

**NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC****Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) and CPWD sign MoU on promoting energy efficiency in buildings**

According to the MoU, BEE and CPWD will cooperate on promoting designs and construction of Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) compliant new buildings, star rating of CPWD managed buildings across the country with no registration or renewal fee, awareness on energy efficiency in building sector and support for capacity building of CPWD officials in ECBC.

ECO Niwas Samhita 2018 is an Energy Conservation Building Code for residential buildings, to push for energy efficiency in residential sector in December 2018. It aims to promote design and construction of homes including apartments and townships to give benefits of energy efficiency to the occupants. Ministry of Power launched the ECO Niwas Samhita 2018.

Aim of ECO Niwas Samhita 2018-19: To benefit the occupants and the environment by promoting energy efficiency in design and construction of homes, apartments and townships.

**Role of BEE –**

- Processing of application for star rating of buildings
- Preliminary scrutiny of application
- Data verification of CPWD maintained buildings
- Installation of smart meters
- Award of certificate & label
- Support for Energy Efficiency in Buildings
- Support for construction of ECBC complaint buildings
- Efficient coordination with CPWD
- Capacity building of CPWD officials

**Role of CPWD –**

- Completely filled application for star rating
- Support and facilitation to data verification and monitoring
- Construction of ECBC Complaint buildings
- Support for Energy Efficiency in Buildings
- Efficient coordination with BEE
- It is anticipated that this initiative will result in energy saving of more than 260 million units in the first stage with operational savings of about Rs. 100 crore.

Star Rating for Commercial Buildings: It is based on the actual performance of a building in terms of its specific energy usage in kwh/sqm/year. It rates office buildings on a 1-5 Star scale, with 5 star labelled buildings being the most efficient.

It is on a voluntary basis and label provided under it is applicable for a period of 5 years from the date of issue. It provides public recognition to energy efficient buildings, and creates a “demand side” pull. Various categories of buildings like Day Use Office Buildings, BPOs, Shopping Malls and Hospitals in the five climatic zones have been identified under the scheme.

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS****Sino-Indian Digital Collaboration Plaza**

The SIDCOP initiative to bring Indian IT companies and Chinese enterprises closer to each other on a single AI enabled platform was launched on 10th January 2019. This is a partnership by National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) with Municipal Governments of Guiyang and Dalian, China.

- A Joint Venture comprising of one Indian and Chinese company has been tasked with the running of the platform.
- SIDCOP is a boundary-less marketplace offers this opportunity for Chinese enterprises in order to assist them in operational optimization and adopting industry best practices in business solutions.
- Indian IT enterprises are world renowned for their expertise in business transformation and operational optimization by using IT tools in complex business environments.

This platform could be useful to connect with top providers from India and help Chinese enterprises source the right solution providers for their projects.

**Withdrawal of US Forces from Syria**

US National Security Adviser (NSA) John Bolton recently outlined conditions for a U.S. troop departure from Syria. This has given way to the recent tussle between US and Turkey.

**The dispute:**

- The US national security adviser said the troops would leave the war-torn country after the Islamic State is beaten. He also said Kurds, U.S. allies in the fight against the IS, should be protected.
- This contradicts with Trump's insistence that the withdrawal would be immediate and without any pre-conditions.
- Turkish President Erdogan refused to John Bolton's suggestions for an orderly exit and the plan to protect the Syrian Kurds.
- Turkey considers the Syrian Democratic Forces, the official military wing of Syrian Kurdistan, an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party.
- The Kurdistan Workers' Party is, indeed, deemed a terrorist group by Turkey and the U.S.
- Turkey sees an autonomous, militarily powerful Kurdistan on the Syrian side of the border as a threat to its territorial integrity.
- But Turkey was limited by U.S. presence in the Kurdish-populated region in pursuing its own military options.
- It is highly likely that Turkey could attack the Kurds as soon as the U.S. troops leave.

**The implication:**

- Tensions were so high that Mr. Erdogan refused to meet Mr. Bolton, who was in Turkey. The U.S. is now in a dilemma.
- Its President has announced the withdrawal. But it cannot just exit Syria without considering the existing geopolitical equations in the region.
- Part of the problem is with the way Mr. Trump announced his decision to withdraw troops.
- He should have held talks with the stakeholders, including Turkey, Russia and Kurds, before taking a decision.
- He could have at least used his intent to pull out from Syria as a bargaining chip to extract concessions from other countries involved in the civil war.

**Cabinet approves Currency Swap Agreement with Japan**

The Union Cabinet has approved India's Currency Swap Agreement with Japan. The \$75-billion bilateral currency swap arrangement is a milestone in mutual economic cooperation and special strategic and global partnership between two countries.

**Currency Swap Agreements**

A Currency swap agreement is a foreign exchange agreement between two parties to exchange a given amount of one currency for another and, after a specified period of time, to give back the original amounts swapped.

**How Currency Swap Agreement can benefit India?**

- The currency swap facilities make it easier for India to pay for its imports. This aids in addressing the challenge of depreciation.
- Since the Currency swap agreement involves trading in local currencies. Countries pay for imports and exports through their own currencies rather than involving a third country currency.
- This does away with the charges involved in multiple currency exchanges.
- The currency swap makes it easier to improve liquidity conditions.
- Currency swap agreements help in saving for a rainy day when the economy is not looking in good shape.
- The swap agreements also contribute towards stabilising the country's balance of payments (BoP) position.
- The agreement aids in improving the confidence in the Indian market.
- Together with ensuring that the agreed amount of capital is available to India, it also brings down the cost of capital for Indian entities while accessing the foreign capital market.
- The Currency Swap Agreement was concluded between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during the summit level meeting at Yamanashi, Japan.

**INDIAN ECONOMY****GST Council Meeting:**

The GST Council in its recently held 32nd meeting took a slew of decisions aimed at reducing the tax and compliance burden on small and medium enterprises.

Measures announced:

- The annual turnover limit under which companies would be exempt from GST has been raised to Rs. 40 lakh for most States and Rs. 20 lakh for the North Eastern and hill states, from the earlier limit of Rs. 20 lakh and Rs. 10 lakh, respectively.
- The limit for eligibility for the Composition Scheme is raised to an annual turnover of Rs. 1.5 crore from April 1, 2019. So far, only manufacturers and traders were eligible for this scheme. The Scheme now has been extended to small service providers with an annual turnover of up to Rs. 50 lakh, at a tax rate of 6%.
- Kerala can levy a cess of up to 1% for up to two years on intra-State supplies to help finance the disaster relief efforts following the recent floods in the state.

Implications and outcomes of these measures:

- A very large part of GST revenue comes from the formal sector and large companies. These measures have been taken to help the small and medium companies. The revenue impact due to these will be minimal.
- Allowing disaster cess of 1% to be introduced in the State of Kerala on local supplies may be an administrative issue for both businesses and government and this may set a precedence for other States to demand additional levy.
- Increasing the GST threshold limit would allow about 10 lakh traders to be exempted from the compliance burden of GST, and increasing the Composition Scheme limit would benefit about 20 lakh small businesses that fall between the annual turnover brackets of Rs. 1 crore and Rs. 1.5 crore.

**GST Council:** The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is governed by the GST Council. Article 279 (1) of the amended Indian Constitution states that the GST Council has to be constituted by the President within 60 days of the commencement of the Article 279A. According to the article, GST Council will be a joint forum for the Centre and the States. It consists of the following members:

- The Union Finance Minister will be the Chairperson
- As a member, the Union Minister of State will be in charge of Revenue of Finance
- The Minister in charge of finance or taxation or any other Minister nominated by each State government, as members.

**ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES****National Clean Air Programme**

The government has announced the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). This is the first ever effort in the country to frame a national framework for air quality management with a time-bound reduction target. The programme will not be notified under the Environment Protection Act or any other Act to create a firm mandate with a strong legal back up for cities and regions to implement NCAP in a time bound manner for effective reduction.

Key features of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):

- Achieve a national-level target of 20-30% reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration between 2017 and 2024.
- Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) will execute this nation-wide programme in consonance with the section 162 (b) of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1986.
- The programme has been launched with an initial budget of Rs. 300 crore for the first two years.
- The plan includes 102 non-attainment cities, across 23 states and Union territories, which were identified by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.
- Non-attainment cities are those which have been consistently showing poorer air quality than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. These include Delhi, Varanasi, Bhopal, Kolkata, Noida, Muzaffarpur, and Mumbai.
- As part of the programme, the Centre also plans to scale up the air quality monitoring network across India. At least 4,000 monitors are needed across the country, instead of the existing 101 real-time air quality (AQ) monitors, according to an analysis.
- The plan proposes a three-tier system, including real-time physical data collection, data archiving, and an action trigger system in all 102 cities, besides extensive plantation plans, research on clean-technologies, landscaping of major arterial roads, and stringent industrial standards.
- It also proposes state-level plans of e-mobility in the two-wheeler sector, rapid augmentation of charging infrastructure, stringent implementation of BS-VI norms, boosting public transportation system, and adoption of third-party audits for polluting industries.

Benefits of the programme: NCAP has certainly helped kick start the much-awaited good practice of setting air pollution reduction targets. The biggest advantage of such targets is that it helps decide the level of stringency of local and regional action needed for the plans to be effective enough to meet the reduction targets. NCAP will also have to be more nuanced and adopt appropriate approaches for small and big cities according to their dominant pollution profile while several strategies may remain uniform.

### **MISCELLANEOUS FACTS**

#### **Democracy Index 2018**

Democracy Index 2018 has been released by The Economist. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of world democracy for 165 independent states and two territories.

The Democracy Index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. Based on their scores on 60 indicators within these categories, each country is then itself classified as one of four types of regime: full democracy; flawed democracy; hybrid regime; and authoritarian regime.

#### **Performance of India:**

- India is ranked at 41 – a notch above last year. It is still classified as a ‘flawed democracy’ according to the index. India achieved a score of 7.23 on the index to maintain its position – the same it did last year. This is the lowest ever score attributed to India in the index ever since its publication.
- India ranks below the US (ranked 25th in the index) and other so called ‘flawed democracies’ like Italy, France, Botswana and South Africa.

Flawed democracy: The report defines a flawed democracy as nations that “have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected. However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.”

#### **Indus Food 2019**

INDUS FOOD-II with the theme of ‘World Food Supermarket’ will be held on 14th and 15th January, 2019, at India Expo Mart, Greater Noida.

Indus Food: INDUS FOOD is a platform of its kind exclusively devoted to enhancing Indian exports in F&B sector.

It enables B2B engagements of buyers and suppliers, after careful business matchmaking, which takes care of precise business requirements of each participant, and enables him to pick and choose whom to meet.

The event is aimed at promoting India as a strong and reliable exporter of food and beverage products to the world.

#### **Indus Food 2019**

- INDUS FOOD 2019 will promote value addition to India’s agriculture exports and integrate Indian farmers and agricultural products with global value chains.
- After the success of the first edition of INDUS FOOD in 2018, Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) has scaled up the Reverse Buyers-Sellers Meet (RBSM) with the financial assistance under Market Access Initiative (MAI) scheme of Department of Commerce. With more than 700 buyers from 70 countries visiting INDUS FOOD-II and more than 500 food suppliers, the event will lead to greater interaction of Indian exporters with global customers.
- It will bring business opportunities to the doorstep of Indian producers and manufacturers and help small exporters, who cannot afford participation in overseas fairs, to have a direct interface with foreign buyers who visit India for this show.
- The event is divided into 15 product display zones viz. sweets & confectionary, dairy, dry fruits, fruits & vegetables, Indian ethnic food & snacks, meat poultry & seafood, non-alcoholic beverages, oil & oil seeds, organic & health food, pulses grain and sugar, spices, tea & coffee, wine & alcoholic beverages, consumer food, and ingredients and fragrances & extracts.