

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK-3
OCTOBER
2020

MAINS

- **Bharatmala Pariyojana**
- **The Human Cost of Disasters 2000-2019-UNDRR**

ECONOMY

- **Ratification of 7 Persistent Organic Pollutants**

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- **Aquaponics**
- **Mars Opposition**

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

PRELIMS

- **Delhi, Male ink \$400-mn pact for connectivity**
GST Council can't arrive at a consensus on compensation issue
- **NITI Aayog announces governing structure of India Energy Modelling Forum**
The prize in Economic Science 2020

ECONOMY

- **Eight Beaches awarded the Blue Flag Certification**
- **Kamdhenu Deepawali Abhiyan**

ENVIRONMENT

- **Launch of physical distribution of property cards under SVAMITVA Scheme**

GOVERNANCE

- **China backs Iran nuclear deal**
- **FATF's keeps Pakistan on 'Enhanced Follow-up List'**

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- **15th Anniversary of the RTI Act**

POLITY

GS SCORE

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— **Disclaimer** —

The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

However, this doesn't mean that Mains articles don't cover facts and PT articles can't have analysis. You are suggested to read all of them for all stages of examination.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK- 3 (OCTOBER, 2020)

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SECTION: A

(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

BHARATMALA PARIYOJANA

CONTEXT

A total of 322 projects in a length of 12,413 Km have been awarded under Bharatmala Pariyojana till August, 2020. Further, 2921 Km has been constructed under the Project till the same date.

◎ ABOUT:

- Bharatmala Pariyojana is an umbrella program for the highways sector that focuses on optimizing efficiency of freight and passenger movement across the country by bridging critical infrastructure gaps through effective interventions.
- The launch of the scheme has been done for bring a new wave of development in the nation in the form of well-maintained and developed roads. Under this project, the construction of roads, in all parts of the nation will be undertaken.

Present Status

- A total of 322 projects in a length of 12,413 Km have been awarded under Bharatmala Pariyojana till August, 2020. Further, 2921 Km has been constructed under the Project.
- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has taken up detailed review of NHs network and has given overall investment approval for Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase I Scheme for development of about 34,800 km (including 10,000 Km residual NHDP stretches) at an estimated outlay of Rs 5,35,000 Crore.

Features of the Scheme

- **Total road construction** - As per the draft of the scheme, government and the ministry will strive to complete new roads, which will add up to a whopping 34,800 kms.
- **Integrated scheme** - The Bharatmala is the name that is given to the road development and it will include many other related schemes as well. With the completion of all the schemes, the overall success of the scheme will be guaranteed.
- **Total tenure of the program** - The central government has the plans of finishing the scheme within a span of five years. Thus, all is set for finishing the first phase before the end of 2022.
- **Segmentation in phases** - Due to the sheer magnitude and spread of the scheme, it will be divided into seven distinct phases. As of now, the first phase is under construction.
- **Constriction on a daily basis** - To finish the first phase in time, the respective department has made efforts of constructing at least 18 km of path on a daily basis. To beat the clock, continued efforts are being made to raise it to 30 km/day.

- **Different categories of road construction** - It has been highlighted in the official draft of the scheme that to provide better connectivity, the construction of various categories of roads will be undertaken.
- **Multi-source of funding** - One source will not be enough for funding a mammoth project. Thus, the government will have to depend on other sources for generating adequate money to meet the expenses.
- A total of around 24,800 kms are being considered in Phase I of Bharatmala. In addition, Bharatmala Pariyojana phase -I also includes 10,000 kms of balance road works under NHDP, taking the total to 34,800 kms at an estimated cost of Rs.5,35,000 crore. Bharatmala Phase I - is to be implemented over a five years period of i.e. 2017-18 to 2021-22.

Bharatmala project category

- **Economic Corridor** - As per the guidelines of the road construction project, the construction of 9000kms of Economic Corridors will be undertaken by the central government.
- **Feeder Route or Inter Corridor** - The total length of the roads, which fall under the Feeder Route or Inter Corridor category, is a whopping 6000kms.
- **National Corridor Efficiency Improvement** - 5000kms of roads, constructed under the scheme will fall in the category of National Corridor for the better connection between roads.
- **Border Road and International Connectivity** - Connecting the cities and remote areas, which are situated in the border regions, the project has kept provision for constructing 2000kms roads that fall in the Border Road or International Connectivity category.
- **Port Connectivity and Coastal Road** - To connect the areas that are dotted along the shorelines and important ports, the central government has ordered the construction of 2000km of roads.
- **Green Field Expressway** - The main stress will be given on the construction and development of Green Field Expressway for better management of traffic and freight.
- **Balance NHDP Works** - Under the last segment, the project will see a construction and maintenance of about 10,000kms of new roads.

Significance of the project

- Bharatmala Pariyojana will enhance the efficiency of freight and passenger movement across the country by bridging critical infrastructure gaps through effective interventions.
- It will bring Improvement in efficiency of existing corridors through development of Multimodal Logistics Parks and elimination of choke point.
- It will enhance focus on improving connectivity in North East and leveraging synergies with Inland Waterways.
- It emphasis on use of technology & scientific

planning for Project Preparation and Asset Monitoring.

◎ CONCLUSION:

- For connecting the areas and maintaining smooth flow of traffic, the construction of new and developed roads are a must. The same will be achieved with the implementation of the Bharatmala project. Under the scheme, a host of new roads will be laid down in the nation which would further help in development by enhancing the infrastructure efficiency.

GSSCORE

THE HUMAN COST OF DISASTERS 2000-2019- UNDRR

CONTEXT

In a recent report “The Human Cost of Disasters 2000-2019”, the United Nations pointed out that climate change is largely to blame for a near doubling of natural disasters in the past 20 years.

◎ ABOUT:

- The report was published to mark the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction is observed on October 13, every year.
- It confirms extreme weather events have come to dominate the disaster landscape in the 21st century.
- The report did not touch on biological hazards and disease-related disasters like the coronavirus pandemic

About UNDRR

- The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction was established in 1999 and serves as the focal point in the United Nations System for the coordination of disaster risk reduction.
- It supports the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which maps out a broad people-centered approach towards achieving a substantial reduction in disaster losses from natural and man-made hazards and a shift in emphasis from disaster management to disaster risk management.

Key Findings

- In the period 2000 to 2019, there were 7,348 major recorded disaster events claiming 1.23 million lives, affecting 4.2 billion people (many on more than one occasion) resulting in approximately US\$2.97 trillion in global economic losses.
- The last twenty years has seen the number of major floods more than double, from 1,389 to 3,254, while the incidence of storms grew from 1,457 to 2,034. Floods and storms were the most prevalent events.
- The sharp increase was largely attributable to a rise in climate-related disasters, including extreme weather events like floods, drought and storms.
- It also recorded major increases in other categories including drought, wildfires and extreme temperature events.
- Asia has suffered the highest number of disasters in the past 20 years with 3,068 such events, followed by the Americas with 1,756 and Africa with 1,192.
- In terms of affected countries, China topped the

list with 577 events followed by the United States with 467.

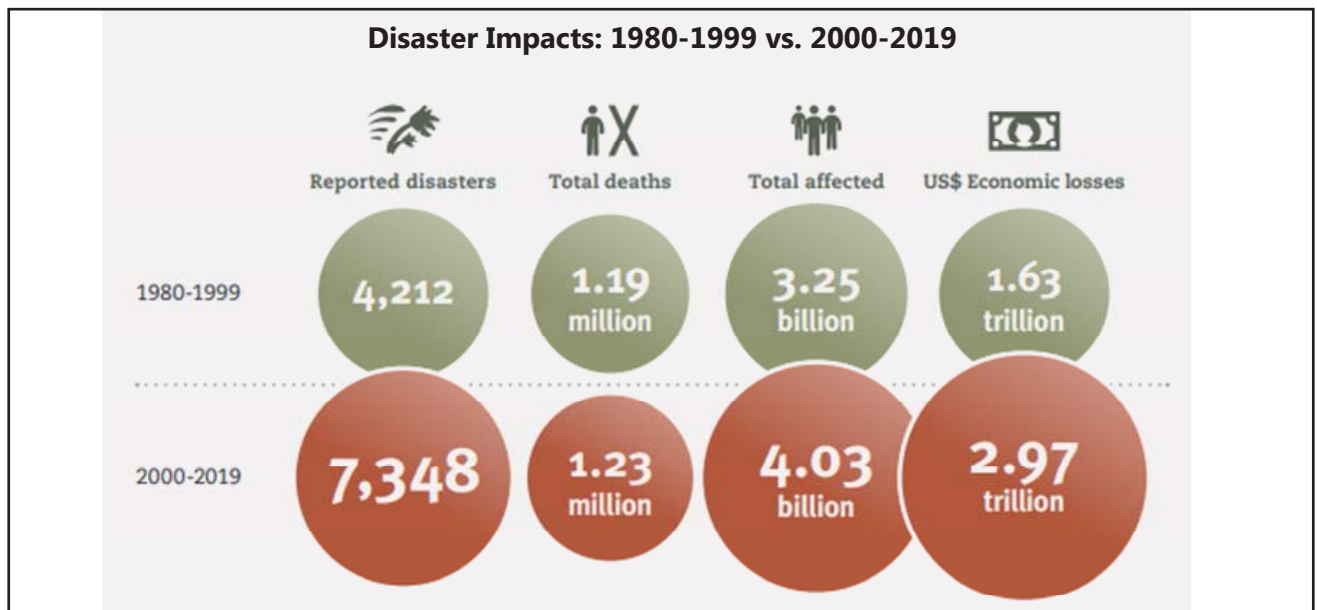
- A warming climate appeared to be driving the number and severity of such disasters
- There has also been a rise in geo-physical events including earthquakes and tsunamis which have killed more people than any of the other natural hazards
- The deadliest single disaster in the past 20 years was the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, with 226,400 deaths, followed by the Haiti earthquake in 2010, which claimed some 222,000 lives.

Major Concerns:

- A temperature increase of 3°C of the global climate is estimated to increase the frequency of potentially high impact natural hazard events across the world. This could render current national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation obsolete in many countries.
- Shifting rainfall patterns and greater variability in precipitation poses a risk to the 70% of global agriculture that is rain-fed and the 1.3 billion people dependent on degrading agricultural land.

Recommendations:

- The concentrated impact due to a single disaster type in some countries provides an opportunity for a more focused approach on disaster risk reduction.
- COVID-19 demonstrates the need for a systemic, multi hazard approach in an increasingly globalized and inter-connected world;
- There is a requirement for strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk with clear vision, competence, plans, guidelines, funding and coordination across sectors and in a manner which takes account of the increasingly systemic nature of disaster risk.
- Public and private investment in disaster risk prevention and reduction through structural and non-structural measures needs to be stepped up to create disaster resilient societies.



AQUAPONICS

CONTEXT

Recently, a pilot 'Aquaponics facility' has been developed by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Mohali at Guru AngadDev Veterinary University (GADVASU), Ludhiana.

About Pilot Aquaponics Facility -

- Aquaponics is state-of-the-art facility. It is the first of its kind in region. This facility is equipped with advanced sensors for monitoring and automated controls.
- It has been developed with the funding support from Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Govt. of India.
- This facility is nearly 100% organic, need much less land for a give yield of crop, consumes 90% less water, the fish and plants so grown are more nutritious.

What is Aquaponics

- Aquaponics is a combination of aquaculture and hydroponics in which both fishes as well as the plants are grown in an integrated manner.
- Aquaculture is growing fish and other aquatic animals, and hydroponics is growing plants without soil.
- Aquaponics uses these two in a symbiotic combination in which aquatic animals' discharge or waste provides fertilizer for growing plants.
- The plants absorb nutrients and filter the water. This filtered water is used to replenish the fish tank.
- It is an environment friendly technique. It is a perfect collaboration between aquaculture and gardening.

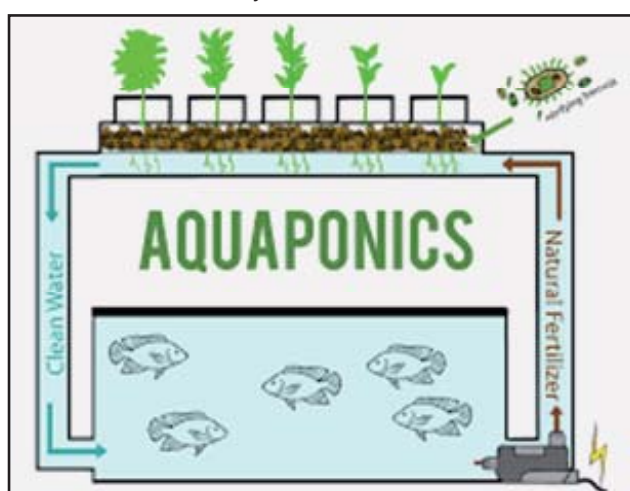
Benefits of Aquaponics:

- There is no need to use fertilizers because the fish provide rich nutrients for the plants.
- It is water efficient process as less water is used for the crops. It uses 1/10th of the water you would use for soil garden.
- Pesticides or other chemicals are not used because they would harm the fish. This results in healthier and organic vegetables.
- There will not be any soil borne diseases in aquaponics because soil is not required in aquaponics

- Plants can grow in very small space, and have a great harvest.
- Plants grow fast because they get very nutritious substances from the fish waste.
- Water is used in a closed system and circulated effectively, reducing the consumption and the water bills.

Disadvantages of Aquaponics

- A lot of crops cannot be grown through aquaponics. For example, specific plant species such as tuberous plants and root vegetables perform most of their growth within soil and aquaponics uses water as a substitute for soil.
- High Electricity Consumption-Fish tanks are supposed to be kept at certain temperatures 24 hours a day. Water pumps also run 24 hours a day and this leads to high electricity consumption.
- It is a complex system that requires a lot of knowledge and experience to construct and maintain. If it is not constructed flawlessly, losses of fish and crop/plants occur which can waste your time and money.



MARS OPPOSITION

CONTEXT

An event referred to as “opposition”, which takes place every two years and two months, Mars will outshine Jupiter, becoming the third brightest object in the night sky during the month of October.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- The opposition took place, on October 13, which gave the planet its “biggest, apparent size of the 2020s.
- An opposition can occur anywhere along Mars’ orbit, but when it happens when the planet is closest to the sun, it is also particularly close to the Earth.
- Opposition is the best time to view Mars.

◎ ANALYSIS:

When does Mars Oppositions take place?

- Mars oppositions happen about every 26 months. Every 15 or 17 years, opposition occurs within a few weeks of Mars’ perihelion (the point in its orbit when it is closest to the sun). This year, Mars opposition occurs on Oct. 13, 2020.
- Mars’s next close approach will happen on December 8, 2022, when the planet will be 62.07 km away from the Earth. Even so, the closest approach does not mean that Mars will appear to be the same size as that of the moon.

What is opposition?

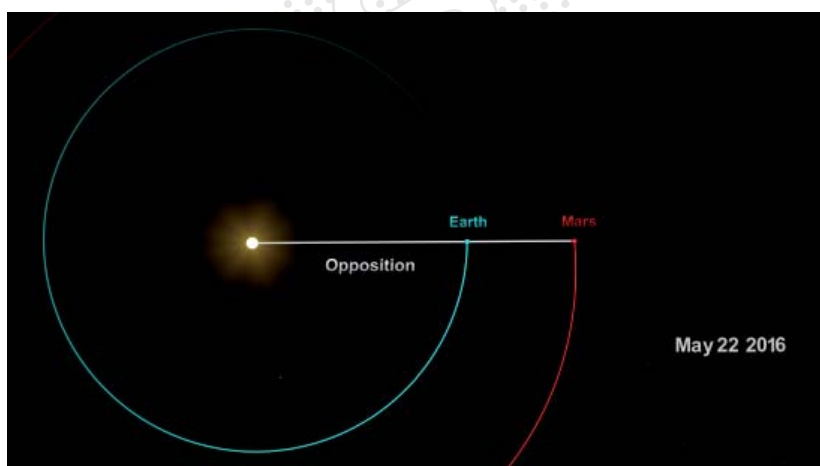
- Opposition is the event when the sun, Earth and an outer planet are lined up, with the Earth in the middle.
- The time of opposition is the point when the outer planet is typically at its closest distance to the Earth for a given year, and the planet appears brighter in the sky.
- An opposition can occur anywhere along Mars’ orbit, but when it happens when the planet is also closest to the sun, it is also particularly close to the Earth.
- Like all the planets in our solar system, Earth and Mars orbit the sun. But Earth is closer to the sun, and therefore races along its orbit more quickly.
- Earth makes two trips around the sun in about the same amount of time that Mars takes to make one trip. So sometimes the two planets are on opposite sides of the sun, very far apart, and other times, Earth catches up with its neighbor and passes relatively close to it.

Why it is called as opposition?

- Because from the perspective on Earth, the sun and Mars appear to be on the opposite sides of the sky, Mars is said to be in “opposition”. Essentially, opposition is a reference to “opposing the sun” in the sky.

Conditions for its occurrence

- The Earth and Mars orbit the sun, there comes a point when they are on the opposite sides of it, and hence very far apart. At its farthest, Mars is about 400 million km from the Earth.
- In case of opposition, however, Mars and sun are on directly opposite sides of the Earth. In other words, the Earth, sun and Mars all lie in a straight line, with the Earth in the middle.
- According to NASA, from an individual’s perspective on the Earth, Mars rises in the east and after staying up all night, it sets in the west just as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.



RATIFICATION OF 7 PERSISTENT ORGANIC POLLUTANTS

CONTEXT

The Union Cabinet has approved the Ratification of seven (7) chemicals listed under Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

◎ BACKGROUND:

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) had notified the 'Regulation of Persistent Organic Pollutants Rules, on March 5, 2018 under the provisions of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, for providing safe environment and addressing human health risks.
- The regulation prohibits the manufacture, trade, use, import and export seven chemicals namely
 - ▶ Chlordecone
 - ▶ Hexabromobiphenyl
 - ▶ Hexabromodiphenyl ether and Heptabromodiphenylether (Commercial octa-BDE)
 - ▶ Tetrabromodiphenyl ether and Pentabromodiphenyl ether (Commercial penta-BDE)
 - ▶ Pentachlorobenzene
 - ▶ Hexabromocyclododecane
 - ▶ Hexachlorobutadiene

Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

- POPs are identified chemical substances that persist in the environment, bio-accumulate in living organisms, adversely affect human health/environment and have the property of long-range environmental transport (LRET).
- POPs bio-magnify throughout the food chain and bio-accumulate in organisms. The highest concentrations of POPs are thus found in organisms at the top of the food chain.
- Exposure to POPs can lead to cancer, damage to central & peripheral nervous systems, diseases of immune system, reproductive disorders and interference with normal infant and child development.
- POPs are listed in various Annexes to the Stockholm Convention after thorough scientific research, deliberations and negotiations among member countries.

Stockholm Convention

- The Stockholm Convention was adopted in 2001 and entered into force in 2004.
- The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from chemicals that remain intact in the environment for long periods.
- The objective of the Stockholm Convention is to protect human health and the environment from persistent organic pollutants.
- India had ratified the Stockholm Convention on January 13, 2006.
- Initially, twelve POPs have been recognized as causing adverse effects on humans and the ecosystem and these can be placed in 3 categories:
 - ▶ **Pesticides:** aldrin, chlordane, DDT, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, hexachlorobenzene, mirex, toxaphene
 - ▶ **Industrial chemicals:** hexachlorobenzene, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)
 - ▶ **By-products:** hexachlorobenzene; polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzofurans (PCDD/PCDF), and PCBs.
- The POPs list has been further amended to include some new POPs under the Stockholm Convention.

Significance for India

- The Cabinet's approval for ratification of POPs demonstrates India's commitment to meet its international obligations with regard to protection of environment and human health.
- It indicates the resolve of the Government to take action on POPs by implementing control measures, develop and implement action plans for unintentionally produced chemicals, develop inventories of the chemicals' stockpiles and review as well as update its National Implementation Plan (NIP).
- The ratification process would enable India to access Global Environment Facility (GEF) financial resources in updating the NIP.

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09
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BATCH -1

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16
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SECTION: B
(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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DELHI, MALE INK \$400-MN PACT FOR CONNECTIVITY

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- Following up on India's announcement of a \$500 million package to the Maldives, the Exim Bank of India and the Maldives's Ministry of Finance signed an agreement for \$400 million in Male.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- Line of Credit is basically an agreement between a borrower and the lender whether it is a bank or a NBFC.
 - According to this agreement the lender is ready to lend a maximum amount to the borrower.
 - The borrower can withdraw money any time he or she want until they reach the maximum limit.
 - The Line of Credit is **not a 'grant' but a 'soft loan'**.
 - It is provided on **concessional interest rates** to developing countries, which has to be repaid by the borrowing government.
 - It also helps to promote exports of Indian goods and services, as 75% of the value of the contract must be sourced from India.

The Agreement

- The **line of credit (LoC)** will fund the **Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)**, a key pledge of President Ibrahim Solih.
- India has also pledged a grant of \$ 100 million for the initiative.

Greater Male Connectivity Project

- Maldivians have often highlighted the disparity between capital Male and the atolls that can be reached only via boat service.
- The GMCP, a 6.7 km bridge and causeway network connecting Male, with islands Villingili, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi, is the second significant connectivity project in the Indian Ocean archipelago, coming two years after the China backed \$200 million Sinamale Bridge, or the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge connecting airport island of Hulhule with the capital, was inaugurated.
- The Greater Male Connectivity Project will lead to greater possibilities. It is the gateway to a more developed and economically-resilient nation.

GST COUNCIL CAN'T ARRIVE AT A CONSENSUS ON COMPENSATION ISSUE

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- Even after continuous meetings, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council in its recent meeting failed to reach a consensus on borrowing options in lieu of the compensation cess shortfall.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- ### What is the compensation issue?
- The Indian economy was in a slowdown even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit India. This was reflected in the weak economic indicators and a slowing GST collection.
 - In October, payments to states were delayed as the collection was lower than expected.

- Under GST law, states were guaranteed to receive payment for any loss of revenue in the first five years of the GST implementation, from July 1, 2017.
 - States have been promised compensation for any revenue shortfall till 2022, in case they go below the 14 percent annual growth since the GST rollout in 2017.

Looming Showdown

OPTION 1 OPERATIONAL

<p>States can approach Centre to facilitate borrowing</p> <p>Borrowings under ₹1.1 lakh cr option</p>	<p>Loans to be serviced from compensation cess</p> <p>Cess extended beyond five years</p>
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DISSENTING STATES

No clarity on way ahead

States say all decisions need to be taken in GST Council

Kerala, Punjab could approach SC

CENTRE SAYS

States in better position to borrow

There will be trouble in bond markets if it borrows more



Nirmala Sitharaman
Finance minister

- The amount due to states started rising at a compounded rate of 14 percent, despite compensation collections not showing any major upward movement for two consecutive years.
- For the April-June period, Rs 14,675 crore has been collected as compensation cess, of which Rs 7,665 crore was collected in June.
- The Centre cleared Rs 36,400 crore for the November-February period in June.
- In July, the Centre released Rs 1.65 lakh crores as GST compensation to states/Union Territories for the financial year 2019-20, against cess collection of Rs 95,444 crores.

Goods & Services Tax

- Goods & Services Tax Council is a **constitutional body** for making recommendations to the Union and State Government on issues related to **Goods and Service Tax**.
- As per **Article 279A (1)** of the amended Constitution, the GST Council has to be constituted by the President within 60 days of the commencement of Article 279A.
- As per Article 279A of the amended Constitution, the GST Council which will be a joint forum of the Centre and the States, shall consist of the following members:
 - ▶ **Chairperson:** the Union Finance Minister- Chairperson
 - ▶ **Member:** the Union Minister of State in charge of Revenue or Finance-Member
 - ▶ **Members:** the Minister in charge of Finance or Taxation or any other Minister nominated by each State Government

Why is it important?

- With States depending heavily on funds from the Centre to meet their public expenditure, any impediments in the flow of funds from Centre will impact the quality of services provided by State government.

- If the GST Council decides to increase the rates of compensation cess or stretch the period for which States are compensated, this may mean that goods taxed at the highest GST rate of 28 per cent will continue to pinch people's pocket.
- Select vehicles, tobacco and aerated drinks, apart from coal, are levied a compensation cess.

NITI AAYOG ANNOUNCES GOVERNING STRUCTURE OF INDIA ENERGY MODELLING FORUM

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - NITI Aayog has announced the governing structure of the India Energy Modelling Forum (IEMF) following its constitution in July.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
 - The IEM Forum was jointly launched by NITI Aayog and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the US–India Strategic Energy Partnership.
 - Part of the Sustainable Growth pillar of the US–India Strategic Energy Partnership (SEP), IEMF aims to engage Indian researchers, knowledge partners, think tanks and national and international government agencies and departments for modelling and long-term energy planning.

What are Energy Modelling Forums (EMF)?

- Energy modeling or energy system modeling is the process of building computer models of energy systems in order to analyze them.
- The Energy Modelling Forum (EMF) in USA was established in 1976 at Stanford University to connect leading modelling experts and decision makers from government, industry, universities, and other research organizations.
- The forum provides an unbiased platform to discuss the contemporary issues revolving around energy and environment.

Governing structure of the Forum

- The governing structure of IEMF will consist of an inter-ministerial and a steering committee.
- The inter-ministerial committee will be convened by NITI Aayog and headed by its CEO, and comprise senior officials from the ministries of petroleum and natural gas; power; new and renewable energy; coal; environment, forest and climate change; and department of science and technology. This committee will review the studies/modelling activities and provide directions and new areas of research.
- The steering committee will comprise representatives of the:
 - Government (ministries of environment, forest and climate change; new and renewable energy; statistics and programme implementation; Technology Information Forecasting and Assessment Council; Coal Controller's Organization; Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell; Central Electricity Authority; and NITI Aayog)
 - Industry Associations (FICCI and CII)
 - Academia (IIT Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Delhi)

India and US's collaboration on Energy

- India and the US have a long-standing collaboration on energy.
- The Sustainable Growth pillar, one of the four of the US–India SEP, is being chaired by NITI Aayog and USAID.

- This pillar brings together Indian and US researchers and decision-makers to collaborate in three focal areas:
 - energy data management
 - energy modelling
 - promotion of low carbon technologies
- IEMF was launched under the area of energy modelling.
- Through collaborations with global energy modelling forums, such as Stanford Energy Modelling Forum and Energy Modelling Platform for Europe, IEMF hopes to share and learn from best practices.

THE PRIZE IN ECONOMIC SCIENCE 2020

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
- The **Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2020** was awarded jointly to **Paul R. Milgrom** and **Robert B. Wilson** “for improvements to auction theory and inventions of new auction formats.”

- ◎ **ABOUT:**
- The prize for economics is officially known as the **Sveriges Riksbank Prize** in Economic Sciences.
 - It was established by **Sweden’s central bank** and has been awarded since 1969 in memory of industrialist **Alfred Nobel**.

What is auction theory?

- Essentially, it is about how auctions lead to the discovery of the price of a commodity. Auction theory studies-
 - how auctions are designed
 - what rules govern them
 - how bidders behave
 - what outcomes are achieved
- Over time, more and more goods and services have been brought under auction.
- The nature of these commodities differs sharply. For instance-
 - A bankrupt person’s property is starkly different from the spectrum for radio or telecom use.
 - Similarly, carbon dioxide emission credits are quite different from the spot market for buying electricity, which, in turn, is quite different from choosing which company should get the right to collect the local garbage.
- In other words, no one auction design fits all types of commodities or seller.
- This is also true because the purpose of an auction also differs with the commodity and the entity conducting the auction. More often than not, private sellers want to maximise their gains while public authorities may have other goals in mind.

What are the key variables that determine the outcome of an auction?

Three key variables need to be understood while designing an auction.

- **Rules of auction:** The bidding behaviour is likely to differ if the rules stipulate open bids as against closed/sealed bids. The same applies to single bids versus multiple bids, or whether bids are made one after another or everyone bids at the same time.
- **Commodity/ service put up for auction:** The second variable is the commodity or service being put up for auction. In essence, the question is how does each bidder value an item. This is not always easy to ascertain. In terms of telecom spectrum, it might be

easier to peg the right value for each bidder because most bidders are likely to put the spectrum to the same use. This is called the “common” value of an object.

- But this may not be the case with some other commodities, say a painting.
- Person A may derive considerably more “private” or personal value — just by looking at it endlessly — than person B.
- In most auctions, bidders allocate both “common” as well as “private” values to the object being auctioned and this affects their eventual bids.
- **Uncertainty:** The third variable is uncertainty. For instance, which bidder has what information about the object, or even the value another bidder associates with the object.

EIGHT BEACHES AWARDED THE BLUE FLAG CERTIFICATION

◎ CONTEXT:

- Eight beaches in India have been awarded the coveted ‘Blue Flag’ certification by an eminent international jury, which comprises members of the-
 - United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
 - United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
 - Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE)
 - International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

◎ ABOUT:

What is the ‘Blue Flag’ certification?

- The ‘Blue Flag’ is a certification that can be obtained by a beach, marina, or sustainable boating tourism operator, and serves as an eco-label.
- The certification is awarded by the Denmark-based non-profit Foundation for Environmental Education, which sets stringent environmental, educational, safety-related and access-related criteria that applicants must meet and maintain.
- It is awarded annually to beaches and marinas in FEE member countries.

Criteria for certification

- Blue Flag certification is granted based on 33 criteria under four heads –
 - environmental education and information
 - bathing water quality
 - environment management and conservation
 - safety and services at the beaches

Which beaches are selected for certification?

- The beaches selected for the certification are:
 - Kappad (Kerala)
 - Shivrajpur (Gujarat)
 - Ghoghla (Diu)
 - Kasarkod and Padubidri (Karnataka)
 - Rushikonda (Andhra Pradesh)
 - Golden (Odisha)
 - Radhanagar (Andaman & Nicobar Islands)

Item for Box

- India is the only country that has received the Blue Flag certification in 2 years' time.
- Japan, South Korea and UAE are the only other Asian nations that have been conferred with a couple of Blue Flag beaches in a time frame of about 5 to 6 years.
- With the feat, India is now in the league of 50 'Blue Flag' countries.
- Spain tops the list with more than 560 such beaches; Greece and France follow.

- ◎ **BACKGROUND:**
- The Blue Flag programme was started in France in 1985 and in areas out of Europe in 2001.
 - Forty-seven countries currently participate in the program, and 4,573 beaches, marinas, and boats have this certification.
 - In its July 2019 notification, the Environment Ministry identified the following beaches in India for Blue Flag certification: Shivrajpur (Devbhumi Dwarka, Gujarat), Bhogave (Sindhudurg, Maharashtra), Ghoghla (Diu, Daman and Diu), Miramar (Panjim, Goa), Kasarkod (Karwar, Karnataka), Padubidri (Udupi, Karnataka), Kappad (Kozhikode, Kerala), Eden (Puducherry), Mahabalipuram (Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu), Rushikonda (Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh), Golden (Puri, Odisha), and Radhanagar (Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar).

What activities are permitted in the CRZ of certain beaches?

- According to the notification issued in January, the following activities and facilities would be permitted in the CRZ of the beaches, including islands, subject to maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from the **High Tide Line (HTL)**:
 - Portable toilet blocks, change rooms and shower panels;
 - Grey water treatment plant;
 - Solid waste management plant;
 - Solar power plant;
 - Purified drinking water facility;
 - Beach access pathways;
 - Landscaping lighting;
 - Seating benches and sit-out umbrellas;
 - Outdoor play / fitness equipment;
 - CCTV surveillance and control room;
 - First aid station;
 - Cloak room facility;
 - Safety watch towers and beach safety equipment;
 - Beach layout, environment information boards and other signages;
 - Fencing, preferably vegetative;
 - Parking facilities;
 - Entry gate, tourist facilitation centre; and
 - Other associated facilities or infrastructure, as per requirements of Blue Flag Certification.

KAMDHENU DEEPAWALI ABHIYAN

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - Encouraged by the response to Gaumaya Ganesha Campaign which encouraged usage of eco-friendly material in manufacture of idols for the Ganesha Festival, Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog (RKA) has started a nation-wide campaign to celebrate “Kamdhenu Deepawali Abhiyan” this year on the occasion of Deepawali festival.
- ◎ **BACKGROUND:**
 - Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog (RKA) has been constituted by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for the conservation, protection and development of cows and their progeny and for giving direction to the cattle development programmes.
 - RKA is high powered permanent body to formulate policy and to provide direction to the implementation of schemes related to cattle so as to give more emphasis on livelihood generation.

India's livestock sector

- Livestock economy sustains nearly 73 million households in rural areas.
- Even though, the country is largest producer of milk, the average milk yield in India is only 50% of the world average.
- The low productivity is largely due to deterioration in genetic stock, poor nutrition and unscientific management.
- The trend needs to be reversed and popular perception about cow and cow based agriculture and cow based industry need to be corrected immediately for social and economic rejuvenation of society particularly poor in rural areas.

Significance of the initiative

- RKA aims reaching 11 crore families to ignite 33 crore Diyas made of cow-dung during this year's Deepawali festival.
- Apart from generating business opportunities to thousands of cow-based entrepreneurs / farmers/ women entrepreneurs, the use of cow-dung products will lead to cleaner and healthier environment.
- It will help in making Gaushalas 'Atma Nirbhar' too.
- By providing an environment friendly alternative to Chinese made Diyas, the campaign will boost up Make in India vision and also promote 'Swadeshi' movement while reducing environmental damage.

LAUNCH OF PHYSICAL DISTRIBUTION OF PROPERTY CARDS UNDER SVAMITVA SCHEME

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the physical distribution of property cards under the 'SVAMITVA' (ownership) scheme, and asserted that it is a “historic move” set to transform rural India.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
 - **What is SVAMITVA Scheme?**
 - The SVAMITVA scheme was launched in April this year with the aim to update rural land records, providing record of rights to village households and issue property cards.
 - SVAMITVA is a central scheme of the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development**.
 - It will be implemented across the country in a phased manner over the next four years, covering around 6.62 lakh villages.

- The scheme focuses on mapping rural-inhabited lands using drones as land records are inaccurate or do not exist for vast areas across India.

Launch of physical distribution of property cards

- The launch will enable around one lakh property holders to download their property cards through an SMS link sent on their mobile phones.
- This would be followed by the physical distribution of property cards by respective state governments.
- These beneficiaries are from 763 villages across six states, including 346 from Uttar Pradesh, 221 from Haryana, 100 from Maharashtra, 44 from Madhya Pradesh, 50 from Uttarakhand and two from Karnataka.

Why land records are important?

- Even though 60 per cent of the country lives in rural areas, villagers do not have ownership documents of their homes despite records being kept of agricultural land.
- These land records play an important role for Gram Panchayats that currently struggle with generating revenues, especially through property tax, who can better invest in the needs of local communities.
- Only 19 per cent of potential property tax was being collected by Gram Panchayats, according to the **2018 Economic Survey**.
- As once ownership of property becomes easy to demarcate and prove, its prices will also be fixed.
- Then the property cards can be used to take loans, improving the tax regime at the Panchayati level.
- Beyond that, this effort may bring about more financial stability for rural India, give accurate land records that can be used for planning, help in calibrating property tax and give a structural recourse for legal matters in property disputes.

Significance of the move

- The move will pave the way for villagers to use property as a financial asset for taking loans and other financial benefits.
- This scheme is an effective step in the direction of economic empowerment in rural India.

CHINA BACKS IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

◎ CONTEXT:

- China has called for a 'new forum' to defuse tensions in the West Asia. China has reaffirmed its commitment to Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, an implicit rebuke of the U.S. for abandoning the accord.

◎ ABOUT:

What is Iran's nuclear deal?

- In 2015, Iran agreed a long-term deal on its nuclear programme with a group of world powers known as the P5+1 - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany.
 - It came after years of tension over Iran's alleged efforts to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran insisted that its nuclear programme was entirely peaceful, but the international community did not believe that.
- Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its sensitive nuclear activities and allow in international inspectors in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions.

The US's withdrawal

- President Donald J. Trump withdrew the United States from the agreement in May 2018, saying it failed to address Iran's ballistic missile program and its role in regional wars.
- The United States reimposed sanctions and moved to wipe out Iran's oil exports, prompting Iran to resume some of its nuclear activities.
- Following the U.S. killing of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, Iran announced plans to halt most of its commitments to the deal.

What's the need of forum?

- Iran has been locked in an acrimonious relationship with Saudi Arabia, the other major West Asian power, over the war in Yemen, Iranian influence in Iraq and Saudi support for Washington's sanctions on Tehran.
- The proposed forum would "enhance mutual understanding through dialogue and explore political and diplomatic solutions to security issues in the West Asia".
- The support for the Iranian nuclear deal, negotiated by the Obama administration but ultimately abandoned by Donald Trump, would be a precondition of entry to the forum.

FATF'S KEEPS PAKISTAN ON 'ENHANCED FOLLOW-UP LIST'

◎ CONTEXT:

- Noting that Pakistan's measures against money laundering and terror financing "is not yet sufficient to justify a re-rating", a regional affiliate of the Financial Action Task Force retained the country on its "Enhanced Follow-up" list.

◎ ABOUT:

What is Enhanced follow-up list?

- "Enhanced follow-up" is an intensive process of correction that deals with members with significant deficiencies (for technical compliance or effectiveness) in their AML/CFT systems.
- The list concluded that Pakistan's progress on the 40 FATF recommendations on the effectiveness of anti-money laundering and combating financing terror (AML/CFT) system largely remained unchanged from a year before.
- While Pakistan was found to be "partially compliant" on 25 of 40 recommendations, it was found to be "non compliant" on four, "largely compliant" on nine parameters and "fully compliant" on one.

About FATF

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was established in July 1989 by a Group of Seven (G-7) Summit in Paris, initially to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
 - ▶ In 2001, the FATF expanded its mandate to incorporate efforts to combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering.
 - ▶ In 2012, it added efforts to counter the financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Three decades after its, creation, in April 2019, FATF Ministers adopted a new, open-ended mandate for the FATF.

- The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- FATF has two types of lists:
 - **Black List:** Countries that are supporting terror funding and money laundering activities are placed in the Blacklist.
 - **Gray List:** Those countries which are not considered as the safe heaven for supporting terror funding and money laundering; included in this list. The inclusion in this list is not as severe as blacklisted.

◎ BACKGROUND:

- FATF had placed Pakistan on its grey list in June 2018 and asked Islamabad to implement a plan of action to curb money laundering and terror financing by the end of 2019 but the deadline was extended later on due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Seeking to wriggle out of the FATF's grey list, debt-ridden Pakistan in August imposed financial sanctions on 88 banned terror groups and their leaders, including 26/11 Mumbai attack mastermind and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar and underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.
- In February, the FATF gave Pakistan, which missed 13 targets, a four-month grace period to complete its 27-point action plan against ML&TF committed with the international community.
- In its third plenary held virtually in June, the FATF decided to keep Pakistan in the grey list as Islamabad failed to check flow of money to terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).

The APG Evaluation

- The APG Mutual Evaluations is a peer-review system to determine whether countries meet the compliance standards for money laundering and terror financing.
- After a country submits a Mutual Evaluation report, APG members can decide to place a member either through regular or enhanced follow-up.
- While a regular follow-up means just biennial reports, a country put under enhanced follow-up has to send four reports of compliance the following year.

Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG)

- The Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG) is a FATF style regional inter-governmental (international) body, the members of which are committed to implement international standards against money laundering (AML), the financing of terrorism (CTF) and financing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- APG was founded in 1997 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- Currently, it consists of 41 member jurisdictions in the Asia-Pacific region and a number of observer jurisdictions and international/regional observer organisations.

Impact of Continuation

- Continuation on the "gray list" means it becomes increasingly difficult for the countries to get financial aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European institutions.

15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RTI ACT

- ◎ **CONTEXT:**
 - October 12, 2020 marked 15 years of the implementation of the RTI Act, which empowers people to question the Government.
- ◎ **ABOUT:**
 - **The Right to Information Act**, simply known as RTI, is a revolutionary Act that aims to promote transparency in government institutions in India.
 - The Act came into existence in 2005, after sustained efforts of anti-corruption activists.
 - The basic objective of the Act is to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, contain corruption, and make our democracy work for the people in real sense.

Progress so far

- More than 2.2 lakh cases are pending at the Central and State Information Commissions, which are the final courts of appeal under the law.
- The increasing backlog is exacerbated by the fact that most commissions are functioning at a reduced capacity, including the Central Information Commission (CIC), which has been headless since August.
- Maharashtra had the highest number of pending appeals, with over 59,000 cases, followed by Uttar Pradesh (47,923) and the CIC (35,653).

What type of information may be obtained under the RTI Act?

- The type of information which may be obtained is defined under **section 2 (f)** of the Act as any material in any form, including records, documents, memos, e-mails, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, log books, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a public authority under any other law for the time being in force.

Who are covered by the Act?

- All Constitutional authorities, ministries, departments and agencies owned and controlled by the Government and also organisations substantially financed by the Government are covered by the RTI Act.
- **Private Bodies:** Private bodies are not within the Act's ambit directly.
 - In a decision of **Sarbjit roy vs Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission**, the **Central Information Commission** also reaffirmed that privatised public utility companies fall within the purview of RTI.
- The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 has been extensively used by people on a range of issues – from holding the government accountable for delivery of basic rights and entitlements to questioning the highest offices of the country.
- Estimates suggest that every year 40 to 60 lakh RTI applications are filed.

Exemption

- Twenty-odd organisations are exempted from RTI.
- But all these entities are related to the country's defence and intelligence, such as RAW, BSF, CRPF, CISF, Intelligence Bureau, National Security Guard etc.

What Are Information Commissions?

- Under the RTI Act, information commissions (ICs) have been set up-

- the central level (Central Information Commission)
- the states (state information commissions)
- The commissions have the powers to-
 - require public authorities to provide access to information
 - appoint Public Information Officers (PIOs)
 - order an inquiry
- They also have the powers of a civil court for enforcing attendance of persons, discovery of documents, receiving evidence or affidavits, issuing summons.



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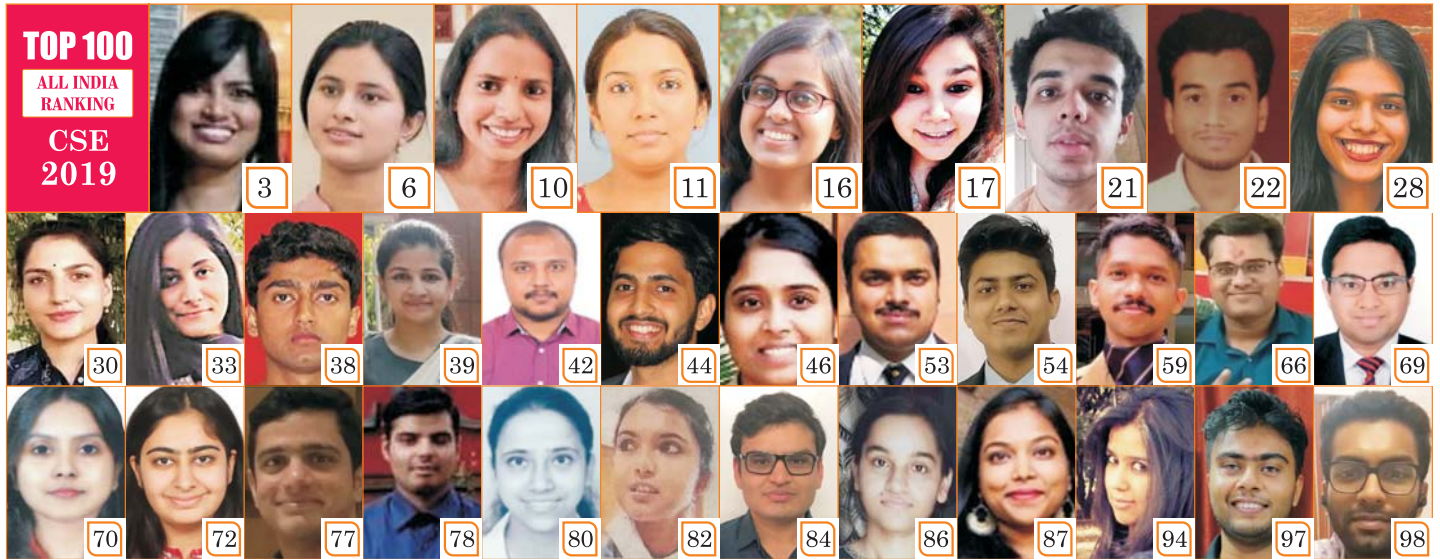
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