

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**Safe City project**

Empowered Committee of Officers for Nirbhaya funds scheme has approved pilot Safe City projects in eight selected metropolitan cities, namely, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Lucknow with a view to provide safety to women in public places. The project would be implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with Centre and State sharing the funding in 60:40 ratio.

The major components of the Safe City project include, inter-alia:

- Setting up an Integrated Smart Control Room;
- Setting up Pink Out-posts (exclusively administered by Women police) for facilitating ease of filing complaint by women;
- Pink Patrols of Women police;
- Setting up Women Help Desks in all Police Stations with Counsellors;
- Augmentation of existing Asha Jyoti Kendra;
- Implementing Safety measures in buses, including Cameras;
- Improving Street Lighting in identified Hot Spot areas;
- Setting up Pink Toilets;
- Integration of Women power-help line with single Emergency number.

Laws for the Sentinelese Tribe:

The Government has promulgated various laws/regulations from time to time to ensure that the rights and well-being of the Sentinelese are safeguarded.

Steps taken to ensure the protection of Sentinelese:

- The entire North Sentinel Island along with 5 km coastal sea from high water mark is notified as tribal reserve.
- The Government respects their way of life style, therefore, has adopted an 'eyes-on and hands-off' practice to protect and safeguard the Sentinelese tribe.
- A protocol of circumnavigation of the North Sentinel Island has been notified. The ships and aircrafts of Coast Guard and boats of Marine Police make sorties around North Sentinel to keep surveillance.
- They have been protected under:
 - A &N Islands (PAT) Regulation 1956.
 - Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
 - Restrictions under Foreigner (Restricted Area) Orders, 1963.
 - Visa Manual Conditions/Passport Act 1920, Indian Forest Act, 1927 and Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Sentinelese Tribe:

- The Sentinelese are a negrito tribe who live on the North Sentinel Island of the Andamans. The inhabitants are connected to the Jarawa on the basis of physical, as well as linguistic similarities. Their numbers are believed to be less than 150 and as low as 40.
- Based on carbon dating of kitchen middens by the Anthropological Survey of India, Sentinelese presence was confirmed in the islands to 2,000 years ago. Genome studies indicate that the Andaman tribes could have been on the islands even 30,000 years ago.
- It is said they have made little to no advancement in the over 60,000 years and still live very primitive lives, surviving mainly on fish and coconuts.
- They are very vulnerable to germs since they have not had contact with the outside world. Even a common flu virus carried by a visitor could wipe out the entire tribe.
- Since the 1960s, there have been a handful of efforts to reach out to the tribe but all have largely failed. They have repeatedly, aggressively made it clear that they want to be isolated.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMS, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019**

The Union Cabinet has approved establishment of a unified authority for regulating all financial services in International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) in India through International Financial Services Centres Authority Bill, 2019. The first IFSC in India has been set up at GIFT City, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

IFSC:

- An IFSC enables bringing back the financial services and transactions that are currently carried out in offshore financial centers by Indian corporate entities.

- They offer business and regulatory environment that is comparable to other leading international financial centers in the world like London and Singapore.
- Currently, the banking, capital markets and insurance sectors in IFSC are regulated by multiple regulators, i.e. RBI, SEBI and IRDAI.
- The dynamic nature of business in the IFSCs necessitates a high degree of inter-regulatory coordination.
- It requires regular clarifications and frequent amendments in the existing regulations governing financial activities in IFSCs.
- The development of financial services and products in IFSCs would require focused and dedicated regulatory interventions.
- It provides world class regulatory environment to financial market participants.
- Further, this would also be essential from an ease of doing business perspective.

Benefits

- The establishment of a unified financial regulator for IFSCs will result in providing world-class regulatory environment to market participants from an ease of doing business perspective.
- This will provide a stimulus for further development of IFSCs in India and enable bringing back of financial services and transactions that are currently carried out in offshore financial centres to India.
- This would also generate significant employment in the IFSCs in particular as well as financial sector in India as a whole.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Asia LPG Summit

2nd edition of the Asia LPG Summit is being held in New Delhi. The summit is being organized by the World LPG Association (WLPGA) in association with major Indian public-sector oil companies (OMCs) Indian Oil, Hindustan Petroleum, and Bharat Petroleum.

Objectives of the summit:

- The summit will offer a unique opportunity to the global LPG industry to interact with development agencies, NGOs and non-profit organizations who have facilitated last-mile access to LPG for the beneficiaries.
- The summit will also bring together academia and private sector to exchange their views on the use of LPG and how pathbreaking initiatives such as 'Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana' can bring remarkable socio-economic transformation.

World LPG Association:

- The World LPG Association (WLPGA) is the authoritative global voice for the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) industry and the worldwide industry association which represents the interests of the LPG industry globally.
- The WLPGA promotes the use of LPG to foster a cleaner, healthier and more prosperous world.
- With over 200 members and presence in more than 125 countries, the WLPGA represents the interests of private and public companies from the entire LPG value chain under one umbrella.
- The WLPGA provides a platform for the exchange of best practices, facts and figures among its members.
- The Association regularly organises interactive meetings between technical experts, members and key stakeholders to demonstrate the benefits of LPG.
- The WLPGA was officially granted Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1989. Publications such as its Annual Statistical Review have become LPG industry references.

INDIAN ECONOMY

National Cow Commission

The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for establishment of National Cow Commission (Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog) for Conservation protection and development of cows and their progeny.

Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog

- The commission will work in collaboration with other government institutions working on research in the fields such as breeding and rearing of cows, organic manure and biogas.
- The commission will be tasked with providing a framework for cow conservation and development programmes.

- The setting up of Aayog will lead to conservation, protection and development of cattle population in the country including development and conservation of indigenous breeds.
- It will result in increased growth of livestock sector which is more inclusive, benefitting women, and small and marginal farmers.

Impact: The creation of this Aayog will provide the policy framework and direction to the cow conservation and development programmes in the country and for ensuring proper implementation of laws with respect to the welfare of cows.

National Gas Grid

The Government has envisaged to develop the National Gas Grid and has informed about the operational status.

- At present about 16,788 Km natural gas pipeline is operational and about 14,239 Km gas pipelines are being developed to increase the availability of natural gas across the country.
- These pipelines have been authorized by Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) and are at various stages of execution viz. Pre-Project activities/laying/testing/commissioning etc.

Aims and Objective

- To remove regional imbalance within the country with regard to access of natural gas and provide clean and green fuel throughout the country.
- To connect gas sources to major demand centres and ensure availability of gas to consumers in various sectors.
- Development of City Gas Distribution Networks in various cities for supply of CNG and PNG.

Abolition of Ombudsman for Direct and Indirect taxes

The Union Cabinet has approved the abolition of institutions of Ombudsman for income tax and indirect tax. The office of Income-Tax Ombudsman was set up in 2003 to deal with grievances of public related to the settlement of complaints relating to income tax.

Reasons for the abolition of the Ombudsman:

- People are preferring online grievance redressal mechanism.
- The institution failed to achieve its objectives as the number of new complaints have fallen to single digits
- The institution of Ombudsman could not prove to be more effective than regular existing parallel channels of grievance redressal.
- Other mechanisms like Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System and Aaykar Seva Kendras are being preferred by the people.

Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System

- Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) is an online web-enabled system developed by NIC. The platform based on web technology aims to enable submission of grievances by the aggrieved citizens from anywhere and anytime (24x7). On the basis of the grievances received Ministries/Departments/Organisations who scrutinize and take action for speedy and favourable redress of these grievances. CPGRAMS also facilitate tracking of grievances through the system generated unique registration number.

Aaykar Seva Kendras

- Aaykar Seva Kendras are established as part of I-T department's 'Sevottam' scheme which seeks to change the Income-tax department's perception from a purely enforcement agency to a service provider.
- The Aaykar Seva Kendras help taxpayers file their returns and redress their grievances. They are meant to be a single window solution for all tax services.

Amendments to the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018

The Union Cabinet has approved the amendments to the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2018. The amendments introduced based on the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Finance strengthen its objective to effectively tackle the menace of illicit deposit-taking activities in the country, and prevent such schemes from duping poor and gullible people of their hard earned savings.

The salient features of the bill are:

- The Bill bans Deposit Takers from promoting, operating, issuing advertisements or accepting deposits in any Unregulated Deposit Scheme. The Bill ban unregulated deposit-taking activities altogether, by making them an offence. The existing legislative-cum-regulatory framework which only comes into effect ex-post with considerable time lags;

- The Bill creates three different types of offences, namely, running of Unregulated Deposit Schemes, fraudulent default in Regulated Deposit Schemes, and wrongful inducement in relation to Unregulated Deposit Schemes.
- The Bill provides for severe punishment and heavy pecuniary fines to act as a deterrent.
- The Bill provides for repayment of deposits in cases where such schemes nonetheless manage to raise deposits illegally.
- The Bill provides for attachment of properties/assets by the Competent Authority, and subsequent realization of assets for repayment to depositors.
- Timelines have been provided for attachment of property and restitution to depositors.
- The Bill enables the creation of an online central database, for collection and sharing of information on deposit-taking activities in the country;

The Bill adopts best practices from State laws and entrusts the primary responsibility of implementing the provisions of the legislation to the State Governments.

Categorisation of Farmers

In agriculture Census, the operational holdings are categorised in five size classes as shown below:

- Marginal: Below 1.00 hectare.
- Small: 1.00-2.00 hectare.
- Semi- Medium: 2.00-4.00 hectare.
- Medium: 4.00-10.00 hectare.
- Large: 10.00 hectare and above.

The India Rural Development Report 2012-13 prepared by the IDFC Rural Development Network notes that Small farms are more efficient, especially in cultivating labour-intensive crops or tending livestock, but land holdings are too small to generate sufficient household income.

To improve the condition of Small and Marginal farmers and to double the income of farmers by 2022, Government is realigning its interventions from the production-centric approach to farmers' income-centric initiatives, with focus on better and new technological solutions.

The interventions include implementation of schemes like, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY), Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), Soil Health Card, Neem Coated Urea, Rainfed Area Development under National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), National Agriculture Market scheme (e-NAM), National Food Security Mission (NFSM), National Mission on Oilseeds & Oil palm (NMOOP), Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), National Mission on Agriculture Extension & Technology (NMAET).

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Flamingo sanctuary

A committee, chaired by Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan, has accorded wildlife clearance to the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed train corridor that encroaches upon a flamingo sanctuary and the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, the home to leopards, in Mumbai.

Sanjay Gandhi National Park: Sanjay Gandhi National Park is spread over three districts – Palgar, Thane and Mumbai Suburb. The National Park is home to a number of endangered species of flora and fauna and harbours approximately 800 species of flowering plants, 45 species of mammals, 43 species of reptiles among others.

Flamingo sanctuary: Western side of the Thane creek is a dedicated flamingo sanctuary. Thane Creek is home to flamingos as well as other migratory and residential bird species. It is Maharashtra's second marine sanctuary after the one at Malvan.