

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**SBM- Grameen confirms over 96% usage of toilets**

The National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) 2018-19 was conducted by an Independent Verification Agency under the World Bank support project to the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G).

Key findings of NARSS 2018-19

- 1% of households were found to have access to toilets during the survey period (the corresponding figure as per the SBMG MIS in November 2018 was 96%)
- 5% of the people who had access to toilets used them
- 7% of villages which were previously declared and verified as ODF were confirmed to be ODF. The remaining villages also had sanitation coverage of about 93%
- 4% of the villages surveyed found to have minimal litter and minimal stagnant water

About the Survey

- The survey used the PPS (Probability Proportion to Size) sampling methodology, which yields results within a confidence interval of 95%.
- Data was collected using the Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) platform.
- The survey also covered schools, anganwadis and public/community toilets in these villages.

Success of SBM-G

- Since its launch in October 2014, the SBM, the world's largest sanitation program, has changed the behaviour of hundreds of millions of people with respect to toilet access and usage.
- 500 million people have stopped defecating in the open since the SBM began, down from 550 million at the beginning of the programme to less than 50 million today.
- Over 9 crore toilets have been built across rural India under the Mission.
- Over 5.5 lakh villages and 615 districts have been declared ODF, along with 30 ODF States and Union Territories.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**US removes preferential concessions**

The U.S. has ultimately acted on its threat to withdraw concessions granted to Indian imports under the Generalised System of Preferences.

Emerging tensions in trade

- India-U.S. trade tensions escalated last year when the U.S. took two consecutive decisions to increase import tariffs on steel and aluminium, and place India's eligibility for GSP benefits under review.
- Shortly after, India said it would impose retaliatory tariffs on imports from the U.S. and even notified the list of items on which these would apply.
- The GSP review, however, stretched on, with the two countries holding frequent talks to address the concerns. India, for its part, postponed the deadline for the imposition of the retaliatory tariffs six times; the latest deadline is on April 1.

Reasons to review GSP status

- Washington's decision to review India's GSP status stemmed from complaints from American medical and dairy industries, both of which said India was not providing "equitable and reasonable access to its market".
- India has said it had tried hard to cater to most of the U.S. demands and reach an understanding, but key points of difference, especially regarding India's cultural concerns to do with dairy products, could not be accommodated.
- The U.S. has been expressing discontent over India's policies to do with data localisation and FDI rules in e-commerce.

India's Response:

- Commerce Ministry said that the GSP benefits amounted to only \$190 million while India's total exports under GSP to the U.S. stood at \$5.6 billion.
- Talks on the issue would still continue during the 60-day period after which the GSP decision would come into effect.
- The other option the government can exercise is to impose retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods.

Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue – 2019

In continuation of the process of engaging the global strategic community in an annual review of India's opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, the second edition of Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) – 2019 was held in New Delhi with an aim to provide a platform for substantive and insightful discussions pertaining to the geopolitical developments affecting the maritime domain of the Indo-Pacific, and provide policy-relevant inputs to the policy-makers and the public at large.

About IPRD- Indo- Pacific Regional Dialogue:

- The idea of an Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD) was first conceptualised and conducted in 2018, as the apex level conference of the Indian Navy, organised by the National Maritime Foundation as the Navy's Knowledge Partner.
- The permanent theme of this annual dialogue is a review of India's opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The aim is to focus attention on the Indo-Pacific, as a maritime geographical-entity, while deliberating aspects of great relevance to regional geopolitics.

Significance: Indo-Pacific is a multipolar region that is contributing more than half of world GDP and population. Countries falling in the direct catchment of the vast Indian and Pacific oceans can be termed as Indo-Pacific countries.

WELFARE SCHEMES**PM Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PM-SYM) Scheme**

The PM Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PM-SYM) was formally inaugurated by PM Modi.

PM Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PM-SYM)

- PM-SYM will be a Central Sector Scheme administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and implemented through Life Insurance Corporation of India and CSCs.
- LIC will be the Pension Fund Manager and responsible for Pension pay out.
- The amount collected under PM-SYM pension scheme shall be invested as per the investment pattern specified by GoI.

Eligibility Criteria

- The unorganised workers mostly engaged as home based workers, street vendors, mid-day meal workers, head loaders, brick kiln workers, cobblers, rag pickers, domestic workers, washer men, rickshaw pullers, landless labourers, etc. whose monthly income is Rs 15,000/ per month or less and belong to the entry age group of 18-40 years are eligible for the scheme.
- They should not be covered under New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme or Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).
- Further, he/she should not be an income tax payer.

Features of PM-SYM

- **Pension Pay out:** Once the beneficiary joins the scheme at the entry age of 18-40 years, the beneficiary has to contribute till 60 years of age. On attaining the age of 60 years, the subscriber will get the assured monthly pension of Rs.3000/- with benefit of family pension, as the case may be.
- **Family Pension:** During the receipt of pension, if the subscriber dies, the spouse of the beneficiary shall be entitled to receive 50% of the pension received by the beneficiary as family pension. Family pension is applicable only to spouse.
- **Contribution by the Subscriber:** The subscriber's contributions to PM-SYM shall be made through 'auto-debit' facility from his/ her savings bank account/ Jan- Dhan account. The subscriber is required to contribute the prescribed contribution amount from the age of joining PM-SYM till the age of 60 years.
- **Matching contribution by the Central Government :** PM-SYM is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme on a 50:50 basis where prescribed age-specific contribution shall be made by the beneficiary and the matching contribution by the Central Government. For example, if a person enters the scheme at an age of 29 years, he is required to contribute Rs 100/ – per month till the age of 60 years. An equal amount of Rs 100/- will be contributed by the Central Government.
- **Enrolment Process:** The enrolment will be carried out by all the Community Service Centers (CSCs). The subscriber will be required to have a mobile phone, savings bank account and Aadhaar number. The eligible subscriber may visit the nearest CSCs and get enrolled for PM-SYM using Aadhaar number and savings bank account/ Jan-Dhan account number on self-certification basis.
- **Facilitation Centres:** All the branch offices of LIC, the offices of ESIC/EPFO and all Labour offices of Central and State Governments will facilitate the unorganised workers about the Scheme.

INTERNAL SECURITY- SECURITY CHALLENGES AND MANAGEMENT IN BORDER AREAS**Project BOLD-QIT**

Project BOLD-QIT (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique) under CIBMS (Comprehensive Integrated Border Management system) has been inaugurated on India-Bangladesh border in Dhubri District of Assam. It is a project to install technical systems under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), which enables BSF to equip Indo-Bangla borders with different kind of sensors in unfenced riverine area of Brahmaputra and its tributaries.

CIBMS:

- The concept of CIBMS is the integration of manpower, sensors and command and control to improve situational awareness and facilitate quick response to emerging situations.
- Among major components of CIBMS is the 'virtual fence'. The second component is the command and control, which will help in optimum use of resources for border management. Another component is power management to keep CIBMS running.

Need and Significance of BOLD- QIT project:

- Border Security Force is responsible for safeguarding of 4,096 Km long International Border with Bangladesh. At various places, it is not possible to erect Border Fence due to the geographical barriers. The 61 Kms of Border area in District Dhubri, Assam where River Brahmaputra enters into Bangladesh is consisting of vast char lands and innumerable river channels thus making border guarding in this area, a daunting task especially during rainy season.
- The implementation of this project will not only help BSF to curb all type of cross border crimes but also provide respite to the troops from round the clock human surveillance.
- Smart borders on one hand allow seamless movement of authorized people and goods, while on the other, minimise cross-border security challenges using innovation and technology enablement. Over the long term, smart border management will also have to incorporate systems that digitally monitor patterns of activity through and around border areas to root out organised crime and anti-national events.

ENVIRONMENT**The New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019**

India and four rhino range nations have signed a declaration 'The New Delhi Declaration on Asian Rhinos 2019' for the conservation and protection of the species at the recently held Second Asian Rhino Range Countries meeting.

2nd Asian Rhino Range Countries meeting was held at New Delhi and organised by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of Government of India in collaboration with the IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group, WWF- India and Aaranyak.

Key facts:

- India will collaborate with Bhutan, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia to increase the population of three species of Asian rhinos, including the Greater one-horned rhinoceros found in the Indian sub-continent.
- The declaration was signed to conserve and review the population of the Greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran rhinos every four years to reassess the need for joint actions to secure their future.
- The declaration includes undertaking studies on health issues of the rhinos, their potential diseases and taking necessary steps; collaborating and strengthening wildlife forensics for the purpose of investigation and strengthening of transboundary collaboration among India, Nepal and Bhutan for the conservation and protection of the Greater one-horned rhino.

The twelve point strategic actions outlined the following actions:

1. To collaborate to strengthen protection regimes, strategic information gathering, and real time sharing of actionable information on rhino crime and its horn trade to secure the rhino population within and between range countries.
2. To initiate research on various habitat parameters including invasive species threatening the suitable habitats of Asian rhinos and take appropriate steps to optimally manage the habitats.
3. To explore possibilities of expanding rhino ranges within country or between rhino range countries for optimal population management.
4. To strengthen transboundary collaboration among India, Nepal, and Bhutan for the greater one-horned rhino conservation and protection.
5. To identify connectivity and corridors across international boundaries and keep them functional, safe and secure for free movement of Asian rhinos and other wildlife.
6. To increase the engagement of the local communities as stewards to secure the future of rhinos in range countries.
7. To initiate proactive monitoring on potential adverse impacts of climate change on rhino health and their habitats in range countries.
8. To undertake studies on Rhino health issues & potential diseases and take necessary steps for management intervention.
9. To regularly organize exposure visits for managers and frontline staffs of the rhino range countries and to document the best practices for wider dissemination.
10. To collaborate and strengthen wildlife forensics for the purpose of investigation.
11. To accelerate natural and conservation breeding of critically endangered Sumatran rhino including best use of all available individuals and technologies.

12. To call to the attention of all countries that possible opening of international trade of rhino horn and other derivatives will have a severe detrimental impact on rhino populations in Asian rhino range countries.

Rhinoceros: The greater one-horned rhinoceros is the largest of the three Asian rhinos and, together with African white rhinos, is the largest of all rhino species. It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. With at least half of the total population, India's Kaziranga National Park remains the key reserve for this species.

Two species of rhino in Asia—Javan and Sumatran—are critically endangered.

World Wildlife Day

World Wildlife Day was celebrated on March 3rd with the theme of 'Life below Water: for People and Planet'. The theme aligns with goal 14 of UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Significance of oceans:

- The ocean contains nearly 200,000 identified species, but actual numbers may be in the millions.
- Globally, the market value of marine and coastal resources and industries is estimated at US\$3 trillion per year, about 5% of global GDP.
- Over three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods. Marine wildlife has sustained human civilization and development for millennia, from providing food and nourishment, to material for handicraft and construction. It has also enriched our lives culturally, spiritually, and recreationally in different ways.

Concerns and the need for conservation:

- The capacity of life below water to provide these services is severely impacted, as our planet's oceans and the species that live within it are under assault from an onslaught of threats.
- As much as 40% of the ocean is now heavily affected by the most significant and direct threat of over exploitation of marine species as well as other threats such as pollution, loss of coastal habitats and climate change.
- These threats have a strong impact on the lives and livelihoods of those who depend on marine ecosystem services, particularly women and men in coastal communities.

Background: On 20 December 2013, at its 68th session, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 3 March, the day of signature of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), as UN World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness of the world's wild animals and plants.

CITES:

- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international regulatory treaty between 183 party states.
- It was formed in 1973 and regulates the international trade in over 35,000 wild species of plants and animals.
- The focus of the convention is not solely on the protection of species. It also promotes controlled trade that is not detrimental to the sustainability of wild species.
- The convention works primarily through a system of classification and licensing.
- Wild species are categorised in Appendices I to III. This often reflects species' threat status on the Red List of the IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species first created in 1964.
- Appendix I prohibits trade in species classified as highly endangered.
- Appendix II allows trade under very specific conditions. This requires exporting countries obtain a permit, but not the importing country.
- Appendix III species require only a certificate of origin to be traded.
- National CITES management authorities may issue permits once scientific authorities show non-detriment findings. In other words, scientific evidence must demonstrate that species sustainability will not be adversely affected by trade. Where data is lacking, the precautionary principle applies.
- CITES is legally binding on state parties to the convention, which are obliged to adopt their own domestic legislation to implement its goals.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If it is both TERRIFYING and AMAZING, then you should definitely pursue it.