

NATIONAL**Cabinet approved implementation of Shahpurkandi Dam on river Ravi in Punjab**

The Union Cabinet has approved implementation of Shahpurkandi Dam Project, in Punjab on river Ravi. Central Assistance of Rs. 485.38 cr (for irrigation component) would be provided over five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

Implementation of this project would help to minimize some of the water of the River Ravi which at present is going waste through the Madhopur Headworks downstream to Pakistan whereas there is a requirement for the same for use in Punjab and J&K.

Indus Water Treaty: Indus Waters Treaty was signed between India and Pakistan in 1960 for sharing of Indus waters. According to the Treaty, India got the full rights for utilization of waters of the three Eastern Rivers namely Ravi, Beas, and Satluj.

- A Bilateral agreement was signed between Punjab and J&K in Jan 1979.
- As per the agreement, construction of Ranjit Sagar Dam (Thein Dam) and Shahpurkandi Dam was to be taken up by Punjab Govt.
- Ranjit Sagar Dam was commissioned in Aug 2000.
- The ShahpurKandi Dam project was initially approved by the Planning Commission during November 2001 and was included under the Accelerated Irrigation Benets Scheme (AIBP) of this Ministry for funding its irrigation component.

Freight Village in Varanasi

The Ministry of Shipping has approved the development of Rs. 156 crore freight village in Varanasi adjoining the Inland Waterways Terminal on River Ganga. The Varanasi freight village will be developed by the Inland Waterways Authority of India. It will serve as a cargo hub, and a centre for aggregation and value addition. It will also provide support to stimulate development of a professional logistics industry in Varanasi.

Freight Village:

A freight village is a designated area where facilities for various modes of transportation, distribution of goods and other logistics are available in a synchronized manner on a large scale.

Freight villages are cargo aggregators, offers various logistic choices to a shipper/cargo owner; i.e. choice of railroad; rail-waterway; road-waterway.

Inland Waterways Authority of India:

It came into existence on 27th October 1986 for development and regulation of inland waterways for shipping and navigation. The Authority primarily undertakes projects for development and maintenance of IWT infrastructure on national waterways through grant received from Ministry of Shipping.

World Bank assisted project SMART launched in Maharashtra...

Maharashtra Government has launched World Bank assisted State of Maharashtra's Agribusiness and Rural Transformation (SMART) Project to transform rural Maharashtra. This project aims to revamp agricultural value chains, with special focus on marginal farmers across 1,000 villages. This initiative is in line with Union Government's step towards doubling farmers' income by 2022. The launch of project which was followed by signing of 50 memorandum of understandings (MoUs) between big corporate and farmers producer groups

Significance

The project is giant step towards transformation of rural economy and empowerment of farmers and also sustainable agriculture through public-private partnership (PPP) model. It seeks to ensure higher production of crops and create robust market mechanism to enable farmers to reap higher remunerations for the yield. It unites agriculture-oriented corporate and farmers by providing them common platform.

Union Cabinet approves Amendment of the Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial Act, 1951

The Union Cabinet has approved the Amendment of the Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial Act, 1951. In the existing Act, there is a provision for representation of a single national political party. The proposed amendment ensures representation of the Opposition Party in the Trust. The proposed Amendment will empower the Government to terminate and replace a Trustee to participate in functioning of the Trust or for any other reason.

INTERNATIONAL AND BILATERAL**OPEC reaches consensus on cutting oil production**

The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) tentatively agreed an oil-output cut but was waiting to hear from non-OPEC heavyweight Russia before deciding the exact volumes for a production reduction aimed at propping up crude prices, two sources from the group said.

- The price of crude has fallen almost a third since October but U.S. President Donald Trump has demanded the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries make oil even cheaper by refraining from output cuts.
- OPEC delegates have said the group and its allies could cut by 1 million bpd if Russia contributed 150,000 bpd of that reduction. If Russia contributed around 250,000 bpd, the overall cut could exceed 1.3 million bpd.
- Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States have been vying for the position of top crude producer in recent years. The United States is not part of any output-limiting initiative due to its anti-trust legislation and fragmented oil industry.
- Iranian exports have plummeted after the United States imposed fresh sanctions on Tehran in November. But Washington gave sanctions waivers to some buyers of Iranian crude, further raising fears of an oil glut next year.

ECONOMY**The Union Cabinet has approved the Agriculture Export Policy, 2018.**

The Cabinet has also approved the proposal for the establishment of Monitoring Framework at Centre with Commerce as the nodal Department with representation from various line Ministries/Departments and Agencies and representatives of concerned State Governments, to oversee the implementation of Agriculture Export Policy. The Government has come out with a policy to double farmers' income by 2022.

Objectives:

- To double agricultural exports from present ~US\$ 30+ Billion to ~US\$ 60+ Billion by 2022 and reach US\$ 100 Billion in the next few years
- To diversify our export basket, destinations and boost high value and value added agricultural exports including the focus on perishables.
- To promote novel, indigenous, organic, ethnic, traditional and non-traditional Agri products exports.
- To provide an institutional mechanism for pursuing market access, tackling barriers and deal with sanitary and phyto-sanitary issues.
- To strive to double India's share in world agri exports by integrating with global value chain at the earliest.
- Enable farmers to get the benefit of export opportunities in the overseas market.

Easing Listing norms – SEBI

The SEBI-appointed committee to examine the listing requirements for Indian and foreign companies in various stock exchanges has submitted its report recently.

Recommendations

- Indian companies can be allowed to list on overseas exchanges without a requirement to also list in the domestic markets.
- Companies that are domiciled abroad can be in turn permitted to list on Indian stock exchanges.
- The committee has laid down the legislative changes required in the FEMA, Companies Act, SEBI's investor protection rules and tax laws to pave the way for this change.
- To avoid round-tripping, funds from overseas exchanges will only be allowed to and from permissible jurisdictions with strong anti-money laundering laws.
- Also, only 'high-quality' companies with a minimum Rs. 1,000 crore issue size may be permitted through this route.

ENVIRONMENT**Beach pollution in India**

The National Centre of Coastal Research (NCCR) has released a report on beach pollution in India.

Highlights of the report:

- The NCCR conducted a qualitative analysis of the litter on six different beaches on the eastern and western coasts. The study notes that beach pollution is on rise in the country.
- Tourism and fishing are the biggest culprits, contributing most of the plastic litter on beaches.
- The study found that plastic litter from tourism alone accounted for 40%-96% of all beach litter.
- At Chennai's Elliot's Beach, for instance, plastics left by tourists accounted for 40% of all the litter, while at Gopalpur in Odisha, it was as high as 96%. As for the other four beaches, plastics formed 66% of the overall litter on Fort Kochi Beach, 60% at Karnataka's Karwar beach, 87% at Visakhapatnam's R.K. Beach, and 81% at Andaman Island's Rangachang beach.
- After tourism, fishing was the next biggest source of litter. While fishing nets were a major contributor, the processing of fish on the beach also produced a lot of litter.
- Also, the proportion of biomedical litter was high in urban areas, such as Elliot's Beach and Fort Kochi Beach.
- Other than the plastic litter dropped by tourists, similar waste from creeks and inlets made its way into the sea in the monsoon.
- Most of the litter consisted of plastic bottles, cutlery, and thermocol.

Study on air pollution and its effects:

Indian Council of Medical Research has released its first comprehensive estimates of deaths, disease burden, and life expectancy reduction associated with air pollution in each state of India.

Highlights of the study:

- One in every eight deaths in India is attributable to air pollution, which now contributes to more disease burden than smoking. In fact, the average life expectancy in India would have been 1.7 years higher if the air pollution level were less than the minimal level.
- In 2017, air pollution accounted for 12.4 lakh deaths in India, which included 6.7 lakh deaths due to outdoor particulate matter air pollution and 4.8 lakh deaths due to household air pollution. Over half of the deaths due to air pollution were in persons less than 70 years of age. With 18% of the global population, India suffered 26% of premature mortality and health loss attributable to air pollution globally.
- Around 77% of India's population is exposed to outdoor air pollution levels above the National Ambient Air Quality Standards safe limit.
- States in east and north India had some of the highest levels of both ambient particulate matter and household air pollution, especially Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Jharkhand. Delhi, Haryana, and Punjab in north India had some of the highest ambient particulate matter pollution exposure in the country.

- However, the report recognises the increasing public and policy attention to control air pollution in India.
- Air pollution has become a year-round phenomenon particularly in north India which causes health impacts far beyond the seasonal rise of respiratory illnesses. Air pollution is now the leading risk factor for chronic obstructive lung disease in India, and a major contributor to pneumonia and lung cancer.

DEFENCE

Clean Sea– 2018: Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has conducted Regional Level Marine Oil Pollution Response Exercise titled ‘Clean Sea– 2018’ at sea of Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar (A&B) Islands. The objective of exercise was to ascertain preparedness of IGC, resource agencies and other stakeholders in responding to major oil spill in line with provisions of National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP). ICG ships Viswasth, Vijith, Rajveer, Rajshri, 4 interceptor boats and its air assets Dornier and Chetak helicopters participated in the exercise.

Sino-India Joint Exercise Hand-in-Hand 2018: Exercise Hand-in-Hand is conducted annually as part of military diplomacy and interaction between armies of India and China. The exercise will involve tactical level operations in an International Counter Insurgency/Counter Terrorist environment under UN mandate. The conduct of Joint Military Exercises is also an important step to uphold the values of Peace, Prosperity and Stability in the region.