

Abhimanu

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NATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Ministry of Power joins hands with Skill India to support electrification scheme 'Saubhagya'

- Ministry of Power has joined hands with Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to train the manpower in six states for speedy implementation of its Saubhagya scheme.
- The launch of this partnership was done through a video conferencing with states where senior officials and Ministers from state governments, were present.
- The scheme has been undertaken as a special project under the government's Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY). The special project under the PMKVY has been launched in six states - Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh.
- Around 47,000 Distribution Lineman-Multi Skills and 8,500 Technical Helpers will be trained to meet the requirement of power sector.

About Saubhagya:

- The scheme funds the cost of last-mile connectivity to willing households to help achieve the goal of lighting every household by 31 December 2018.
- With no subsidy component for monthly electricity consumption, the Gram Panchayat and public institutions in the rural areas will be authorised to carry out billing and collection tasks which have been pain points for the discoms.
- States have also been provided with an incentive of 50% of their loan being converted to grants, if the electrification targets are met by 31 December 2018.
- To ensure on-the-spot registration, mobile applications will be used. While free connections will be provided to below poverty line (BPL) households, even those not covered under this category can avail it by paying Rs500 in 10 instalments of Rs50 each along with their monthly bill.
- For those household where the national electricity grid can't reach, households will be provided with solar power packs along with battery banks. State-run Rural Electrification Corp. is the nodal agency for the scheme.
- The beneficiaries for free electricity connections will be identified using Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data.

Analysis:

- Despite the government's aggressive village electrification programme, the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana launched in July 2015, under which 78% of 18,000 villages have been electrified, it was realised that the problem of electricity 'access' wasn't resolved.
- A village is declared to be electrified if 10% of the households are given electricity along with public places such as schools, panchayat office, health centres, dispensaries and community centres.
- With a large number of household still remaining without access to electricity, the scheme aims at ensuring the coverage of households as opposed to only villages.
- It was seen that the electricity distribution companies (discoms) don't want to supply to the villages even if the electrification has taken place. By providing electricity access to all households with prepaid and smart meters, demand will be created which in turn will force the discoms to supply to these villages.

- The scheme will help India, the world's third-largest energy consumer after the US and China, to help meet its global climate change commitments as electricity will substitute kerosene for lighting purposes. Lighting in turn will also help in improving education, health, connectivity with the multiplier effect of increased economic activities and job creation.

National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for restructuring of National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to strengthen governance, implementation and monitoring framework.
- The approval would lead to restructuring of composition of Board of NSDF and the NSDC to strengthen governance, implementation and monitoring framework.

About NSDC:

National Skill Development Corporation India (NSDC) was setup as a one of its kind, Public Private Partnership Company with the primary mandate of catalysing the skills landscape in India.

NSDC is a unique model created with a well thought through underlying philosophy based on the following pillars:

1. Create: Proactively catalyse creation of large, quality vocational training institutions.
2. Fund: Reduce risk by providing patient capital. Including grants and equity.
3. Enable: the creation and sustainability of support systems required for skill development. This includes the Industry led Sector Skill Councils.

The main objectives of the NSDC are to:

- Upgrade skills to international standards through significant industry involvement and develop necessary frameworks for standards, curriculum and quality assurance
- Enhance, support and coordinate private sector initiatives for skill development through appropriate Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models; strive for significant operational and financial involvement from the private sector
- Play the role of a "market-maker" by bringing financing, particularly in sectors where market mechanisms are ineffective or missing
- Prioritize initiatives that can have a multiplier or catalytic effect as opposed to one-off impact.

About National Skill Development Fund:

- The National Skill Development Fund was set up in 2009 by the Government of India for raising funds both from Government and Non Government sectors for skill development in the country.
- The Fund is contributed by various Government sources, and other donors/ contributors to enhance, stimulate and develop the skills of Indian youth by various sector specific programs.
- A public Trust set up by the Government of India is the custodian of the Fund. The Trust accepts donation, contribution in cash or kind from the Contributors for furtherance of objectives of the Fund.
- The Fund is operated and managed by the Board of Trustees. The Chief Executive Officer of the Trust is responsible for day-to-day administration and management of the Trust.
- The Fund meets its objectives through National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) which is an industry led 'Not For Profit Company' set up for building skill development capacity and forging strong linkages with the market.
- NSDC acts as a catalyst in skill development by providing funding to enterprises, companies and organizations that provide skill training.
- It also develops appropriate models to enhance, support and coordinate private sector initiatives.

National Agricultural Cooperative Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED)

- National Agricultural Cooperative Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED) has signed the Debt Settlement Agreement with its eight lender banks.

- The One Time Settlement with the lender banks has been made at Rs. 478 Crore. In addition, the lenders are entitled to the assignment of auction right of the property of one of the defaulters of its tie-up business conducted in the years 2003-05.

About NAFED:

- National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd.(NAFED) was established 2nd October 1958. NAFED is registered under the Multi State Co-operative Societies Act.
- NAFED was setup with the object to promote Co-operative marketing of Agricultural Produce to benefit the farmers. Agricultural farmers are the main members of NAFED, who have the authority to say in the form of members of the General Body in the working of NAFED.
- The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation is implementing a Price Support Scheme (PSS) for the procurement of oilseeds and pulses at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) declared by the Government, through NAFED, which is the central nodal agency for this purpose.

Atal Innovation Mission

- NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) has announced the signing of a Statement of Intent (SOI) with SAP Global to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship
- As part of the SOI, SAP in 2018 will adopt 100 Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATL) for five years to nurture the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) learning among secondary school children across India.
- This aims to enable students to learn advanced technology topics relevant to digital transformation and the Internet of Things, e.g. Design Thinking methodology, introduction to programming languages and experiential science learning.

About Atal innovation mission:

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) was launched by the NITI Ayog as an innovation promotion platform involving academics, entrepreneurs, and researchers utilizing national and international experience to promote the culture of innovation, R and D in India particularly in technology oriented areas.
- The AIM along with Self-Employment and Talent Utilization (SETU) are Government of India's the leading ventures to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. The Atal Innovation Mission has two core functions:
- Entrepreneurship promotion through Self-Employment and Talent Utilization, wherein innovators would be supported and mentored to become successful entrepreneurs.
- Innovation promotion: to provide a platform where innovative ideas are generated
- To realize these two core objectives, AIM has different sub-components. Atal Incubation Centers, Atal Tinkering Laboratories, Atal Grand Challenge Awards and Scale up Support to Established Incubation Centers.
- Atal Incubation Centers are aimed at the creation and promotion of incubation centers across the country. AICs will promote startups in various sectors like manufacturing, transport, energy, health, education, agriculture, water, sanitation, etc., and would provide them with necessary infrastructural facilities and other value-added services. AIM gives a grant-in-aid of Rs 10 crore to each AIC for a maximum of five years to cover capital and operational expenditure cost.
- An incubation centre should be a legal entity to be registered in India as public, private or public-private partnership and must be in operation for a minimum of three years.
- The Scale-up Support to Established Incubation Centers' aims to augment capacity of the established incubation centers in the country.

New vehicle scrappage policy

- The policy targets to take polluting vehicles out of the roads and help the automobile industry register higher sales.
- The policy mentions about vehicles older than 20 years becoming eligible for benefits under the scrappage scheme.
- The scheme would now come in effect from April 1, 2020, coinciding with the implementation of the BS-VI norms.

Analysis:

- The total population of commercial vehicles that will be older than 20 years in fiscal 2021 would be 50,000 vehicles, much lower than the government's earlier estimate of 2.8 crore vehicles and our internal estimate of 640,000 vehicles. In any case, 70,000-90,000 vehicles are scrapped every year. So, we believe the impact of the scrappage policy will be limited.
- Although the benefit offered under the scrappage policy is expected to be 15 percent of the vehicle's price, the effect will be muted as prices of diesel vehicles are expected to go up by 10-15 percent once the new norms come into force.
- There are very few vehicles would actually be older than 20 years in the current vehicular population. Medium and heavy commercial vehicles (M&HCVs) that typically have a life of 20 years would be eligible under the scrappage scheme. Under M&HCVs, medium commercial vehicles (16-tonne gross vehicle weight) would benefit the most, while the number of multi-axle vehicles, intermediate commercial vehicles (ICVs), tractor trailers, and light commercial vehicles opting for the scheme would be very limited.
- The report said additional benefit from the policy, which is scheduled for implementation from April 1, 2020 along with the implementation of BS VI norms, is expected to spur demand for commercial vehicles to some extent when vehicle prices will increase because of change in emission norms (from BS IV to BS VI).

Integrated Scheme for School Education

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal of Department of School Education and Literacy to formulate an Integrated Scheme on School Education.

Key features and objectives of the scheme:

- To make quality education more inclusive and equitable from kindergarten to higher secondary students, the government will primarily be focusing on technology and teaching.
- This scheme aims to provide flexibility to states and Union Territories to “plan and prioritise their interventions within the scheme norms and the overall resource envelope available to them.”
- Other objectives of the scheme include bridging social and gender gaps in school enrolment, ensuring minimum standards in schooling provisions, promoting vocational education, improving infrastructure in government schools.
- The scheme also aims to upgrade the State Councils for Educational Research and Training (SCERTs)/State Institutes of Education and District Institutes for Education and Training (DIET) as “nodal agencies for teacher training”.
- The government believes the joint scheme will improve learning outcomes and enhance capacity building of teachers through the use of digital technology in education.
- The integrated scheme would also provide for co-curricular activities and government programmes like ‘Swachh Vidyalaya’, ‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’, ‘Kaushal Vikas’ and ‘Khelo India’.

Analysis

- The Scheme gives flexibility to the States and UTs to plan and prioritize their interventions within the scheme norms and the overall resource envelope available to them.

- It will help improve the transition rates across the various levels of school education and aid in promoting universal access to children to complete school education.
- The Scheme, by providing quality education, aims to equip the children with varied skills and knowledge essential for their holistic development and prepare them for the world of work or higher education in the future.
- It would lead to an optimal utilization of budgetary allocations and effective use of human resources and institutional structures created for the erstwhile Schemes.

Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme

- The NITI Aayog has launched the baseline ranking for the Aspirational Districts based on published data of 49 indicators.
- All the states — except West Bengal and Kerala — are on board in this ranking initiative.
- From April 1, these 101 districts will start entering data and from May onwards, they will be ranked based on progress made (delta ranking) on a real-time basis.
- As per the baseline ranking, Vizianagaram in Andhra Pradesh is ranked highest with score of 48.13% while Mewat in Haryana tails at the end with 26.02%.
- Among others, Asifabad (Telengana), Singrauli (Madhya Pradesh), Kiphire (Nagaland), Shrawasti, Siddarthnagar and Balrampur (Uttar Pradesh), Namsai (Arunachal Pradesh), Sukma (Chattisgarh) are ranked at bottom of the list.

About 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme

- This programme aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
- The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan.
- With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.
- The Government is committed to raising the living standards of its citizens and ensuring inclusive growth for all – SabkaSaath, SabkaVikas.
- To enable optimum utilization of their potential, this program focusses closely on improving people's ability to participate fully in the burgeoning economy.
- Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure are this programme's core areas of focus.
- Districts are prodded and encouraged to first catch-up with the best district within their state, and subsequently aspire to become one of the best in the country, by competing with, and learning from others in the spirit of competitive & cooperative federalism.

India-Pakistan diplomatic crisis

- India and Pakistan have agreed to solve the diplomatic tussle over the allegations of harassment of the diplomats in each other's countries.
- The two countries have mutually decided to resolve matters as per the 1992 code of conduct (COC) ensuring the diplomats and their families are not harassed.

About 1992 Code of Conduct:

- The Code provides for "smooth and unhindered functioning" of the diplomatic and consular officials of the two countries in conformity with the international laws without violating their privileges and immunities.

- The Code also says that the two countries should not resort to intrusive and aggressive surveillance and actions such as verbal and physical harassment, disconnection of phone lines, etc.

The Diplomatic Tussle

- The diplomatic ties of India and Pakistan took a hit over the harassment of the diplomats in each other's countries. Both the countries accused each other of harassing and intimidating their diplomats. The diplomatic ties first took a hit when Pakistan's ISI raided a residential complex under construction for Indian diplomats in Islamabad in February.
- The residential complex was raided and electricity and water supply to the property were suspended. Following which the Indian high commissioner Ajay Bisaria met the Pakistan foreign secretary to protest against the harassment of their diplomats. He alleged that his car was stopped in the middle of the road and was prevented from attending an event in Pakistan.
- Pakistan, on the other hand, accused India of intimidating the children of its diplomats. The Pakistan high commission had earlier alleged that the car of one of its senior diplomats was blocked on road. Another note verbale alleged that their car, with the diplomat's children on board, was hit from behind by another car. The kids were on the way to their school.

Enemy properties

- The government has initiated the process of sale of more than 9,400 enemy properties by issuing guidelines and directing the office of the custodian to submit the list of all such movable and immovable assets within three months.
- The sale of enemy properties is expected to fetch around Rs 1 lakh crore for the government exchequer.
- The move comes after the amendment of the Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Act 2017 and the Enemy Property (Amendment) Rules, 2018, which ensured that the heirs of those who migrated to Pakistan and China during partition and afterwards will have no claim over the properties left behind in India.

About Enemy properties:

- Enemy properties were those left behind by the people who took citizenship of Pakistan and China. There are 9,280 properties left behind by Pakistani nationals and 126 properties which belonged to Chinese nationals, a ministry official said.
- The government has vested these properties in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India, an office instituted under the Central government.
- A list of all vested enemy properties (movable and immovable) shall be prepared by the custodian for its submission to the Central government within three months from the publication of this order.
- For the purpose of valuation of the immovable enemy property, a valuation committee will be constituted at the district level with the district magistrate as the chairman besides two other official members.
- The committee shall consider the circle rate of the area where the property is situated or a rate fixed by the district administration as a mode of valuation of the property along with other valuation modes.
- The custodian will prepare and submit the state-wise list of the enemy properties along with their valuation to the Central government within one month from the date of receipt of the valuation report from the valuation committee.
- Among the 9,280 properties left behind by Pakistani nationals, the highest 4,991 properties are located in Uttar Pradesh followed by West Bengal which has 2,735 such estates. There are 487 such properties in Delhi. Among the 126 properties left behind by Chinese nationals, the highest 57 are located in Meghalaya followed by West Bengal with 29.

National Conference on Down Syndrome

- A 'National Conference on Down Syndrome' was organised by the National Trust under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in New Delhi.

- On 19th December 2011, the United Nations General Assembly declared to observe 21st March as World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD) and since then every year, this day is officially observed by UN to create awareness about people with Down Syndrome.
- The objective of this conference was to provide excellent opportunities to the parents to obtain information about latest development in education and skilling and inclusive living of persons with Down Syndrome.

About Down Syndrome:

- Down Syndrome is a chromosomal condition associated with intellectual and learning disabilities.
- Causes: Persons with Down Syndrome have 47 chromosomes as compared to 46 in majority of people.
- Impacts: This one Extra chromosome causes its own impact and slows down learning process. It impacts neurological functioning causing impairment of intellectual functions e.g. analytical thinking, complex abstractions and judgement etc.
- Treatment: Good schooling, loving family, learning and work opportunities make them grow up to be responsible, loving and cheerful persons. Their emotions and needs are like any other person of the same age. Accepting and respecting family/community is a big support to their growth and development.

Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for enhancing the scope of Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY).
- The Government of India will now contribute the Employer's full admissible contribution for the first three years from the date of registration of the new employee for all the sectors including existing beneficiaries for their remaining period of three years.

About Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana:

- In this scheme, Government is paying the 8.33% contribution of Employers to the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) in respect of new employees (who have joined on or after 1st April 2016) having a new Universal Account Number (UAN), with salary up to Rs. 15,000/- per month.
- The scheme has a dual benefit i.e. on the one hand the employers are incentivized for increasing the employment base of workers in the establishments, and on the other hand a large number of workers will find jobs in such establishments.
- A direct benefit is that these workers will have access to social security benefits of the organized sector.
- The scheme "Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana"(PMRPY) was announced in the Budget for 2016-17.
- The objective of the scheme is to promote employment generation.
- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

ISA and India sign the Host Country Agreement

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), have signed the Host Country Agreement.

- The Agreement will give ISA a juridical personality and gives it power to contract, to acquire and dispose off movable and immovable properties, to institute and defend legal proceedings.
- Under this agreement, ISA shall enjoy such privileges, applicable tax concessions and immunities as are necessary for ISA's Headquarter to independently discharge its function and programmes.
- ISA shall be deriving its status, privileges and immunities as per Article 10 of Framework Agreement.

About ISA:

- India's prime minister has launched an international solar alliance of over 120 countries with the French president, François Hollande, at the Paris COP 21 climate summit.
- The Alliance is likely to boost the absorption and deployment of solar power, which has already seen exponential expansion in the last five years — between 2010 and 2014, the installed capacity of solar energy across the world has grown from 23 GW to about 180 GW.
- It is an invitation to 121 countries lying between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, which get the most solar insolation, to make collaborative efforts to harness solar energy to generate electricity. Most of these countries are in Asia, Africa and South America, and many of them are power deficient.
- By coming together to install solar power plants, these countries can drive up the demand for solar technologies manifold, in the process forcing down prices even more. Currently, the growth of solar installed capacity has been coming from very few countries.
- This alliance can bring standardization to manufacturing processes and solar technologies. If every country starts using similar products and processes, costs of manufacturing elements of solar technologies can fall substantially.
- A keenly awaited technology breakthrough is in the area of storage systems. There is currently no way to store the electricity being produced by solar systems, because of which the sun is not the most reliable energy source on many days.
- India will provide money and infrastructure to this alliance. India has committed itself to providing Rs 400 crore over the next five years to building infrastructure and meeting recurring costs. A secretariat is being set up in New Delhi. Till a building is constructed, the secretariat will function from the Delhi-based National Institute of Solar Energy. India is leading world from the front by launching various initiatives regarding solar energy. India has a capacity of 4 GW and has set a target of adding 100 GW of solar power by 2022.

3R Regional Forum in Asia and the Pacific

- India is hosting the 8th 3R Regional Forum in Asia and the Pacific in Indore in next month.
- The event is co-organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) Government of India, the Ministry of the Environment, Government of Japan (MOEJ), and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD).
- Theme: "Achieving Clean Water, Clean Land and Clean Air through 3R and Resource Efficiency- A 21st Century Vision for Asia-Pacific Communities".

About the 3R Regional Forum:

- In 2009, the Regional 3R Forum in Asia was established at Japan's proposal as a platform for broad cooperation on promotion of the 3Rs – reduce, reuse and recycle – in Asia. Members include central governments, international agencies, aid agencies, private sector entities, research bodies, NGOs and other relevant parties.
- Forum members have held high-level discussions on policies, provided support for the implementation of 3R projects in member countries, shared useful information, and are building networks for the further promotion of 3R initiatives.
- Japan hosted the inaugural Regional 3R Forum in Tokyo in 2009, and has cosponsored subsequent Forums together with the governments of host countries and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) . After the fourth forum, the name was changed to Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific.
- The Fourth Regional 3R Forum – held in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, in March 2013 – adopted the Ha Noi 3R Declaration - Sustainable 3R Goals for Asia and the Pacific for 2013-2023 .

- It is a legally non-binding and voluntary document which aims to provide a basic framework for Asia-Pacific countries to develop measures and programs to promote 3Rs including a set of 3R indicators for monitoring specific progress.
- Japan will continue its efforts to expand cooperation with the governments of other countries, international agencies, and other bodies with the aim of building a sound material-cycle society worldwide.

Participating Countries

- Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Cook Islands, People's Republic of China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, New Zealand, Nepal, Niue, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam

WHO report on E- Cigarettes

- WHO has released a report on E-Cigarettes.

Highlights of the report:

- Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) (also known as e-cigarettes) emits nicotine, the addictive component of tobacco products. In addition to dependence, nicotine can have adverse effects on the development of the foetus during pregnancy and may contribute to cardiovascular disease.
- Although nicotine itself is not a carcinogen, it may function as a “tumour promoter” and seems to be involved in the biology of malignant disease, as well as of neurodegeneration.
- Foetal and adolescent nicotine exposure may have long-term consequences for brain development, potentially leading to learning and anxiety disorders.
- The evidence is sufficient to warn children and adolescents, pregnant women, and women of reproductive age against ENDS use and nicotine.

What are e-cigarettes?

- An electronic cigarette (or e-cig) is a battery-powered vaporizer that mimics tobacco smoking. It works by heating up a nicotine liquid, called “juice.”
- Nicotine juice (or e-juice) comes in various flavors and nicotine levels. e-liquid is composed of five ingredients: vegetable glycerin (a material used in all types of food and personal care products, like toothpaste) and propylene glycol (a solvent most commonly used in fog machines.) propylene glycol is the ingredient that produces thicker clouds of vapor.
- Proponents of e-cigs argue that the practice is healthier than traditional cigarettes because users are only inhaling water vapor and nicotine.
- It is difficult to regulate e-cigarettes as e-cigarettes contain nicotine and not tobacco, they do not fall within the ambit of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA), which mandates stringent health warnings on the packaging and advertisements of tobacco products.

India, Pakistan to hold Permanent Indus Commission meet

- India and Pakistan will hold a meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission to discuss various issues under the Indus Waters Treaty.
- This will be the 114th meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC), which should meet at least once a year as per the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).
- The meeting of the PIC is held alternately in India and Pakistan every year.

About Indus Water Treaty:

- The Indus Water Treaty (IWT) is a water sharing arrangement, signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960, by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan's President General Ayub Khan. The World Bank (the erstwhile international bank for reconstruction and development) brokered the treaty and is also a party to it.
- The Indus system of rivers comprises three western rivers which includes the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab and three eastern rivers — the Sutlej, Beas and Ravi.
- Under the treaty, India has exclusive rights on the eastern rivers and their tributaries while Pakistan has exclusive rights on the western rivers. Pakistan also received a one-time financial compensation for the loss of water from the eastern rivers and to build a new canal system.
- The waters of the Indus basin begin in the Himalayan mountains in the region under China.
- The river flows from the hills through the arid and dry states of Punjab and Sindh, converging in Pakistan, and empties out in the Arabian Sea, south of Karachi.

About Permanent Indus Commission

- The Permanent Indus Commission is a bilateral commission of officials from India and Pakistan, created to implement and manage goals of the Indus Waters Treaty.
- The agreement covers six rivers – the three eastern rivers of Ravi, Beas, Sutlej and their tributaries and the three western rivers of Indus, Jhelum, Chenab and their tributaries.
- The current dispute revolves around the Kishenganga (330 megawatts) and Ratle (850 megawatts) hydroelectric plants.
- India is building the plants on the Kishanganga and Chenab rivers, which Pakistan claims violates the treaty.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS)

- China has successfully launched two satellites with a single rocket to strengthen its BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS). The two satellites are coded as the 30th and 31st members in the BDS.

About BeiDou Satellite System:

- Beidou is the world's fourth navigation satellite system, following GPS in the United States, GLONASS in Russia and Galileo in the European Union.
- The new-generation satellites feature better accuracy, stability and signal clarity than previous Beidou models because of improvements in intersatellite links, laser communication devices and atomic clocks.
- They will also be more compatible with GPS, GLONASS and Galileo, the satellite office. Development of third-generation Beidou satellites started in 2009.
- By the end of next year, China will have launched 18 third-generation Beidou satellites into space to cover all nations involved in the Belt and Road Initiative
- This enables the network to reduce dependence on ground stations and to reduce operational costs.
- The Beidou system now covers nearly 30 countries involved in the initiative including Pakistan, Egypt and Indonesia, the office said.
- In 2019 and 2020 China will send six third-generation Beidou satellites into medium Earth orbits, as well as three to inclined geosynchronous satellite orbits and two to geostationary orbits.
- Both are synchronised with the rotation of the Earth, but geostationary satellites are parked over the Equator, according to gisgeography.com.

- Beidou has acquired a great number of users in China. Most of the shared bicycles in Chinese cities now employ Beidou-based positioning services; more than 4 million taxis, long-distance buses and cargo trucks nationwide have been equipped with Beidou devices; and about 40 per cent of smartphones in China are able to access the services, said Ran Chengqi, director of the China Satellite Navigation Office.

South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP)

- The Union Cabinet has approved signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) for cooperation on the response to Oil and Chemical Pollution in the South Asian Seas Region.
- The MoU intends to promote closer cooperation between India and other maritime nations comprising the South Asian seas region namely Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for protection and preservation of marine environment in the region.
- Indian Coast Guard (ICG) will be the Competent National Authority and national operational contact point for implementation of “Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan” under the MoU and shall respond to oil and chemical spills on behalf of Government of India. Further, ICG Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs) will be the national emergency response centre for marine incidents.

About SACEP:

- It was established in 1982, SACEP is an inter-governmental organization of eight member states: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- Apex decision body is the SACEP Governing Council comprising of Ministers

SACEP core programme and project activities apart from South Asian Seas Programme and are:

- Waste Management
- Adaptation to Climate Change
- Data base and Information Management
- Biodiversity

The coastal habitats of South Asia are at a high risk of eutrophication from nutrient enrichment due to leakages from agriculture, aquaculture, sewage, industrial effluents, marine trade and transport.

QUICK FACTS

- World Meteorological Day is observed on: **23 March**
- International TB Day is observed on: **24 March**
- 5th India Maize Summit, 2018 is observed in: **New Delhi**
- First district to have 100% solar powered health centres: **Surat**
- New President of Peru: **Martin Vizcarra**
- New President of Myanmar: **Win Myint**
- New Ethiopia Prime Minister: **Abiye Ahmed**