Abhimanu

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Abhimanu's IAS Study Group

Chandigarh

NATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk Industry

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for Central Sector Scheme "Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk Industry" for the next three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- The scheme will be implemented through Central Silk Board (CSB).

Salient Features of the Scheme

- The scheme will benefit 85 lakh people in the silk sector.
- It will provide livelihood opportunities for women, those belonging to SCs and STs, and other weaker sections of the society across the country, including those from Left-Wing Extremism affected areas and North Eastern Region.
- Silk farmers, seed producers and chawki rearers will be brought under Direct Benefit Transfer, with Aadhaar linkage.
- A helpline will be set up for timely redressal of grievances & outreach programmes will be undertaken.
- Registration process & reporting by seed production centres, basic seed farms and extension centre will be automated through web-based software.
- Support to be given to: a) Private graineurs to produce quality seed; b) Chawki Rearing Centres with incubation facilities, to produce and supply chawki worm: c) Adopted seed-rearers to generate quality seed cocoons
- Cold storage will be set up, which will also provide mobile disinfection units and equipment support for mechanization
- 131 new Chawki Rearing Centres (CRCs) will be established for scientific handling of silkworm eggs and rearing of young age silkworm larvae under controlled conditions to enhance quality of cocoon and their harvest.
- 81 units will be installed to provide cocoon drying facility in a scientific manner for improved reeling.
- Automatic reeling machine for mulberry, improved reeling/spinning machineries and Buniyaad Reeling machines for Vanya silk under Make in India program will be disseminated to produce quality silk.
- For Government-owned facilities, 100% cost will be borne by the Government of India.
- For individual beneficiaries: SC/ST- 65% cost by Central Government, 25% by State Government and 10% by the beneficiary.
- Beneficiaries from NE states, J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh - 80% cost to be borne by Central Government whereas individual and State Government will bear 10% each.
- General: 50% cost will be borne by the Central Government, 25% by the State Government.

Krishi Vigyan Kendras

- The ministries of agriculture and skill development have signed a pact to conduct programmes for training in farm and allied sectors at 690 Krishi Vigyan Kendras across the country.
- About 40% of the country's workforce is linked to agricultural knowledge activities. The government aims to double farmers' income. However, without skill upgradation, this is not possible. There are rapid technological strides in the agriculture sector; therefore, upskilling is needed.

About Krishi Vigyan Kendra:

- Krsihi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) are agricultural extension centres created by ICAR (Indian Council for Agricultural Research) and its affiliated institutions at district level to provide various types of farm support to the agricultural sector. The first KVK was established during 1974 (Pondichery) and has grown as a largest network in the country.
- KVKs provide several farm support activities like providing technology dissemination to farmers, training, awareness etc.
- To achieve the set objectives KVKs undertake following types of activities in the adopted villages: (1) Farm Advisory Service (2) Training programme for different categories of people. (3) Training programme for the extension functionaries. (4) Front Line Demonstration (Fill) (5) On Farm Testing (OFT).
- They play a vital role in conducting on farm testing to demonstrate location specific agricultural technologies.
- KVKs conducts demonstrations to prove the potential of various crops at farmers' fields. They also conduct need based training programmes for the benefit of farmers and farm women, rural youths.
- KVKs are creating awareness about improved agricultural technologies through large number of extension programmes. Critical and quality inputs like seeds, planting materials, organic products, biofertilizers and livestock, piglet and poultry strains are produced by the KVKs and made available to the farmers.
- As per the mandate of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, K.V.K. will operate under the administrative control of State Agricultural University (SAU) or Central Institute situated in a particular area. Different scientists from different disciplines as per the specific requirement of that particular area are posted in the Krishi Vigyan Kendra as Training Associate.
- The KVKs are evolving as the future grass root level institutions for empowering the farming community. KVKs have made dent and has become part of decentralized planning and implementation instrument to achieve desired level of growth in agriculture and allied sector.

'SATHE' program

- NITI Aayog has released comprehensive roadmaps and detailed timelines for its initiative 'Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital in Education (SATH-E)'.

About SATHE Program:

- The SATH-E initiative in based on formal agreements with the States and will be funded through a cost-sharing mechanism between NITI Aayog and the participating states.
- The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Piramal Foundation for Education Leadership (PFEL) were chosen as knowledge partners for the project facilitating review, data collection and implementation.
- SATH-E has been envisaged as a programme which aims to transform elementary and secondary school education across these three states.
- SATH-E roadmap refers to a time-bound, goal-driven exercise that will reach its logical culmination by the end of the academic year 2020.
- Further, the foundations of other long term interventions, as is found necessary by each state, would be laid during this period.
- Limiting interventions to only those where there is complete state buy-in for sustainability, the whole process would be done in consultation with the states and MHRD. This will be facilitated by the National Steering Group (NSG), chaired by the CEO of NITI Aayog and including the Chief Secretaries of the States, which will continuously monitor progress, introduce course-corrections and offer a platform for addressing issues in implementation.
- Thus, SATH-E aims to create role model States for education and mainstream 'islands of excellence' across the country to facilitate qualitative and quantitative transformation of learning outcomes. Marrying technology with need-based, data-driven assessment and a 'giving it what it takes' approach - be it innovation, incubation, external third party funding and Public- Private- Philanthropic Partnership (PPPP) experimentation – SATH-E puts the States in the driver's seat to transform education at scale.

Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill, 2017

- Parliament has passed the Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill, 2017. Besides enabling the central government to fix the ceiling of tax free gratuity, the bill will also empower it to fix the period of maternity leave through executive order. The Bill seeks to empower the government to fix the period of maternity leave and the tax-free gratuity amount with an executive order.
- Introduced in 1972, the Act was enacted to provide for a scheme for the payment of gratuity to employees engaged in factories, mines, oilfields, plantations, ports, railway companies, shops and other establishments. Employees who have rendered a minimum five years of continuous service with the establishment employing ten or more persons fall under the Act.

The 2017 bill seeks to amend the Act on two issues.

- First, it empowers the government to notify the period of maternity leave eligible for qualifying as continuous service and determine the amount of gratuity available to employees.
- Under the Act, the maximum maternity leave (Section 2A) was based on the maternity leave stated under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.
- After the amendment of the Maternity Act in 2017, the maximum maternity leave under the Maternity Act was changed from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.
- The present bill sought to remove the reference of 12 weeks in the Act and empowers the government to notify the maximum maternity leave.
- Secondly, the Act had introduced a ceiling of Rs. 10 lakh on the maximum amount of gratuity payable to an employee through an amendment in 2010.
- The provision was based on the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules, 1972 enacted for government employees. After the implementation of the 7th Central Pay Commission, the ceiling gratuity for Central Government employees has been enhanced from Rs. 10 lakh to Rs. 20 lakh.
- Seeking to amend the current provision (Section 4) of the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, the bill empowers the government to notify the ceiling proposed instead of amending the Act. This amendment was sought so that the limit can be revised from time to time with the increase in wage and inflation and future pay commissions.
- Gratuity is calculated based on 15 days of wages for each year of continuous and complete service, subject to a ceiling.

Draft policy on defence production

- Government has released a draft policy on defence production which increases the foreign direct investment (FDI) cap in niche technology areas to 74% under the automatic route, in a bid to boost local manufacturing and catapult India into the league of countries housing top defence and aerospace industries.
- At present, the FDI cap for the defence sector is 49% under the automatic route for all categories.

Highlights:

- This policy aims to “create an environment that encourages a dynamic, robust and competitive defence industry, as an important part of the Make in India initiative”.
- It also aims to “facilitate faster absorption of technology and create a tiered defence industrial ecosystem in the country”, besides reducing the “dependence on imports” to “achieve self-reliance”.
- India is currently the top importer of defence hardware in the world. According to the policy, India hopes to achieve a turnover of Rs1.7 trillion in defence goods and services by 2025. It has a goal of becoming an arms exporter to the tune of Rs35,000 crore in defence goods and services by 2025.
- The government is targeting achieving self-reliance in the development and manufacture of fighter aircraft, medium-lift and utility helicopters, warships, land combat vehicles, autonomous weapon systems, missiles,

guns, small arms, ammunition, explosives, surveillance, electronic warfare and communication systems and night fighting equipment.

- To achieve all these goals and to make it easier to do business in the area of defence for innovators, small- and medium-sized enterprises, the policy proposes to bring in enabling provisions to ensure start-ups and small enterprises participate "without having restrictions of turnover" or "prior experience".
- The government will list its requirements in terms of platforms and weapon systems for the next decade to help private sector companies understand the opportunities.
- It will also simplify procedures for private firms to enter defence production, i.e., liberalize the regime by issuing licences in 30 days and pruning no-go areas to a small 'negative list' for licensing.
- The government will also do away with capacity assessment, except for critical projects. It will introduce earnest money deposits and performance guarantees as safeguards for others.
- With regard to offsets, the government has proposed to set up an ombudsman for resolving all such claims. Offsets—investments through a local partner to set up an ecosystem of suppliers—would be investment linked.
- In the area of taxation, the government has proposed rationalization of taxes on import of capital goods for services and inputs for defence and aims to prevent inversion of taxes.

NATIONAL POLITY

No confidence motion

- The YSR Congress has proposed a no-confidence motion against the NDA government on the issue of granting special category status to Andhra Pradesh. The motion will be the first such move during the tenure of this NDA government.

About No confidence motion:

- Article 75 of the Indian Constitution specifies that the council of ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of the People, there is no mention of a no-confidence motion in the constitution: All it means is that the majority of Lok Sabha members must be with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet.
- Article 118 of the Constitution permits each house of Parliament to make its own rules for conduct of business. Rule 198 of the Lok Sabha specifies the procedure for a motion of no-confidence.
- Any member might give a written notice before 10 am; the Speaker will read the motion of no-confidence in the House and ask all those favouring the motion be taken up to rise. If there are 50 MPs in favour, the Speaker could allot a date for discussing the motion – but this has to be within 10 days. However, this cannot be done in conditions of din or confusion in the House.

Did a govt ever lose a no-confidence motion in India?

- The first National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government had lost such a motion in 1999.

What happens if both a motion for no-confidence and a motion for confidence are tabled?

- In 1990, when V P Singh had tabled a motion of confidence and a member had given the notice for a no-confidence motion, the Speaker had given precedence to government business and taken the motion of confidence.

What happens if the prime minister loses a motion of confidence?

- He has to resign, and the President has to identify another person who enjoys the confidence of the Lok Sabha.

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for continuation of Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) from April 2017 to March 2020.

About RUSA:

- Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2013 aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.
- It is a centrally sponsored scheme(in the ratio of 60:40 for general category States, 90:10 for special category states and 100% for union territories

Objectives

- Improve the overall quality of state institutions by ensuring conformity to prescribed norms and standards and adopt accreditation as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- Usher transformative reforms in the state higher education system by creating a facilitating institutional structure for planning and monitoring at the state level, promoting autonomy in State Universities and improving governance in institutions.
- Ensure reforms in the affiliation, academic and examination systems.
- Ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and ensure capacity building at all levels of employment.
- Create an enabling atmosphere in the higher educational institutions to devote themselves to research and innovations.
- Expand the institutional base by creating additional capacity in existing institutions and establishing new institutions, in order to achieve enrolment targets.
- Correct regional imbalances in access to higher education by setting up institutions in unserved & underserved areas.
- Improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities of higher education to SC/STs and socially and educationally backward classes; promote inclusion of women, minorities, and differently abled persons.

Autonomy to Higher Educational Institutions

- University Grants Commission has granted autonomy to sixty Higher Educational Institutions which have maintained high academic standards.
- Autonomy is granted to institutes based on the parameters of excellence in academic performances, capability of self-governance and enhancement in the quality of education, and it can be seen as a great opportunity to meet the emerging and evolving needs, in sync with the industry.
- These universities will remain within the ambit of UGC but will have the freedom to start new courses, off campus centers, skill development courses, research parks and any other new academic programs.
- They will also have the freedom to hire foreign faculty, enroll foreign students, give incentive based emoluments to the faculty, enter into academic collaborations and run open distance learning programmes.
- The eight autonomous collages, granted autonomy, will be free to set their own syllabus, hold examinations, carry out evaluation as well as declare results. In this case, only the degree will be awarded by the respective university.

Analysis:

- There are five central universities, 21 state universities, 24 deemed universities and two private universities that have been given this 'autonomy' — "which have maintained high academic standards".
- They include some of the highest-quality public universities, such as Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Hyderabad, Jadavpur University, Aligarh Muslim University, Osmania University, Savitribai Phule Pune University, and Banaras Hindu University, among others.

- According to the UGC regulations, these universities will no longer need UGC's permission to start a new courses, programmes, departments, schools, centres — as long as they do not ask for funds from the government. They must do it in self-financing mode. There is possibility that this will not only lead to a steep increase in student fees, but will propel the universities and colleges to start commercial courses, solely for the sake of financing.
- Universities are free to open off-campus centres without inspection or interference from the government — as long as they are able to "arrange both recurring and non-recurring revenue sources and does not need any assistance for the same from the UGC or the Government".
- Higher education plays a crucial role in the realisation of India's potential for economic and technological growth. Autonomy helps institutionalise quality and accountability, thereby encouraging institutions to incorporate unique pedagogical developments and practices into the curriculum.
- Management education is meant to be contemporary in nature and thus dynamic. Frequent changes are required in pedagogy, curriculum and other aspects. An autonomous status expedites these operations and thus enthuses constant fluidity in the pattern and curriculum, apart from accelerating and improving evaluation.

Nabakalebar festival

- Commemorative coins in denominations of ₹10 and ₹1000 have been released on Lord Jagannath's Nabakalebar festival.

About Nabakalebar festival:

- Nabakalebar is all about transformation of Puri temple, Odisha lords into the new body. The new wooden idols of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, Goddess Subhadra and Sudarshan are welcoming to the temple with great celebration and it is a great occasion for Odisha people. The new idols are carved and old ones are cremated with rituals mentioned in the century old Odia scriptures.
- Depend on the almanac positions of Hindu calendar the transformation or the Nabakalebar takes place once in every 12 to 19 years. Usually it is held in that year when the month of Ashadha is followed by another Ashadha.
- The previous Nabakalebars were taken place in the years like 1969, 1978 and 1996 and this year again all devotees are getting the opportunity to see changing form of lords.
- From a religious point of view the temple management and priest have to identify the holy tree with a group of search team as prescribed in the temple records. They trace the trees with support of divine dream, then next they start their stopover at Kakatpur, the abode of Goddess Mangala. After that carving of the idols, transfer of Bramha from old to new idol and finally sacred burial of old bodies of Lords are the major rituals which are combinely named as the process of Nabakalebar.

Notice to Bengal over GI tag for 'Rosogolla

- The Geographical Indication (GI) Registry has issued a notice to the West Bengal State Food Processing and Horticulture Development Corporation, asking why the GI recognition given to 'Banglar Rosogolla' not be withdrawn.
- A petition was recently filed objecting to the GI status procured by West Bengal for 'Banglar Rosogolla' four months ago.
- The petitioner questioned the data and documents provided by West Bengal for getting GI tag for this famous sweet.
- He had also pointed out that Odisha was not given a chance to explain its stance when the West Bengal State Food Processing & Horticulture Development Corporation applied for GI status.

About Geographical indicators:

- GI(Geographical Indications) are signs used on goods that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that place of origin.

- Agricultural products typically have qualities that derive from their place of production and are influenced by specific local factors, such as climate and soil. They may also highlight specific qualities of a product, which are due to human factors that can be found in the place of origin of the products, such as specific manufacturing skills and traditions.
- A geographical indication points to a specific place or region of production that determines the characteristic qualities of the product that originates therein. It is important that the product derives its qualities and reputation from that place.
- Place of origin may be a village or town, a region or a country. It is an exclusive right given to a particular community hence the benefits of its registration are shared by the all members of the community.
- Keeping in view the large diversity of traditional products spread all over the country, the registration under GI will be very important in future growth of the tribes / communities / skilled artisans associated in developing such products.

Analysis:

- There are number of challenges with the Geographical indicators. Firstly, An important dimension of GI is that it does not protect knowledge or technology as such. It only protects the name or indication. This essentially means that the famous Banarasi sari can be produced anywhere in the world but it cannot be named 'Banarasi sari'. For a price-conscious consumer, it might not make much sense to buy GI certified products at a premium, if the same product is available elsewhere.
- Secondly, there is the ambiguity in the definition of the term 'producer' in the legislation which does not distinguish between real producer, retailer or dealer.
- Thirdly, Government activities related to GI is concentrated mostly on registering GI products where the state governments are acting in haste. Identification of GI based products and their registration is happening without adequate due thoroughness. Groups filling for GI registration do not assess the commercial prospect of a GI product in the domestic and international markets or the potential of such registration in contributing towards the future growth of the product as well as the socio-economic implication for the communities involved in the supply chain.
- fourthly, Defining the exact geographical boundaries of a product is often a big challenge, particularly in the context of non-agricultural products.
- Fifthly, There is currently exists no standard procedures for consultation before registration and it is most probable that pre- application process may end up in inadequate consultations with various stakeholders including retailers. While marketing and promotion efforts may need sustained commitment of resources, yet there is no guarantee of such success particularly for new GI products. There is also constant need for building capacity and awareness about GIs among various stakeholders including consumers.

Usage of MPVs In Sukma Maoist Blast Under Scanner

- The usage of an 'all visible' mine protected vehicle (MPV), in which nine CRPF men were killed Chhattisgarh, with Maoists lurking around in a denuded forest area is being seen as a glaring lapse and the rationale to use them is being probed.
- MPVs are by and large designed to withstand 'pressure' IEDs that use 5-7 kg of explosives. Maoists, however, target them with 'trigger' IEDs stuffed with at least 20-30 kg of explosives.
- A 50-kg IED is suspected to have been used in latest attack, which completely wrecked the MPV.
- Such a large IED can toss even these massive vehicles several feet into the air — and even if the MPV is not ripped open, its occupants die of head injuries, shock and neck fractures.

Historical Background:

- The first MPVs were developed during World War II when Allied forces faced the massive task of removing mines from the African desert.

- Significant innovations were made during the Rhodesian Bush War (1972-80) when the Rhodesian government developed a suit of MPVs that could withstand Soviet TM-46 anti-tank mines. The US and European powers worked on these vehicles to develop the modern-day MPV.
- The Indian Army first used MPVs in Jammu and Kashmir in the late 90s. South African Casspir MPVs, inducted in early 1998, were highly effective in moving troops and protecting them from ambushes and pressure IEDs used by militants. In the early 2000s, Casspir MPVs were pushed into Maoist zones in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. But the Maoists quickly learnt their limitations, and by late 2005, casualties began to be reported from IED attacks on them.

Indian MPV:

- Based on Casspir, DRDO developed 'Aditya' in 2001. But it was only in 2007 that the MPVs began to roll out of the Ordnance Factories Board's manufacturing facility in Medak.
- Like Casspir, Aditya could withstand the impact of 14 kg of TNT IED under the wheels and 10 kg TNT IED under the hull and side walls. It is very effective against ballistic attacks — its armour blocks a range of bullets from a distance of 10 m.
- An MPV such as the Aditya typically has a body reinforced with solid steel or alloy, with a floor of extra thick steel sheets. It has a V-shaped steel monocoque hull that directs the force of the blast away from the vehicle's occupants. Field experiments have shown a V-shaped hull will be propelled in the air to only a third of the height compared to a flat hull exposed to the same force of blast. The monocoque technology ensures that the wheels, which are expected to take the first impact, are separated from the chassis, preventing the crew compartment from being thrown high in the air.
- The vehicle can seat 12 soldiers, and has a provision for a remote weapon station or a mounted turret for a light or medium machine gun.

Manesar land scam

- The Central Bureau of Investigation had registered a case in September 2015 on allegations that private builders, in conspiracy with unknown public servants of Haryana government, had purchased around 400 acres of land from farmers at Manesar at throwaway prices.

Background:

- On August 27, 2004, Haryana issued a notification under Section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act, announcing the acquisition of 912 acres in Manesar, Lakhnaula and Naurangpur to set up the 'Chaudhary Devi Lal Industrial Township'. On August 25, 2005, a notification under Section 6 of the Act was issued for 688 acres; the rest of the land was released from acquisition. Thereafter, a notification under Section 9 was issued, saying the compensation to affected landowners would be announced on August 26, 2007.
- From 2004 to 2007, private builders struck deals with the landowners. A total of 114 sale deeds were executed. At that time, it was expected that the compensation would be around Rs 12.5 lakh per acre, on a par with the prevailing government rates.
- To persuade the landowners, the builders offered them Rs 20-25 lakh per acre. As the date for the announcement of final compensation award came closer, the builders reportedly offered Rs 80 lakh per acre. But on August 24, 2007, two days before the scheduled date, the government dropped acquisition proceedings, and announced that a fresh notification would be issued later. The builders then sold the landholdings at Rs 1.2 crore to Rs 4.5 crore per acre.
- In 2011, 117 affected landowners from Manesar filed a civil writ petition seeking action against the state government and builders for having allegedly compelled them to divest their land at throwaway prices under the threat of acquisition. They pleaded that since the acquisition proceeding was initiated and then withdrawn with mala fide intentions, all transactions, including sale deeds, be set aside.

Court Verdict:

- Terming the withdrawal of acquisition proceedings a "fraud" and "mala fide exercise of power", the apex court restored acquisition of 688 acres in the three villages.
- The court ruled that the land shall vest in Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) and Haryana State Industrial & Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIDC), free from all encumbrances.

- The court directed the CBI to investigate all transactions and recover all moneys, and hand it over to the state government. It also asked the agency to unearth all "unnatural gains received by the middlemen".

Will original owners get their land back?

- No. As per the order, "If the result of forcing land holders to enter into unnatural and unreasonable bargain was achieved by wrongful utilization of the power conferred under the Act, in its writ jurisdiction a superior court would be justified in granting the relief of invalidating such transaction…"
- However, the court added, "in the circumstances, the public interest which the acquisition was intended to achieve will never be sub-served… The real and substantial relief would be in restoring the situation where the process of acquisition is made free from such supervening vested interests and is enabled to achieve the objective that the acquisition was intended to sub-serve."

Cabinet approves North-East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS) 2017

- The Union Cabinet has approved the North East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS), 2017 with financial outlay of Rs.3000 crores up to March, 2020.
- Government will provide necessary allocations for remaining period of scheme after assessment before March 2020.
- NEIDS is a combination of the incentives covered under the earlier two schemes with a much larger outlay.

About this scheme:

- In order to promote employment in the North East States, Government is incentivizing primarily the MSME Sector through this scheme. Government is also providing specific incentive through the scheme to generate employment.
- All eligible industrial units, which are getting benefits of one or more components of other schemes of the Government of India, will also be considered for benefits of other components of this scheme.

Under the Scheme, the following incentives shall be provided to new industrial units set up in the North Eastern States including Sikkim:

Central Capital Investment Incentive for Access to Credit (CCIIAC):

- 30% of the investment in Plant & Machinery with an upper limit of Rs.5 Crore on the incentive amount per unit.

Central Interest Incentive (CII):

- 3% on working capital credit advanced by eligible Banks/ Financial institutions for first 5 years from the date of commencement of commercial production by the unit.

Central Comprehensive Insurance Incentive (CCII):

- Reimbursement of 100% insurance premium on insurance of building and Plant & Machinery for 5 years from the date of commencement of commercial production by the unit.

Goods and Service Tax (GST) Reimbursement:

- Reimbursement up to the extent of Central Govt. share of CGST and IGST for 5 Years from the date of commencement of commercial production by the unit.

Income-Tax (IT) Reimbursement:

- Reimbursement of Centre's share of income tax for first 5 years including the year of commencement of commercial production by the unit.

Transport Incentive (TI)

- 20% of the cost of transportation including the subsidy currently provided by Railways/ Railway PSU for movement of finished goods by rail.
- 20% of cost of transportation for finished goods, for movement through InlandWaterways Authority of India.

- 33% of cost of transportation of air freight on perishable goods (as defined by IATA) from the airport nearest to place of production toany airport within the country.

Employment Incentive (EI)

- The Government shall pay 3.67% of the employer's contribution to the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) in addition to Government bearing 8.33% Employee Pension Scheme (EPS) contribution of the employer in the Pradhan MantriRojgarProtsahanYojana (PMRPY).

Ayushman Bharat -National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM)

- Union Cabinet has approved the launch of a new Centrally Sponsored Ayushman Bharat -National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM) having central sector component under Ayushman Bharat Mission anchored in the MoHFW.
- The scheme has the benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year.
- The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on SECC database.
- AB-NHPM will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes -Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).

Salient Features:

- AB-NHPM will have a defined benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year.
- This cover will take care of almost all secondary care and most of tertiary care procedures. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme.
- The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses. All pre-existing conditions will be covered from day one of the policy.
- A defined transport allowance per hospitalization will also be paid to the beneficiary.
- Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.
- AB-NHPM will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.
- The different categories in rural area include families having only one room with kucha walls and kucharoof; families having no adult member between age 16 to 59; female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59; disabled member and no able bodied adult member in the family; SC/ST households; and landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour.
- Also, automatically included families in rural areas having any one of the following: households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour. For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme.
- The beneficiaries can avail benefits in both public and empanelled private facilities. All public hospitals in the States implementing AB-NHPM, will be deemed empanelled for the Scheme. Hospitals belonging to Employee State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) may also be empanelled based on the bed occupancy ratio parameter. As for private hospitals, they will be empanelled online based on defined criteria.
- To control costs, the payments for treatment will be done on package rate (to be defined by the Government in advance) basis.
- The package rates will include all the costs associated with treatment. For beneficiaries, it will be a cashless, paper less transaction. Keeping in view the State specific requirements, States/ UTs will have the flexibility to modify these rates within a limited bandwidth.
- One of the core principles of AB-NHPM is to co-operative federalism and flexibility to states. There is provision to partner the States through co-alliance.
- This will ensure appropriate integration with the existing health insurance/ protection schemes of various Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments (at their own cost), State Governments will be

allowed to expand AB-NHPM both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for implementation.

- They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.
- States would need to have State Health Agency (SHA) to implement the scheme States will have the option to use an existing Trust / Society / Not for Profit Company/ State Nodal Agency or set up a new Trust / Society / Not for Profit Company/ State Health Agency to implement the scheme and act as SHA. At the district level also, a structure for implementation of the scheme will need to be set up.
- To ensure that the funds reach SHA on time, the transfer of funds from Central Government through AB-NHPMA to State Health Agencies may be done through an escrow account directly. The State has to contribute its matching share of grants within defined time frame.
- In partnership with NITI Aayog, a robust, modular, scalable and interoperable IT platform will be made operational which will entail a paperless, cashless transaction.
- This will also help in prevention / detection of any potential misuse / fraud / abuse cases. This will be backed by a well-defined Grievance Redressal Mechanism.
- In addition, pre-Authorisation of treatments with moral hazards (Potential of misuse) will be made mandatory.
- In order to ensure that the scheme reaches the intended beneficiaries and other stakeholders, a comprehensive media and outreach strategy will be developed, which will, inter alia, include print media, electronic media, social media platforms, traditional media, IEC materials and outdoor activities.

Benefits:

- Increase the benefit cover to nearly 40% of the population, (the poorest&the vulnerable)
- Covering almost all secondary and many tertiary hospitalizations. (except a negative list)
- Coverage of 5 lakh for each family, (no restriction of family size)
- This will lead to increased access to quality health and medication. In addition, the unmet needs of the population which remained hidden due to lack of financial resources will be catered to. This will lead to timely treatments, improvements in health outcomes, patient satisfaction, improvement in productivity and efficiency, job creation thus leading to improvement in quality of life.

Amendment to the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for moving official amendments to the 'Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016'.
- The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016 proposes to regulate surrogacy in India by establishing National Surrogacy Board at the Central level and State Surrogacy Boards and Appropriate Authorities in the States and Union Territories.
- The proposed legislation ensures effective regulation of surrogacy, prohibit commercial surrogacy and allow altruistic surrogacy to the needy Indian infertile couples.
- Once the Bill is enacted by the Parliament, the National Surrogacy Board will be constituted. The States and Union Territories shall constitute the State Surrogacy Board and State Appropriate Authorities within three months of the notification by the notification by the Central Government.

Analysis:

- This act will regulate the surrogacy services in the country and will control the unethical practices in surrogacy, prevent commercialization of surrogacy and will prohibit potential exploitation of surrogate mothers and children born through surrogacy.
- While commercial surrogacy will be prohibited, including sale and purchase of human embryo and gametes, ethical surrogacy to the needy infertile couples will be allowed on the fulfilment of certain conditions and for specific purposes.
- All infertile Indian married couples, who want to avail of ethical surrogacy, will be benefitted. Further, the rights of surrogate mother and children born out of surrogacy will be protected.

- India has emerged as a surrogacy hub for couples from different countries and there have been reported incidents concerning unethical practices, exploitation of surrogate mothers, abandonment of children born out of surrogacy and rackets of intermediaries importing human embryos and gametes. The 228th report of the Law Commission of India has recommended for prohibiting commercial surrogacy and allowing ethical altruistic surrogacy by enacting a suitable legislation.

INTETRNATIONAL AFFAIRS

India emerges as world's largest importer of arms

- According to a latest research released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India has emerged as the largest importer of major arms.

Important highlights:

- Global arms and military services sales rose for the first time since 2010, with India, Saudi Arabia, UAE, China and Algeria emerging as the top importers during the five year period of 2012-2016.
- Together, these countries accounted for 34 percent of all global imports with India leading the table accounting for 13 percent for all arms imports. Vietnam was a new entry in the top-10 arms importers accounting for 3 percent of all global sales.
- Based on sales by the world's 100 biggest arms producers, the report pointed at an increase of 1.9 percent (based on 2015 US dollar values) from 2015 with $374.8 billion spent on arms and military services. Based on current US dollar values, the arms sales rose by 1.3 percent.
- The volume of transfers of major weapons in 2012–16 was 8.4 percent higher than in 2007–11.
- The United States managed its stand as the world's largest spender followed by China and Russia. The US also accounted for largest share of arms sales (33 percent) followed by Russia 23 percent.
- Saudi Arabia, the fourth largest spender, is the largest client of American arms, accounting for 13 percent of arms sales by US companies.
- The US also accounted for 14 percent of all Indian purchases, however, it was Russia which led the table accounting for 68 percent of India's arms imports during 2012-2016.
- India was also among the top five spenders on arms and military services in 2016 spending $55,923 million in arms and military services.
- Though USA, Russia, China, France, and Germany accounted for 74 percent of the total volume of arms exports, a change was witnessed in arms exporters with South Korea maintaining its stand as an emerging arms supplier, whereas Germany and France seeing a decrease in arms sales.

About SIPRI:

- SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Established in 1966, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public. Based in Stockholm, SIPRI also has a presence in Beijing, and is regularly ranked among the most respected think tanks worldwide.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (RIMES)

- The Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (RIMES), an UN-registered agency will collaborate with Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) to strengthen its quality, prediction ability and response capacity.
- RIMES will provide technical support to OSDMA regarding analysis of data to be generated through automatic weather stations being installed in all the gram panchayats, validation of the forecast, early warning and preparedness for lightening, heat wave, flood, draught and Tsunami.
- It would enhance the warning response capacities of the OSDMA by imparting specialized expert training. It will also help to develop a one-stop risk management system for all OSDMA needs- integration of multiple data database/servers.

About RIMES:

- RIMES was established on 30 April 2009 to provide user-relevant early warning services to its Member States and others. It is governed by a Council, composed of heads of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) presently chaired by India. Council decisions are carried out by the RIMES Secretariat, which is currently Maldives. RIMES programs and projects are implemented by the Program Unit, which also operates and manages the regional early warning facility, located near Bangkok, Thailand.
- The RIMES Council established a Ministerial Consortium for obtaining highest-level political endorsement and guidance for mobilizing resources to fund Master Plan implementation and RIMES delivery of core services. The Ministerial Consortium comprises of Ministers that have purview of the NMHS or national scientific and technical agency that generate multi-hazard early warning information in RIMES Member States.

RIMES Consortium of Ministers first met in New Delhi in June 2012 and the present Ministerial meeting was the Second. Twenty-three countries were represented in the conference today, with participation of Ministers and Ambassadors, and Senior Officials. The nations represented were Afghanistan, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Comoros, India, Lao PDR, Maldives, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, Philippines, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

Cold fusion

- Cold fusion — or its successor technologies such as Low Energy Nuclear Reaction (LENR) — remains a dead-end and a false hope for many scientists across the world. India, however, is taking tentative steps towards restarting research into it, some 25 years after it was shut down at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) following global criticism heaped on the idea.

What is cold fusion?

- Cold fusion is a hypothetical process in which hydrogen fusion supposedly occurs at room temperature. The topic is controversial, because the notion appears to defy the laws of physics. Some scientists believe that cold fusion represents a real phenomenon and that it will someday form the basis for an abundant, cheap source of energy. Others maintain that cold fusion, like perpetual motion, is impossible.
- Hydrogen fusion as it is currently known is the process responsible for the energy output of the sun and most other stars.
- It does not ordinarily take place unless there is extreme heat (millions of degrees Celsius) and extreme pressure. The only officially documented examples of human-generated fusion involve the explosions of hydrogen bombs.

- In the hydrogen fusion process, the nuclei of hydrogen atoms are driven together to form helium nuclei. It takes four hydrogen nuclei to ultimately produce a single helium nucleus . Energy, and certain subatomic particles, are emitted as byproducts.
- After the first hydrogen bombs were successfully tested, scientists and engineers began searching for a way to control hydrogen fusion reactions and harness the energy in a constructive manner. Hydrogen fusion generates no dangerous nuclear waste, is far more efficient than the fission processes currently used in nuclear reactors, and has as its basis the most abundant element in the universe (hydrogen).
- In 1989, Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann of the University of Utah claimed to have produced hydrogen fusion in a controlled experiment at room temperature. The news created a stir among scientists, engineers, government agencies, and the public. It also caused a controversy among physicists that has been going on ever since.

Analysis:

- No radioactive materials are used in cold fusion. It occurs as the tiny protons, neutrons and electrons of hydrogen interact, releasing energy slowly, through heat and photons, without the dangerous radiation associated with conventional nuclear reactions, and cold fusion makes no radioactive waste.
- Cold fusion seeks to produce nuclear energy without harmful radiation, complex equipment and the application of very high temperatures and pressures. But it has no conclusive theory explaining it and flies in the face of a well-established physics law that goes against easy fusion of nuclei. There is no guarantee that every time a cold fusion or LENR experiment is done, energy will be produced.

QUICK FACTS

- According to WEF energy transition index, rank of India is**: 78**
- 17th World Conference on Tobacco was held in: **South Africa**
- World Sparrow Day is observed on**: 20 March**
- International Day of Happiness is observed on**: 20 March**
- World Water Day is observed on**: 22 March**
- Official fruit of Kerala: **Jackfruit**
- New Ambassador of India to Belarus: **Sangeeta Bahadur**