra

Why in News?

Saudi Aramco and ADNOC signed an MoU today to jointly develop and build an integrated refinery and petrochemicals complex at Ratnagiri in Maharashtra.

The project will be implemented by Ratnagiri Refinery & Petrochemicals Ltd. (RRPCL).

Earlier, Saudi Aramco had joined the project by signing an MoU with the Indian consortium on 11th April 2018 on the sidelines of the 16 International Energy Forum Ministerial.

Saudi Aramco also sought to include another strategic partner to co-invest in the project as an overseas investor.

About the Project:

RRPCL which is promoted by a consortium of India PSUs consisting of IOCL, BPCL and HPCL will now have Saudi Aramco & ADNOC as overseas strategic partners.

The project will be set up as a 50:50 joint partnership (50:50) between the consortium from India and Saudi Aramco and ADNOC.

This will be single largest overseas investment in the Indian refining sector.

The strategic partnership brings together crude supply, resources, technologies, experience and expertise of these multiple oil companies with an established commercial presence around the world.

The project cost is estimated at around Rs.3 lakh crore (USD 44 billion).

Significance of Refinery:

The mega refinery will be capable of processing 1.2 million barrels of crude oil per day (60 million metric tonnes per annum).

It will produce a range of refined petroleum products, including petrol and diesel meeting BS-VI fuel efficiency norms.

The Refinery will also provide feedstock for the integrated petrochemicals complex, which will have the capacity of producing approx. 18 million tonnes per annum of petrochemical products.

RRPCL will rank among the world's largest refining & petrochemicals projects and will be designed to meet India's fast-growing fuels and petrochemicals demand.

It is expected that it will contribute to a GDP improvement of around 2% Nationally and about 12% to the state of Maharashtra.

POSHAN Abhiyaan

Why in News?

ICDS-CAS (Common Application Software) has been specially designed to strengthen the Service Delivery System as well as the mechanism for Real Time Monitoring (RTM) for nutritional outcomes.

It looks at improving the nutrition outcomes through effective monitoring, timely intervention and also act as a fact-based decision-making tool.

Convergence and use of Technology are the two hallmarks of POSHAN Abhiyaan.

The Abhiyaan lays-down specific targets to be achieved across different monitoring parameters over the next few years. Never before has nutrition been given such prominence at the highest level in the country.

About ICDS-CAS:

The Common Application Software (ICDS-CAS) especially developed for this purpose enables data capture, ensures assigned service delivery and prompts for interventions wherever required.

This data is then available in near real time to the supervisory staff from Sector, Block, District, State to National level through a Dashboard, for monitoring.

About POSHAN Scheme:

It is currently the largest e-Nutrition & Health programme in the World having 1.1 lakh data entry devices with frontline functionaries across 7

States (Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) enabling a footprint of 95 lakh plus beneficiaries.

The POSHAN Abhiyaan empowers the frontline functionaries i.e. Anganwadi Workers and Lady Supervisors by providing them with Smartphones.

POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission) was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 8th March, 2018 in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan.

The programme through use of technology, targeted approach and convergence strives to reduce the level of Stunting, Under-nutrition, Anemia and Low Birth Weight in Children, as also, focus on Adolescent Girls, Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers, thus holistically addressing malnutrition.

Van Dhan Kendras

Why in News?

The Government proposes to set up 3000 Van Dhan Kendras involving 30,000 SHGs across the country under the Van Dhan Scheme of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

In a new game changing initiative, the Prime Minister launched the Van Dhan Scheme of Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED on 14th April, 2018 during the celebrations of Ambedkar Jayanti at Bijapur Chattisgarh.

Emphasizing the important role of value addition in increasing tribal incomes, the Prime Minister stated that Van Dhan, Jandhan and Goverdhan Schemes had the potential to change the tribal-rural economic system.

All these three schemes in tandem need to be promoted for this purpose by the State Governments.

About Van Dhan Scheme:

Van Dhan Mission is an initiative for targeting livelihood generation for tribals by harnessing non-timber forest produces, the true wealth of forest i.e. Van Dhan with an estimated value: Rs.2 Lakh Cr. per year.

It shall promote and leverage the collective strength of tribals (through SHGs) to achieve scale.

It also aims at build upon the traditional knowledge & skill sets of tribals by adding technology & IT for value addition.

Further it is to set-up tribal community owned Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (the Kendra) in predominantly forested tribal districts.

A Kendra shall constitute of 10 tribal SHGs, each comprising of upto 30 tribal NTFP gatherers or artisans i.e. about 300 beneficiaries per Kendra.

Importance of VDK:

Value addition assumes critical importance in ensuring remunerative prices to the tribals in this approach.

Three stage value addition would be the corner stone for enhancing incomes of the tribals under the scheme.

Prime Minister Awas Yojana (PMAY)

Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs will hand over 1 crore homes under the Prime Minister Awas Yojana (PMAY) by December 2018

About PMAY:

In order to empower people to get their dream home, honorable Prime Minister has announced a comprehensive and a progressive mission, 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Housing for All' on 17 June, 2015.

One of the major verticals of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) for Lower Income Group/Economically Weaker Section (EWS/LIG) and Middle Income Group (MIG – I & II).

Under this scheme, Central government provides financial assistance through lending Institutions to eligible beneficiaries across [all statutory towns](#) as per 2011 census and their adjacent planning area (updated by the government from time to time)

Higher Education Commission of India Act

In a landmark decision, a Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018 which seeks to repeal UGC Act and provides for setting up of Higher Education Commission of India has been prepared by the Ministry of HRD and placed in public domain for comments and suggestions.

The focus of Higher Education Commission of India will be on improving academic standards and the quality of Higher Education.

The draft Act is in accordance with the commitment of Government for reforming the regulatory systems that provide for more autonomy and facilitate holistic growth of the education system which provides greater opportunities to the Indian students at more affordable cost.

Highlights of the Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018

1. The focus of the Commission will be on improving academic standards and quality of higher education, specifying norms for learning outcomes, lay down standards of teaching/research etc.
2. It will provide a roadmap for mentoring of institutions found failing in maintaining the required academic standards.
3. It shall have the power to enforce its decisions through legal provisions in the Act,
4. The Commission shall have the power to grant authorization for starting of academic operations on the basis of their compliance with norms of academic quality.
5. It will also have the powers to revoke authorization granting to a higher education institution where there is a case of wilful or continuous default in compliance with the norms / regulations.
6. It will also have the power to recommend closure of institutions which fail to adhere to minimum standards without affecting students' interest.
7. The Commission will encourage higher education institutions to formulate a Code of Good Practices covering promotion of research, teaching and learning.

Women Transforming India Awards

8. NITI Aayog, in partnership with United Nations and DICE Districts invites nominations for the Third Edition of the Women Transforming India Awards (WTI Awards).
9. The WTI Awards 2018 was announced on the occasion of the International Womens' Day in March this year.
10. An annual event, the Awards seek to recognise and applaud the work done by exemplary women towards nation-building.

11. About the Awards:

12. This year, the WTI Awards focus on '**Women and Entrepreneurship**', a concept concomitant with the launch of NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP).
13. The winners will receive support and mentoring offered under the aegis of WEP, an online platform managed by NITI Aayog to enable women realize their entrepreneurial aspirations.
14. The Women Transforming India Awards 2018 invites stories of exceptional women entrepreneurs who are breaking the glass-ceiling and challenging stereotypes through businesses, enterprises and initiatives that:
 15. · Provide innovative solutions to address key developmental challenges and/or
 16. · Impact communities within a sector
17. The Awards will recognize exceptional women who are flag-bearers of the next wave of innovation and connect them with potential business opportunities to help them grow; to empower them and to empower a New India.
18. Women entrepreneurs from across the country, engaged in any economic activity across all walks of life, are encouraged to apply.

General Studies-3

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank:

Why in News?

With the total project portfolios of US\$4.4 Billion, India has been the largest borrower of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) lending since the time the Bank started its operations.

Unlike most other multilateral development banks set up by advanced economies, AIIB is the first major multilateral development bank where principal contributors are the borrowing members themselves.

While 75% of the capital is from Asia, several non-Asian regions like Europe, North America, some East African and Latin American countries have also joined the bank as members.

The third Annual Meeting of AIIB is being organized by Government of India, in collaboration with Government of Maharashtra at Mumbai during 25-26 June 2018.

About AIIB

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia and beyond.

Headquartered in Beijing, It commenced operations in January 2016 and have now grown to 86 approved members from around the world.

By investing in sustainable infrastructure and other productive sectors today, It will better connect people, services and markets that over time will impact the lives of billions and build a better future.

Significance of AIIB:

The United Nations has addressed the launch of AIIB as having potential for “scaling up financing for sustainable development” for the concern of global economic governance.

The capital of the bank is \$100 billion, equivalent to 2/3 of the capital of the Asian Development Bank and about half that of the World Bank.

CORPAT Exercise:

Why in News?

India and Bangladesh have agreed to institute a Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) as an annual feature between the two navies.

The first edition will be inaugurated by Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba during his visit there from June 24 to 29.

The commencement of CORPAT is major step towards enhanced operational interaction between both navies.

Naval cooperation between India and Bangladesh has been traditionally strong, encompassing a wide span which includes operational interactions through port calls, passage exercises along with capacity building, capability enhancement and training initiatives..

Widening cooperation

Over the last few years, the Navy has expanded its assistance to countries in the region through “material support, training, EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) surveillance, provisioning of platforms, hydrographic assistance, joint exercises and offering slots in professional training courses.

The Navy regularly conducts CORPATs with Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand.

It also conducts EEZ surveillance of Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles on their request.

First satellite to collect space junk deployed

The first-ever satellite to test possible solutions in cleaning up space junk has been deployed by the International Space Station (ISS) and would soon begin experiments in orbit.

The satellite mission, dubbed RemoveDEBRIS, is one of the world’s first attempts to tackle the build-up of dangerous space debris orbiting the Earth

About the RemoveDebris mission:

- RemoveDebris is an EU (European Union) research project to develop and fly a low cost in-orbit demonstrator mission that aims to de-risk and verify technologies needed for future ADR (Active Debris Removal) missions.
- RemoveDebris is aimed at performing key ADR technology demonstrations (e.g., capture, deorbiting) representative of an operational scenario during a low-cost mission using novel key technologies for ADR. The project is based on and aimed at contributing to global/European ADR roadmaps.

How it works?

A microsatellite called here RemoveSAT, will release, capture and deorbit two space debris targets, called DebrisSats, in sequence using various rendezvous, capture and deorbiting technologies thus demonstrating in orbit, key ADR technologies for future missions in what promises to be the first ADR technology mission internationally.

Chilika Lake:

Why in News?

The Airports Authority of India has proposed to set up a water aerodrome in Chilika Lake for starting amphibious aircraft operations in Odisha.

About Chilika Lagoon:

- It is the largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest lagoon in the world after The New Caledonian barrier reef in New Caledonia.
- It is the largest wintering ground for migratory waterfowl found anywhere on the Indian sub-continent.
- It is one of the hotspot of biodiversity in the country, and some rare, vulnerable and endangered species listed in the IUCN Red List of threatened Animals inhabit in the lagoon for atleast part of their life cycle.

- On account of its rich bio-diversity and ecological significance, Chilika was designated as the 1st “Ramsar Site” of India.
- The Nalaban Island within the lagoon is notified as a Bird Sanctuary under Wildlife (Protection) Act, the National Wetlands, mangroves and coral reefs Committee of Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India, have also identified the lagoon as a priority site for conservation and management.
- Chilika Lagoon lies in the districts of Puri, Khurda and Ganjam of Odisha State along the eastern coast of India. It is well connected to the Chennai and Kolkata through National Highway No 5, and the Chennai Kolkata rail line passes along the western bank of the Lagoon Balugaon, with Balugaon, Chilika and Rambha being the main stations along the Western shoreline of the lagoon.

MSME Day

Why in News?

The Ministry of Micro Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME), will organize a National Conclave (UdyamSangam) on 27th June 2018 on the occasion of UN MSME Day.

The purpose of the Conclave is to encourage dialogue and partnership among various stakeholders of the MSME ecosystem and for promoting innovation and knowledge sharing on MSME related issues.

On this occasion the Solar Charkha Mission of the Ministry will be launched by the President.

Salient Features:

The Mission will cover 50 clusters and every cluster will employ 400 to 2000 artisans.

The Mission has been approved by the Government of India for which the MSME Ministry will disburse subsidy of Rs. 550 crores to the artisans.

A Website of the Ministry will also be launched which will act as a bridge between the talent pool and those enterprises seeking trained man power.

Nearly one lakh fifty thousand persons have received training in the 18 State-of-the-art Technology Centres of the MSME Ministry last year.

The need for convergences of all government initiatives relating to MSME sector has always been emphasized.

UdyamSangam is a step forward towards consolidating that process. UdyamSangam will be followed by a fortnightlong MSME Pakhwada called Udyam Lehar.

About UN MSME Day

The UN General Assembly in its 74th Plenary held on the 6th April, 2017 declared 27th June as Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day, recognizing the importance of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in achieving sustainable development goals and in promoting innovation, creativity and sustainable work for all

Suryashakti Kisan Yojana (SKY) scheme

Why in News?

In an attempt to promote solar energy, the *Gujarat government has announced Suryashakti Kisan Yojana (SKY) scheme* under which farmers would be encouraged to generate electricity and sell their surplus to power distribution companies.

Highlights of the project:

- Under the first phase of project, *the state government would provide financial assistance* to 12,400 farmers out of the state's total 15 lakh farmers to generate an estimated 175 MW of power.
- *The state government and the Centre would jointly share 60% of the cost* of installing a solar generating unit in the fields, while the farmers would need to chip in only 5%. The remaining 35%

would be in the form of a loan by the state government at the rate of four to 4.5%.

- *The government would also enter in a 25-year power purchase agreement with the farmers.* Till the farmers repay their loan, the distribution companies would buy electricity from them at the rate of Rs 7 per unit and at Rs 3.5 per unit once the loans are settled. After that, the farmers would get ownership of the solar system.

Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme

Why in News?

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the Mechanism for procurement of ethanol by Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to carry out the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme- Revision of ethanol price for supply to Public Sector OMCs.

All distilleries will be able to take benefit of the scheme and large number of them are expected to supply ethanol for the EBP programme.

Benefits from Price Revision:

Remunerative price to ethanol suppliers will help in reduction of cane farmer's arrears, in the process contributing to minimizing difficulty of sugarcane farmers.

Ethanol availability for EBP Programme is expected to increase significantly due to higher price for C heavy molasses based ethanol and enabling procurement of ethanol from B heavy molasses and sugarcane juice for first time.

Increased ethanol blending in petrol has many benefits including reduction in import dependency, support to agricultural sector, more environmental friendly fuel, lesser pollution and additional income to farmers.

The sugarcane and sugar production in this sugar season is very high leading to dampening of sugar prices.

Consequently, sugarcane farmers' dues have increased due to lower capability of sugar industry to pay the farmers. Government has taken many decisions for reduction of farmer's dues.

This is also in line with the National Policy on Biofuels -- 2018 announced by the Government during May, 2018 which has widened the scope of raw material for ethanol production.

Background:

Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme was launched by the Government in 2003 on pilot basis which has been subsequently extended to the Notified 21 States and 4 Union Territories to promote the use of alternative and environmental friendly fuels.

This intervention also seeks to reduce import dependency for energy requirements and give boost to agriculture sector.

Strategic Petroleum Reserves

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved establishment of additional 6.5 Million Metric Tonne (MMT) Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) facilities at two locations, i.e. Chandikhol in Odisha and Padur in Karnataka, including construction of dedicated SPMs (Single Point Mooring) for the two SPRs.

The SPR facilities at Chandikhol and Padur will be underground rock caverns and will have capacities of 4 MMT and 2.5 MMT respectively.

Government had announced setting up of two additional SPRs during the budget announcement for 2017-18.

The in principle approval is to take up the project under PPP model to reduce budgetary support of Government of India.

Benefits of SPR:

ISPRL has already constructed underground rock caverns for storage of 5.33MMT of crude oil at three locations, viz. Vishakhapatnam (1.33 MMT), Mangalore (1.5 MMT) and Padur (2.5 MMT).

The total 5.33 MMT capacity under Phase-I of the SPR programme is currently estimated to supply approximately 10 days of India's crude requirement according to the consumption data for FY2016-17.

Cabinet's approval for establishing additional 6.5 MMT Strategic Petroleum Reserve facilities will provide an additional supply of about 12 days and is expected to augment India's energy security.

The construction phase of the SPRs at Chandikhol and Padur is likely to generate significant direct & indirect employment opportunities in the states of Odisha and Karnataka.

Sagarmala Project:

Why in News?

The Ministry of Shipping's flagship programme for port-led-prosperity Sagarmala' received the '**Gold Award**' in infrastructure sector in the recently concluded **52nd Skoch Summit 2018** in New Delhi.

The Sagarmala Programme also received the '**Order of Merit**' at the Summit.

About SKOCH Award:

The **Skoch Awards** recognize leadership and excellence in accelerating socio-economic changes.

These awards have become a benchmark of best practices in India in the fields of governance, infrastructure, finance, banking, technology, corporate citizenship, economics and inclusive growth.

About Sagarmala Project :

Sagarmala is the flagship programme of the Ministry of Shipping for port-led-development of the country through harnessing India's 7,500 km long coastline, 14,500 km of potentially navigable waterways and strategic location of India on key international maritime trade route.

The Sagarmala Programme hinges on four pillars, namely;

Port Modernization,

Port Connectivity,

Port-linked Industrialization and

Coastal Community Development.

The programme aims to double the share of domestic waterways (inland & coastal) in the modal mix, generate logistic cost savings of Rs. 35,000-40,000 Cr per annum, boost merchandise exports by USD 110 Billion and enable creation of 1 Crore new jobs, including 40 Lac direct jobs, in the next 10 years.

Europe's first solar panel recycling plant

WHERE?

Europe's first solar panel recycling plant was recently inaugurated in France. The new plant is located in Rousset, southern France.

Details:

- Waste management firm Veolia signed a contract with solar recycling group PV Cycle France to recycle 1,300 tonnes of solar panels this year.
- The plant in Rousset uses robots to take panels apart and recover glass, silicon, plastics, copper and silver, all of which can be reused to create new panels.

Need for Solar panel recycling plant?

Solar panels have an estimated lifespan of 25 to 30 years, meaning that many of the first generation built in the 1990s are now being decommissioned. The huge growth in solar power in recent years also means that finding a sustainable and circular solution to ageing panels is of prime importance.

Way ahead:

The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that by 2050 there will be between 60 to 78 million tonnes of PV panel waste around the world. China and the US, as leaders in solar installation, will also need to establish recycling plants to deal with this waste, but that this could unlock significant economic benefits.

At the moment, however, only the European Union has adopted waste regulations specifically aimed at tackling future solar PV waste.

Hayabusa-2

A Japanese probe has reached an asteroid 300 million km away to collect information about the birth of the solar system and the origin of life after a more than three-year voyage through deep space.

The Hayabusa2 probe successfully settled into an observation position 20 km above the Ryugu asteroid, officials from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said on Wednesday..

The successful mission came just days before the UN's International Asteroid Day on June 30, a global event to raise awareness about the hazards of an asteroid impact and technological progress to counter such a threat.

Mission Objectives:

Scientists hope to glean clues about what gave rise to life on the earth from samples taken from Ryugu, which is thought to contain relatively large amounts of organic matter and water.

Photos of Ryugu — which means “Dragon Palace” in Japanese, a castle at the bottom of the ocean in an ancient Japanese tale — show an asteroid shaped a bit like a spinning top with a rough surface.

The Hayabusa2 probe was in good shape and is now ready to start exploring the asteroid over the coming 18 months, JAXA said.

The next stage is to identify suitable sites to take samples from once the probe touches down on the asteroid.

That probe returned from a smaller, potato-shaped, asteroid in 2010 with dust samples despite various setbacks during its epic seven-year odyssey and was hailed as a scientific triumph.

Blockchain Technology

Why in News?

The Centre is considering a proposal to set up a Centre of Excellence for blockchain technology in Hyderabad to drive innovation.

The proposal has been submitted by C-DAC Hyderabad, along with the Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology (IDRBT) and Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI), Mumbai.

“The Centre of Excellence, proposed to come up at C-DAC’s Hyderabad unit, will be the first one by the government for blockchain technology.

The plan is to use blockchain to digitise and secure land records for Telangana.

Once we successfully deploy it, we can then think of scaling it.

About Blockchain:

A blockchain, originally block chain, is a continuously growing list of [records](#), called *blocks*, which are linked and secured using [cryptography](#).

Each block typically contains a [cryptographic hash](#) of the previous block a [timestamp](#), and transaction data By design, a blockchain is resistant to modification of the data. It is "an open, [distributed ledger](#) that can record transactions between two parties efficiently and in a verifiable and permanent way".

How does it Work?

For use as a distributed [ledger](#), a blockchain is typically managed by a [peer-to-peer](#) network collectively adhering to a [protocol](#) for inter-node communication and validating new blocks.

Once recorded, the data in any given block cannot be altered retroactively without alteration of all subsequent blocks, which requires consensus of the network majority.

Benefits of Blockchain:

Blockchains are [secure by design](#) and exemplify a distributed computing system with high [Byzantine fault tolerance](#). [Decentralized](#) consensus has therefore been achieved with a blockchain.

This makes blockchains potentially suitable for the recording of events, medical records, and other [records management](#) activities, such as [identity management](#), [transaction processing](#), documenting [provenance](#), [food traceability](#), and voting.

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

Why in News?

India has announced it will increase for the next four years the money it pays to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), a mechanism to provide grants for environment projects. India will increase its commitments from \$12 million to \$15 million to the GEF's new four-year investment cycle, known as GEF-7.

About GEF:

- The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of *the 1992 Rio Earth Summit* to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems.
- It is *an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector* that addresses global environmental issues.
- GEF funds are *available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition* to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements.
- *The World Bank serves as the GEF Trustee*, administering the GEF Trust Fund.

It is a FINANCIAL MECHANISM for five major international environmental conventions: the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

New evidence of Life on Mars:

The crust that encases rocky planets and makes possible the emergence of life took shape on Mars earlier than thought and at least 100 million years sooner than on Earth, researchers said on June 27.

Analysing grains of the mineral zircon extracted from a Martian meteorite known as Black Beauty, they determined that the Red Planet's outer layer hardened 4.547 billion years ago, only 20 million years after the birth of the Sun.

“Mars's primary crust formation — which is the end product of planet formation — happened much faster than previously thought.

About Red planet:

Water is considered to be an essential precursor for life, at least as we know it.

Mars was once much more Earth-like, with a thick atmosphere, abundant water and global oceans.

Mars is thought to have a dense metallic core with a radius of about 1,800 km, consisting primarily of iron, nickel and sulphur. The core is surrounded by a largely dormant mantle — some 1,500 km thick — made mainly of silicon, oxygen, iron and magnesium.

Finally, the crust averages about 50 km in depth, with a maximum of about 125 km. Earth's crust averages 40 km, but is one-third the thickness of the Martian crust once planet size is taken into account.

Up to now, mathematical models have suggested that the solidification of the Red Planet took up to 100 million years.

The new study tackles the question by examining a chunk of Mars that streaked into the Saharan Desert and was discovered in 2011.

How Planets Formed?

There are two main models for the formation of planets.

In one, it occurs in stages, with small dust particles coalescing into “planetesimals” — rock fragments ten to 100 km in diameter — that

collide to form planetary embryos, and then planets, over a time scale of 50 to 100 million years.

According to a more recent model, planetary growth unfolds more quickly and is fuelled by so-called “pebble accretion”, the layered accumulation of particles measured in centimetres and metres that are loosely bound with gases.

The new timeline suggests that something similar may have happened on our planet, but only after Earth was “reset” by the giant impact that formed the Moon about 4.4 billion years ago.