

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**PM Lays Foundation Stone for Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh**

PM laid Foundation Stone for the Sela Tunnel Project in Arunachal Pradesh across Sela Pass. The tunnel project will boost the tourism industry and economic activities in the region as well as north-eastern states.

Sela Pass: Sela Pass is a high-altitude mountain pass located on the border between the Tawang and West Kameng Districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The pass connects Tawang for rest of India.

Key Facts about the Sela Tunnel Project

- The Sela pass tunnel will be constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).
- The announcement of the project was done in the Union Budget 2018 by then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.
- Project costs Rs. 687 crore and is expected to be completed in the three years.
- The project involves the construction of a road for a total distance of 12.04 km which consist of two tunnels of 1790 and 475 meters.
- The project once completed will reduce the travelling time from Tezpur to Tawang by more than one hour.
- The project will also aid travellers in by-passing the dangerous snow-covered Sela top at a height of 13,700 feet.
- An asset to the Defence Forces
- The Sela tunnel project will provide all-weather connectivity and reduce travelling time. This aids the swift and fast movement of army troops in Tawang which is a strategically-located district located near the border of China. The tunnel will reduce the travel time between the Indian Army's 4 Corps headquarters at Tezpur in Assam and Tawang.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**The Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill**

The government has introduced Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill in Rajya Sabha to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 Autonomous Councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the northeastern region. The amendment will impact one crore tribal people in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

Key facts:

- The proposed amendments provide for elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grassroot level.
- The village councils will be empowered to prepare plans for economic development and social justice including those related to agriculture, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, minor irrigation, water management, animal husbandry, rural electrification, small scale industries and social forestry.
- The Finance Commission will be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to them.
- The Autonomous Councils now depend on grants from Central ministries and the State government for specific projects. At least one-third of the seats will be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura after the amendment is approved.

6th schedule: The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the administration of the tribal areas in the four northeastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

Key provisions:

- The governor is empowered to organise and re-organise the autonomous districts. Thus, he can increase or decrease their areas or change their names or define their boundaries and so on.
- If there are different tribes in an autonomous district, the governor can divide the district into several autonomous regions.
- Composition: Each autonomous district has a district council consisting of 30 members, of whom four are nominated by the governor and the remaining 26 are elected on the basis of adult franchise. The elected members hold office for a term of five years (unless the council is dissolved earlier) and nominated members hold office during the pleasure of the governor. Each autonomous region also has a separate regional council.
- The district and regional councils administer the areas under their jurisdiction. They can make laws on certain specified matters like land, forests, canal water, shifting cultivation, village

administration, inheritance of property, marriage and divorce, social customs and so on. But all such laws require the assent of the governor.

- Village councils: The district and regional councils within their territorial jurisdictions can constitute village councils or courts for trial of suits and cases between the tribes. They hear appeals from them. The jurisdiction of high court over these suits and cases is specified by the governor.
- Powers and functions: The district council can establish, construct or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, ferries, fisheries, roads and so on in the district. It can also make regulations for the control of money lending and trading by non-tribals. But, such regulations require the assent of the governor. The district and regional councils are empowered to assess and collect land revenue and to impose certain specified taxes.
- The acts of Parliament or the state legislature do not apply to autonomous districts and autonomous regions or apply with specified modifications and exceptions.
- The governor can appoint a commission to examine and report on any matter relating to the administration of the autonomous districts or regions. He may dissolve a district or regional council on the recommendation of the commission.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMS, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.

GeM and CCI Sign MoU

Government e Marketplace (GeM) and Competition Commission of India (CCI) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to enable a fair and competitive environment in the e-Marketplace.

GeM:

- GeM is a state-of-the-art national public procurement platform of Ministry of Commerce and Industries, that has used technology to remove entry barriers for bonafide sellers and has created a vibrant e-marketplace with a wide range of goods and services.
- GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.
- Features: It facilitates online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments / Organisations / PSUs. It provides the tools of e-bidding, reverse e-auction and demand aggregation to facilitate the government users, achieve the best value for their money.

Competition Commission of India:

It is a statutory body of the Government of India, responsible for enforcing the Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition.

Arundhati scheme

The government of Assam has announced a new scheme called Arundhati to provide gold at free of cost to the brides.

Key features:

- Under the scheme, the government of Assam aims to provide 1 Tola Gold to brides belonging to all such communities of Assam where it is customary to provide gold at the time of the wedding.
- The scheme is named after Arundhati, wife of great sage Basistha. The government has set aside Rs 300 cr has been for the implementation of the Arundhati Scheme.
- The benefit under Arundhati scheme can be availed upon formal registration of marriages under Special Marriage (Assam) Rules, 1954.
- The scheme is limited for economically weaker sections, whose annual income is below Rs 5 lakh.

Significance of the scheme: Gold forms an inherent part of Indian weddings. With the introduction of the Arundhati Scheme, the government wants to stand with those fathers who cannot afford to gift a set of gold ornaments to their daughters and would resort to borrowings and put themselves in the vicious cycle of debt.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Exercise Cutlass Express

Multinational training exercise 'CUTLASS EXPRESS – 19' was held recently.

- It is an exercise designed to assess and improve combined maritime law enforcement capacity, promote national and regional security in East Africa as well as information sharing, planning and operating.
- Sponsored by U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and is conducted by U.S. Naval Forces Africa.
- The aim of the exercise: To improve law enforcement capacity, promote regional security and progress inter-operability between the armed forces of the participating nations.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**Convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals(CMS)**

The 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals (CMS) is going to be hosted by India during 15th to 22nd February, 2020 at Gandhinagar in Gujarat. India has been a Party to the CMS since 1983. The Conference of Parties (COP) is the decision-making organ of this convention.

CMS:

- In order to protect the migratory species throughout their range countries, a Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), has been in force, under the aegis of United Nations Environment Programme.
- Also referred to as the Bonn Convention, it provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats and brings together the States through which migratory animals pass, the Range States, and lays the legal foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range.

Classification of species:

- Under this convention, migratory species threatened with extinction are listed on Appendix I and Parties strive towards strictly protecting these animals, conserving or restoring the places where they live, mitigating obstacles to migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them. Migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international co-operation are listed in Appendix II of the Convention.
- CMS is only global and UN-based intergovernmental organization established exclusively for conservation and management of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range.

What are migratory species? Why protect them?

- Migratory species are those animals that move from one habitat to another during different times of the year, due to various factors such as food, sunlight, temperature, climate, etc.
- The movement between habitats, can sometimes exceed thousands of miles/kilometres for some migratory birds and mammals. A migratory route can involve nesting and also requires the availability of habitats before and after each migration.

Asiatic Lion Conservation Project

Three months after at least 20 lions in Gujarat succumbed to a virus, the Centre and the Gujarat government has announced a Rs. 97.85 crore Asiatic Lion Conservation Project.

Asiatic Lion Conservation Project

- The MoEFCC has launched the “Asiatic Lion Conservation Project” with an aim to protect and conserve the world’s last ranging free population of Asiatic Lion and its associated ecosystem.
- The project will be funded from the Centrally Sponsored Scheme- Development of Wildlife Habitat (CSS-DWH) with the contributing ratio being 60:40 of Central and State share.
- The conservation of Asiatic Lions has always been a priority of Government of India.
- The Ministry in the past has supported Asiatic Lion in Gujarat by including it in list of 21 critically endangered species under the species recovery component of CSS-DWH.

Provisions of the Project

- Key aspects of the conservation project include undertaking “habitat improvement” measures, making more sources of water available, creating a wildlife crime cell, and a task force for the Greater Gir region.
- Another key outcome of the project is to have a dedicated veterinary institute, “lion ambulances”, and back-up stocks of vaccines that may be required.
- It would also involve having in place a GPS-based tracking system, which would look at surveillance tracking, animal and vehicle tracking.
- There would also be an automated sensor grid that would have magnetic sensors, movement sensors and infra-red heat sensors.
- The Gujarat government has envisaged a ‘Greater Gir’ that includes, other than the existing Gir National Park, sanctuaries in Girnar, Pania and Mitiyala.

Translocation as an alternate Solution

- The Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh was identified to be the most suitable for reintroducing the species, but there has been no progress on the proposal.

- The SC in April 2013 had ordered the translocation of some lions from Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh within six months, but this hasn't happened.
- There is a committee of experts from both States examining the suitability of Madhya Pradesh as a potential lion reserve.
- However, they have to comply with certain guidelines of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (on selecting suitable habitat, translocation).

Asiatic Lions conservation in India

- Asiatic lions that once ranged from Persia (Iran) to Palamau in Eastern India were almost driven to extinction by indiscriminate hunting and habitat loss.
- A single population of less than 50 lions persisted in the Gir forests of Gujarat by late 1890's.
- IUCN Red List Status: Endangered
- With timely and stringent protection offered by the State Government and the Center Government, Asiatic lions have increased to the current population of over 500 numbers.

The last census in the year 2015 showed the population of 523 Asiatic Lions in Gir Protected Area Network of 1648.79 sq. km. that includes Gir National Park, Gir Sanctuary, Pania Sanctuary, Mitiyala Sanctuary adjoining reserved forests, Protected Forests, and Unclassed Forests.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC

Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully flight tested the second indigenously developed 'Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)' propulsion based missile system.

Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR): It is a missile propulsion technology jointly developed by India and Russia.

Significance:

- It will help both India's surface-to-air and air-to-air missiles to perform better and enhance their strike range, making them more lethal.
- With it, India can have fastest long-range missiles in two categories, providing full-fledged and multi-layered aerial protection from hostile attacks.
- Its successful use in missiles will mark India's entry into select club of nations that use next-generation missile technology against manoeuvring targets, compromising effectiveness of conventional missiles.

Ramjet: Ramjet is a form of air-breathing jet engine that uses the vehicle's forward motion to compress incoming air for combustion without a rotating compressor. Fuel is injected in the combustion chamber where it mixes with the hot compressed air and ignites. A ramjet-powered vehicle requires an assisted take-off like a rocket assist to accelerate it to a speed where it begins to produce thrust.

Anti-tank Missile Helina Flight Tested

The Helicopter-launched anti-tank missile Helina was successfully test fired from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur in Balasore district of Odisha.

Features of Helina-Anti Tank Missile

- Helina is the indigenously designed and built missile system. It is an air-launched variant of the Nag, a fire-and-forget ATGM with an estimated range of 4 kilometers. Its range is estimated at between 7 to 8 kilometres. It is guided by an infrared imaging seeker (IIR) operating in the lock-on before-launch mode and helps in further strengthening the defence capabilities of the country.
- The infrared imaging seeker (IIR) technology is also indigenously developed and has been demonstrated in the NAG anti-tank guided missile system. Helina is launched from twin-tube stub wing-mounted launchers on board Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's (HAL) Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) and Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH). It is one of the most advanced anti-tank weapons in the world. The production and induction of the Helina missiles are likely to happen in 2019.