

DATE: 7th Dec 2018, Friday

Current Affairs

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Sources: THE HINDU and Indian Express

52. Surat may become fastest growing city, 17 of 20 world's fastest-growing cities from India

News:

"Oxford Economics in its report Global Cities: The future of the world's leading urban economies to 2035" predicting 17 of 20 fastest-growing cities in the world will be from India in the term of GDP growth between 2019 and 2035

Facts:

- **Major Findings of the reports:**
 - Surat, a commercial center for textiles in Gujarat, will witness the fastest GDP growth followed by Bangalore and Agra.
 - Outside of India, Phnom Penh is the fastest growing city in the world in the 2019-2035 forecast
 - When it comes to the total size of the economies, New York will continue to be the largest urban economy due to its growing finance & business service sector
 - In comparison to the world's biggest metropolises, India's economic output is expected to remain small.
 - According to the forecast, in 2027, the aggregate GDP of all Asian cities will for the first time exceed the combined GDP of all North American and European Cities.

Concern

- The faster the cities' economies grow; the more migrants they will attract. This, in turn, will pressure already scarce resources such as land and water.
- More inhabitants will require more energy, adding to the carbon footprint of these cities.

53. Assembly Elections 2018: EC looks to ensure disabled-friendly voting

Accessible Elections:

To uphold the sanctity of free and fair elections and ensure wider participation by people with disabilities in the electoral process, the

Election Commission of India had selected 'Accessible Elections' as the central theme of year 2018.

The barriers in access to electoral participation by PwDs:

1. Difficulties in voter registration
2. Inaccessible registration materials or facilities
3. Inadequate or inaccessible voter education and related materials
4. Difficulties in physical access to polling stations
5. Inability to vote independently and privately
6. Absence of or inappropriate assistance from poll workers etc.

Constitutional and Legal safeguards:

1. **Article 324** of the Constitution provides for the Election Commission, its powers and functions for maintenance of the Electoral roll and Conduct of Elections in a free and fair manner.
2. **Article 325** provides that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in the electoral roll on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, et al.
3. **Provisions under rule 49N of the Conduct of Election rules, 1961**, ECI guidelines, and Supreme Court orders directly address the issue of assistance to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).
4. **The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** talks about accessibility in voting stating that the Election Commission of India and the State Election Commissions shall ensure that all polling stations should be accessible to the persons with disabilities and all materials related to the electoral process are easily understandable by and accessible to them

Strategic Plan of Election Commission of India 2016-25

Goal 1: Inclusive Special facilitation for registration of certain category of voters including Differently-abled electors etc.

Activity 1: Electoral Roll to be made PwD friendly by identifying such voters in a dedicated section of ER, within each part. It envisages constitution of a Working Group on Facilitation and Inclusion of PwDs.

Goal-2: Accessible Improving and strengthening accessibility for electoral registration with envisaged outcome of Barrier free electoral registration.

Outcome: Barrier-free electoral registration.

Activity1: Making available one Voter Facilitation Centre at every District Headquarters.

Activity2: Making available one Voter Facilitation Centre at every Block Headquarters.

Activity3: Integration with CSCs- Integrating the facility of Common Service Centres voter related services throughout the country by adopting service area approach.

Directions and Guidelines of the Election Commission for making elections "Accessible":

- Identification of PwDs including polling station-wise list
- Facilitation in filling up voter registration forms
- Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF) at Polling Stations
- Priority-based access to facilities at polling stations
- Matdata Sahayata Kendras and other election offices in the field

- Involvement of NGOs, CSOs/DPOs, rwAs
- System Sensitisation and Training
- Use of technology in aid of PwDs
- Training and sensitisation of officials handling the work relating to PwDs

SVEEP (systematic voters' education and electoral participation):

Voter education and outreach for PwDs is an integral part of the SVEEP plans. Broad areas of coverage include-

- An officer well versed with provisions of facilities for PwDs shall be designated for each of the Assembly Constituencies.
- Wide publicity shall be ensured through various modes.
- General publicity material shall be prepared in simple language, sign language and braille.

54. COP24 summit: 'Developed nations likely to fall way short of 2020 emission targets'

News:

Assessment by the UN climate body shows that the developed nations are likely to fall short of their modest emission reduction targets for 2020.

Facts:

- It is a first-of-its-kind assessment by the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**, shows that developed nations had reduced their emissions by 16 per cent from their 1990 levels by the year 2016 short of their collective target of 18 per cent.
- **These targets for the developed countries for the pre-2020 period are governed by the 1997 Kyoto Protocol** and will expire in 2020, after which the Paris Agreement will take over.
- In the Kyoto framework, **only the developed countries, responsible for the overwhelming majority of emissions over the last 150 years**, were assigned specific emission reduction targets.
- However, In the **Paris architecture, no country is assigned any target** and everyone decided their own the climate actions

India's Argument

- India and other developing countries have been arguing that the emission gap created by the developed nations in pre-2020 period will eventually fall upon everyone to fulfil, and want to guard against this scenario.
- At a recent meeting in New Delhi, the four countries which go under the name of **BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India and**

China) had stressed that these emission gaps must not present any “additional burden to developing countries in the post-2020 world”, and therefore, proposed that the developed countries must be made to carry over their unachieved targets beyond 2020 and finish them by 2023.

Additional facts:

- **Kyoto Protocol**
 - Was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997 and entered into force on 16 February 2005
 - Agreement linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate and it is internationally **binding emission reduction targets**.
 - The Protocol places a heavier burden on developed nations under the principle of “**Common but differentiated**” **responsibilities**.
 - The detailed rules for the implementation of the Protocol were adopted at COP 7 in Marrakesh, Morocco, in 2001, and are referred to as the “**Marrakesh Accords**”
 - During the first commitment period, 37 industrialized countries and the European Community committed to reduce GHG emissions to an average of five percent against 1990 levels. **Developing nations were asked to voluntarily comply**.
 - During the second commitment period, Parties committed to reduce GHG emissions by at least **18 percent below 1990 levels** in the eight-year period from 2013 to 2020.
- **The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** is an intergovernmental treaty developed to address the problem of climate change. The Convention was negotiated and opened for signature at the June 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) which is also known as **the Rio Earth Summit**.

55. Jobs, admissions: 97% of Central OBC quota benefits go to just under 25% of its castes

News: Commission to Examine Sub-Categorisation of OBCs has found 97% of Central OBC quota benefits go to just under 25% of its castes in jobs and admissions reserved at the Central level.

Facts:

- The commission has been tasked with examining the extent of **inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the OBC castes** and also work out the mechanism for sub-categorization to ensure equitable reservation.

- While reservation in jobs for OBCs was implemented in 1993, reservations in admissions in Central government institutions (both 27 per cent) was implemented in 2006.

Findings of the report

- There are 938 OBC sub-castes – which make up 37% of the total number – have no representation at all in the reserved seats
- Keeping in mind their numbers, their backwardness and their regional spread the Commission has proposed to “sub-categorise” the OBCs.
- Share of several states in OBC quotas is much higher than their share in the population of India also there are many states with much lower share in benefits than their share in the population.
- The main idea is not to create a new hierarchy among OBCs but a more level playing field for all.

Sub-categorisation of OBCs.

- Sub-categorisation of OBCs will divide them into two groups: **the more affluent ones and the less affluent ones.**
- At present, the more affluent OBC communities are better placed at taking advantage of the 27% reservation for OBCs in central government jobs and educational institutions.
- Dividing this 27% reservation into two will mean that the less affluent OBC communities will be able to get somewhat more seats in jobs and colleges.
- The sub-categorization of OBCs will also ensure increased access to benefits such as reservations in educational institutions and government jobs for less dominant OBCs.

Challenges:

- Lack of authentic sources which provides a reliable estimate of the population of individual castes and communities included in the Central list.
- Few states/UTs have adopted some kind of sub-categorisation for their OBC lists but none of them seems to have proposed any clearly criterion for placing a community in one category or the other.

56. Centre approves Shahpurkandi Dam project on river Ravi in Punjab

News

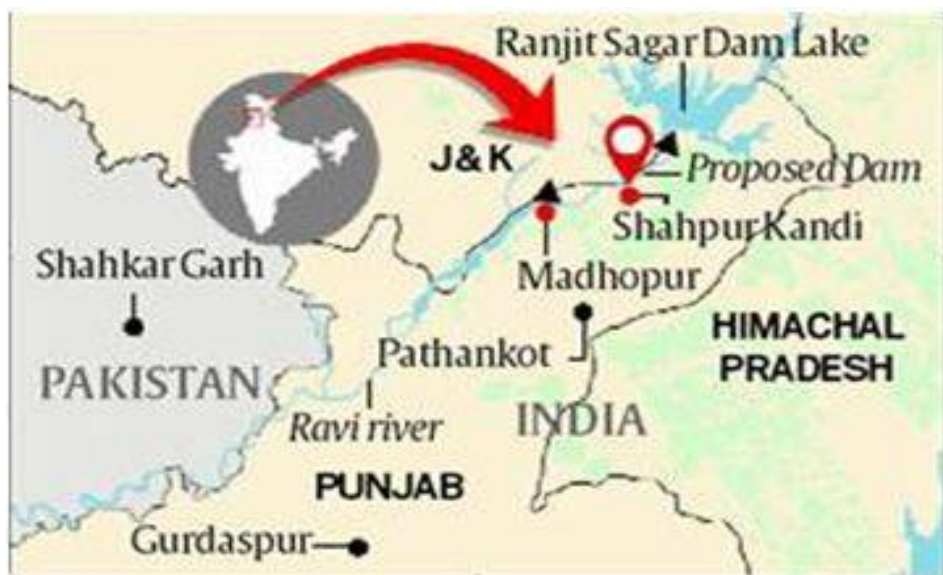
The Union Cabinet has approved the implementation of Shahpurkandi dam project on the Ravi river in Punjab

Important Facts:

1. The project would be implemented by Govt. of Punjab with Central Assistance and is expected to be completed by 2022

Benefits from the project:

1. It would help minimising some of the water of the River Ravi which at present is going waste through the Madhopur Headworks downstream to Pakistan.
2. On completion of the project an Irrigation Potential of 5,000 ha in Punjab State and 32,173 ha in J&K State would be created.
3. The project is expected to deliver electricity and irrigation worth Rs 850 crore annually and to fully utilize the Ravi water as per the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan
4. The project will enable the upstream Ranjit Sagar Dam project electricity station to act as a peaking station, besides having its own generation capacity of 206 MW.



Indus Water Treaty

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

57. Cabinet clears policy to double agri exports

News:

The Union Cabinet has cleared Agriculture Export Policy, 2018 which is in line with Prime Minister's commitment to double farmers' income by 2022.

Important Facts:

1. Aim of the policy: The policy seeks to harness the export potential of Indian agriculture, through suitable policy instruments, to make India global power in agriculture and raise farmers' income
2. Objectives:
 - To increase India's agricultural exports to \$60 billion by 2022 from the current \$37 billion and reach \$100 billion after few years, with a stable trade policy regime
 - To diversify the export basket, destinations and boost high value and value added agricultural exports including focus on perishables.
 - Promoting indigenous, novel, ethnic, organic, traditional and non-traditional Agri products exports.
 - To focus on export centric clusters for integrated Commodity Focus Value Chain and Infrastructure Development.
 - Providing an institutional mechanism to pursue market access, tackling barriers and deal with sanitary and phyto-sanitary issues.
 - Striving to double India's share in world agri exports by integrating with global value chain at the earliest.
 - To ensure farmers to get benefit of export opportunities in overseas market.
1. Elements of Agriculture Export Policy: The recommendations in the Agriculture Export Policy have been organised in two categories – Strategic and Operational

Component		Major Recommendations
Strategic	Policy Measures	a) Stable Trade Policy Regime b) Reforms in APMC Act and streamlining of Mandi fee c) Liberalising Land Leasing norms
	Infrastructure and Logistics Boost	● Involves pre-harvest and post-harvest handling facilities, storage & distribution, processing facilities, roads and world class exit point infrastructure at ports facilitating swift trade.
	Holistic approach to boost Exports	● Coordinated approach by all Ministries

Component		Major Recommendations
	Greater involvement of State Governments in Agri Exports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Identification of a nodal State Department / Agency for promotion of agriculture export b) Inclusion on agricultural exports in the State Export Policy c) Infrastructure and Logistics to facilitate agricultural exports d) Institutional Mechanism at State level and cluster level to support exports
Operational	Focus on Clusters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Identify suitable production clusters b) Conduct farmer registrations c) Digitization of land records d) Promote Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO) e) Should be implemented in partnership with private exporters f) Creation of a corpus for export oriented horticultural production through development of clusters.
	Promoting Value added exports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Product development for indigenous commodities and value addition b) Promote Value added Organic exports c) Promotion of R&D activities for new product Development for the upcoming markets
	Marketing and promotion of "Brand India"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● constituting separate funds dedicated to organic, value added, ethnic, GI and branded products.
	Attract private investments into production and processing	

Component		Major Recommendations
	Establishment of strong quality regimen	a) strong R&D, new varieties, state of the art lab and a lab networking process for effective accreditation and monitoring. b) Establish and maintain single supply chain and standards for domestic and export market
	Self-sufficiency and export centric production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • export oriented production aimed at self-sufficiency and exports.
	Research & Development	a) Public-private partnership in agriculture R&D b) innovations in packaging, improving shelf life of products and greater R & D in developing products to suit the demand of importing countries
	Miscellaneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of Agri-start-up fund

58. Tourists bring a wave of trash to beaches

News:

Study by the National Centre of Coastal Research (NCCR) shows concern over rising plastic pollution on Indian beaches.

Facts:

- The NCCR conducted analysis of the litter on six different beaches on the eastern and western coasts and found that plastic litter from tourism alone accounted for 40%-96% of all beach litter.
- **Major Source of Plastic pollution on beaches:**
 - As per the report **tourism and fishing** are the biggest culprits.
 - While fishing nets were a major contributor, the processing of fish on the beach also produced a lot of litter.
 - Proportion of **biomedical litter** was high in urban areas including litter consisted of plastic bottles and thermocol

Chemicals in Plastic

- The plastic-related chemicals that are of critical concern for human health are—**bisphenol-A** or BPA, and additives used in the synthesis of plastics, which are known as **phthalates**

Impact of Plastic Pollution on beaches:

- **Marine pollution**
 - Because it comes in sizes large and small, polluting plastics even affect the world's tiniest organisms such as plankton and Fishes. When they get poisoned due to plastic ingestion, this causes problems for the larger animals that depend on them for food.
 - Reefs littered with plastic are at least 20 times as likely to have diseased corals as unpolluted reefs
- Presently, Government is working on an Action Plan to Check Plastic Waste Flowing into Oceans and bring National Marine Litter Policy.
- **The Great Pacific Garbage** – Patch is also known as a plastic trash vortex or gyre. It is located in the central North Pacific Ocean and is larger than two States of Texas. Patches of garbage are also seen in the Atlantic Ocean.
- **National Center of Coastal Research (NCCR)**
 - The NCCR programme has been operating on a project mode since 1998.
 - It aims to apply scientific tools and techniques in addressing problems like erosion and ecosystem changes and Coastal Ocean Monitoring and Prediction System (COMAPS) programme aiming to monitor the levels of marine pollutants in the seas around India.
- **Blue Flag** – Is a globally recognised **eco-label awarded to beaches** and marinas that adhere to strict environmental and safety norms.

59. Air pollution linked to 12.4L deaths in India in '17: Report

News:

Lancet Planetary Health report revealed 12.4L deaths in 2017 are linked to air pollution in India.

Facts:

Major Findings of the report

- One out of eight deaths in India is attributable to air pollution, which now contributes to more disease burden than smoking.

- About 77% of India's population is exposed to outdoor air pollution levels above the National Ambient Air Quality Standards safe limit
- India has 18% of the global population and it suffered 26% of premature mortality and health loss attributable to air pollution globally.
- It highlighted that apart from respiratory diseases, pollution also causes ischemic heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lung cancer, commonly associated with smoking.
- According to report by Indian Council of Medical Research finding the average life expectancy in India would have been 1.7 years higher if the air pollution level were less than the minimal level

State Contribution:

- States in east and north India had highest levels of both ambient particulate matter and household air pollution. Punjab had some of the highest ambient particulate matter pollution.

Major Source of pollution burden

- Major sources include transport vehicles, construction activity, industry and thermal power emissions, residential and commercial solid fuel use, waste and agriculture burning, diesel generators, and manual road dust sweeping
- **National Ambient Air Quality Standards**
 - Established by the **United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** for harmful pollutants.
 - (NAAQS) have been set for six principal pollutants known as criteria pollutants. They are **carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter** (airborne suspensions of extremely small solid or liquid particles), **sulfur oxides, and ground-level ozone** (ozone is not directly emitted into the air but it is formed by sunlight acting on emissions of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds).
 - NAAQS is **applied for outdoor air** throughout the country.