

Abhimanu

Weekly current affairs Series

Week: IV, October 2018

Abhimanu's IAS Study Group
Chandigarh

NATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

MoU amongst BRICS nations regarding cooperation in the social and labour sphere

- The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China, South Africa, regarding Cooperation in the Social and Labour Sphere. The MoU was signed on 3rd August, 2018 during BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers (LEM) Meeting.

Important highlights:

- In the MoU, the parties including India have agreed to cooperate and hold mutual events in the prominent areas viz. labour legislation and enforcement, protection of workers' rights with focus on vulnerable groups, Employment and labour market policies, Professional education, skills and training and Social protection.
- The member countries may utilize the BRICS Network of Labour Research Institutes and BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework for cooperation on Social Security and other labour issues.
- The Memorandum is not an International Treaty and does not create rights and obligations for the parties governed by international law.

About BRICS

- The acronym BRIC was first used in 2001 by Goldman Sachs in their Global Economics Paper, "The World Needs Better Economic BRICs" on the basis of econometric analyses projecting that the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China would individually and collectively occupy far greater economic space and would be amongst the world's largest economies in the next 50 years or so.
- As a formal grouping, BRIC started after the meeting of the Leaders of Russia, India and China in St. Petersburg on the margins of G8 Outreach Summit in 2006. The grouping was formalized during the 1st meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers on the margins of UNGA in New York in 2006. The 1st BRIC Summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, on 16 June 2009.
- It was agreed to expand BRIC into BRICS with the inclusion of South Africa at the BRIC Foreign Ministers' meeting in New York in September 2010. Accordingly, South Africa attended the 3rd BRICS Summit in Sanya, China on 14 April 2011.

Analysis:

- The MoU provides a mechanism for cooperation, collaboration and maximum synergy amongst BRICS member countries with the common objective of inclusive growth and shared prosperity in the new industrial revolution.
- This would facilitate member countries to share knowledge and also implement joint programmes on matter of Labour and Employment, Social Security and Social dialogue.
- This would also ensure networking of international Training Centre of International Labour Organisation (ILO) with the BRICS Network of Labour Institutes which includes V.V. Giri National Labour Institute of India.
- This network would specifically focus on the theme of youth employment and research on new forms of employment.
- This network will also explore new learning technologies, including virtual network to deepen cooperation, exchange of information and capacity building.

- The BRICS Social Security cooperation framework will deepen social security cooperation among BRICS nations and would facilitate cooperation for improvement of social security systems and social security agreements among member countries.

6th tranche of electoral bonds sale

- The Finance Ministry has authorised the sale of sixth tranche of electoral bonds. The State Bank of India, will issue and encash them from November 1 to November 11 via its 29 authorised branches.

What are Electoral Bonds?

- Electoral Bond is a financial instrument for making donations to political parties. These are issued by Scheduled Commercial banks upon authorization from the Central Government to intending donors, but only against cheque and digital payments (it cannot be purchased by paying cash).
- Electoral Bond (s) would be issued/purchased for any value, in multiples of Rs.1,000, Rs.10,000, Rs.1,00,000, Rs.10,00,000 and Rs.1,00,00,000 from the Specified Branches of the State Bank of India (SBI).
- These bonds shall be redeemable in the designated account of a registered political party within the prescribed time limit from issuance of bond.
- The bonds will likely be bearer bonds and the identity of the donor will not be known to the receiver.
- The party can convert these bonds back into money via their bank accounts. The bank account used must be the one notified to the Election Commission and the bonds may have to be redeemed within a prescribed time period.

Analysis:

- The current system of cash donations from “anonymous or pseudonymous” sources is “wholly non-transparent”, and “the donor, the donee, the quantum of donations and the nature of expenditure are all undisclosed”.
- The system of Bonds will encourage political donations of “clean money” from individuals, companies, HUF, religious groups, charities, etc.
- After purchasing the bonds, these entities can hand them to political parties of their choice, which must redeem them within the prescribed time. The idea, the government has said, is to evolve a transparent system of political funding.
- But the voting public will not know which individual, company, or organisation has funded which party, and to what extent. At the same time, the fact that the SBI — and by implication, the government — will know who is getting what from whom can open up the possibility of arm twisting or harassment of those seen to be supporting parties or ideologies that are opposed to the government. And this will be possible without the public knowing or being able to see the pattern of such harassment.

Currency swap agreement between India and Japan

- Japan and India have entered into a \$75-billion currency swap arrangement that will bolster the country's firepower as it battles a steep drop in the rupee's value.
- The facility will serve as a second line of defence for the rupee after the \$393.5 billion of foreign exchange reserves that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has at its disposal.

What is a currency swap?

- A currency swap is an agreement between two parties to exchange a series of cash flows denominated in one currency for those denominated in another for a predetermined period of time. This involves the swap of the currency amounts for an agreed period and payments of interest during that period.
- Unlike an interest rate swap, a currency swap requires the actual exchange of the two principal currency amounts on which the sets of cash flows are based.
- An exchange takes place at the beginning of the arrangement and at maturity the amounts are swapped back.

- This actual exchange of principal is an important feature of a currency swap because, although the two amounts exchanged at the beginning of the agreement may be of equivalent value in the market, it is unlikely (as a result of movements in the exchange rate) that this will be the case at maturity. This means there is a residual counterparty risk that remains after the currency swap has been agreed.

Analysis:

- The deal will help the two countries to swap their currencies for U.S. dollars to stabilise the rupee which has witnessed the steepest fall in recent years. The agreement will allow India to tap foreign capital as and when the need arises and help to bring down the cost of funds for Indian companies while accessing the foreign capital market.
- The currency swap agreement will have a positive impact on financing India's current account deficit.
- This comes against the backdrop of a gradual increase in interest rates in the U.S. that has led to the strengthening of the greenback against other currencies, and flight of capital from emerging economies.

Gujarat's first Mega Food Park

- Union Minister for Food Processing Industries has inaugurated the first Mega Food Park in Gujarat. It is located at Village Shah and Vasravi, Taluka Mangrol, District Surat. A 2nd Mega Food Park has been sanctioned by the Ministry in Mehsana District of Gujarat.
- This Mega Food Park has been set up in 70.15 acres of land at a cost of Rs. 117.87 crore. The Mega Food Park will leverage an additional investment of about Rs. 250 crores in 25-30 food processing units in the park.

About Mega Food Parks Scheme(MFP):

- The Mega Food Park is an inclusive concept which is aimed at establishing direct linkages from the farm to processing and on to the consumer markets, through a network of collection centers and Processing Centers.
- The Mega Food Park have a Central Processing Centre (CPC) as the nuclei of all value addition activities facilitated by Primary Processing Centre (PPC), which will act as point of aggregation and primary handling to provide ready to use raw materials to be processed further in the units to be set up in the CPC.
- The PPCs fed by field Collection Centres which will be the first point of contact with growers
- The collection centres is managed by local entrepreneurs will serve as farm level aggregation points for adjoining areas within a radius of about 10 Kms. The collection centres, while serving as the primary nodes for the Mega Food Park network will also enhance farm level value realization by providing direct market access to the farmers. Also it is expected that the collection centres will in course of time emerge as centres of rural commerce thereby spurring economic activity in the area.
- The primary processing centres is located near natural aggregation points will serve a number of collection centres lying in close proximity. The primary processing centres provides facilities for storage, sorting grading cleaning etc. Some of the PPCs may also house facilities for carrying out primary processing like pulping and juicing. Each primary processing centre have transportation facilities like refrigerated vans, trucks etc for transportation of goods from the collection centres and to the central processing centre. Storage facilities include all weather warehouses and cold storage / modified temperature storages wherever required.
- The Central Processing facility is an industrial park spread over an area of about 50 acres and house a number of processing units owned by different business houses.

Analysis:

- Mega food park scheme help in providing better prices to farmers, reduce wastage of perishables, add value to agricultural produce and create huge opportunities for entrepreneurship and employment for the youth.
- This scheme is facing some issues during execution. Land acquisition is a major issue while establishing mega food parks. It is very difficult to get 50 acre of land anywhere, particularly in small and hilly states. The government needs to provide flexibility to this requirement.
- Most agri-business in our country happens through cooperatives, their integration into food parks is critical.

- This scheme gives a grant to the SPV, the SPV finds itself unable to attract the PPCs and CCs. Here, the National Mission on Food Processing could play a major role by providing the Rs. 50 Lakh grant under that mission to units within the MFPs. But that scheme is now delinked from central support and states may have to decide if they want to continue or not. State governments may look into these issues case-by-case basis and provide attractions to these units as well.
- MFP scheme provides maximum grant of Rs.50 crores for setting up a MFP in minimum 50 acres of contiguous land with 50 percent contribution to the total project cost from the SPV. This “one size fits all” approach has not been able to attract the investors having more or less requirements.
- Scheme has not attracted global companies because some of them would not work on basis of “grant” from a developing country. They would like to work on Joint Ventures.
- Current status of Mega Food Park: The Centre's ambitious scheme of Mega Food Parks (MFP) in India is stumbling with some missing deadlines while others not meeting the basic purpose of project. In most cases, before launching the scheme no study was done on global best practices or on similar successful international parks or clusters. All the schemes stress on enhancing domestic capabilities of the Indian (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)) and only some emphasise of increasing India's share in international trade However, not much importance is given to linking India to the global value chain. The objective in schemes such as the MFP does not refer to increasing export or any form of global linkages. This is an area of concern especially since the Prime Minister has recently launched the 'Make in India' campaign, which focuses on attracting global investors to invest in India for domestic and global markets.
- Financial issues were found to be one of major reasons for incomplete projects. The most significant reason for delay is failure of MFPs in construction of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs). None of the operational MFPs had completely received the grant amount and most of them mentioned that this was because the PPCs and collection centres are yet to be operational. In order to create world class facilities, all the food parks have imported machineries from abroad which are expensive. Hence the rent or the lease amount for these facilities is also expected to be high. In some cases small and medium food processors said that they will not be able to afford these facilities. In case of PPCs, their economic viability also depends on the rental that they charge. Even if the PPC has a state of the art infrastructure the users may not be willing or may not have the ability to pay a high rental.
- Farmers usually opt for the facilities with lower rental. This, in turn, leads to the low usability of the PPC.

Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF)

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for creation of special Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF).
- The approval entails an estimated fund size of Rs.7,522 crore, comprising Rs.5,266.40 crore to be raised by the Nodal Loaning Entities (NLEs), Rs. 1,316.6 crore beneficiary's contribution and Rs.939.48 crore budgetary support from the Government of India.
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), National Cooperatives Development Corporation (NCDC) and all scheduled Banks shall be the nodal Loaning Entities.

Benefits:

- Creation of fisheries infrastructure facilities both in marine and Inland fisheries sectors.
- To augment fish production to achieve its target of 15 million tonne by 2020 set under the Blue Revolution; and to achieve a sustainable growth of 8% -9% thereafter to reach the fish production to the level of about 20 MMT by 2022-23.
- Employment opportunities to over 9.40 lakh fishers/fishermen/fisherfolk and other entrepreneurs in fishing and allied activities.
- To attract private investment in creation and management of fisheries infrastructure facilities.

SC order on use and sale of firecrackers

- The Supreme Court has ordered a partial ban on the sale and use of firecrackers, ahead of Diwali next month.
- Hearing a bunch of petitions seeking a blanket ban on firecrackers to help curb air pollution, the court has allowed the use of “safer” firecrackers for a limited time period during festivals.

About Ban:

- Refusing a complete ban, the top court has permitted the use and sale of “greener” firecrackers which have low emission. Firecrackers with permissible decibel sound limits will be allowed to be sold in the market
- Firecrackers will be allowed to be burst for 2 hours, 8pm to 10pm on Diwali. For New Year and Christmas, the time allotted is 11.45 pm to 12.30 am.
- The Supreme Court has restrained E-commerce websites like Flipkart and Amazon from selling firecrackers which are beyond the permissible limit. Websites will attract contempt of court charges if they don't adhere to court's direction.
- Station house officers of police stations concerned will be held liable if banned firecrackers are sold in their areas.
- The apex court had earlier said there is a need to take into account all aspects, including the fundamental right of livelihood of firecracker manufacturers and the right to health of over 1.3 billion people in the country, while considering a plea for the ban.

Analysis:

- The question that arises is why the judiciary needs to intervene in administration when that is fundamentally the role of the representatives of the people. Often, this is because of a weak or tentative executive and legislature that fail to perform the constitutional duties.
- Article 21 of the Constitution gives every citizen the right to life including dignity and comfort in livelihood, and also a right to a clean habitable environment to live in. It is the job of the legislature and executive to ensure these fundamental rights for the people. And so often, these arms fail or are tentative in their duties to implement such fundamental rights for a number of varied reasons depending on the mindset and action plans in force.
- The judiciary, as a guardian, must then step in and ensure that these breaches are rectified or bottle necks cleared to prevent a crisis in the ecosystem.
- By not enforcing a complete ban, the court has tried to steer clear of interfering with any major executive decision or administrative policy. The court seems to recognise the severe incoming polluting conditions and merely attempts, in its own way, to help curb the spectre of severe environmental conditions. In doing so, it has tried to help the executive, who seemed in favour of a countermeasure (through the pollution control board), but lacked a certain bandwidth for implementation and enforcement.

Namami Gange programme

- The Executive Committee (EC) of the National Mission for Clean Ganga has approved 12 projects worth Rs. 929 Crore under the Namami Gange programme in its 16th meeting held recently.

About Namami Gange Programme:

- Government launched an integrated Ganga conservation mission called 'Namami Gange' to arrest the pollution of Ganga River and revive the river.
- The Union Cabinet approved the action plan proposed by Centre to spend Rs 20,000 Crores till 2019-2020 on cleaning the river, increasing the budget by four-fold and with 100% central share – a central sector scheme.

- Recognizing the multi-sectoral, multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder nature of the Ganga Rejuvenation challenge, efforts have been made to improve the inter-ministerial, and centre-state coordination with increased involvement in preparation of action plan and increased monitoring at central and state levels.
- The implementation of the program has been divided into entry-level activities (for immediate visible impact), medium term activities (to be implemented within 5 years of time frame), and, long-term activities (to be implemented within 10 years).
- Entry-level activities includes river surface cleaning to address the floating solid wastes; rural sanitation to arrest the pollution (solid & liquid) entering through rural sewage drains and construction of toilets; renovation, modernization, & construction of crematoria that prevents the disposal of un-burnt/ partially burnt bodies in the river; repair, modernization & construction of ghats to improvise the human-river connect.
- Medium-term activities will focus on arresting the municipal and industrial pollution entering into the river.
- Under the long-term, providing adequate flow to the river is envisioned through determination of e-flow, increased water-use efficiency, and improved efficiency of surface irrigation.

India's first container movement on inland waterways

- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) will transport container cargo belonging to the food and beverage giant PepsiCo (India) from Kolkata to Varanasi on river Ganga (National Waterway-1).
- This would be the country's first container movement on inland vessel post-independence.

About National waterways:

- **National Waterway 1 (NW1):** The National Waterway No. 1 uses a 1,620-kilometre stretch of the Ganges River. It was declared a national waterway in the year 1986 and runs from Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh to Haldia in West Bengal.
- **National Waterway 2 (NW2):** The National Waterway No. 2 consists of an 891-kilometre stretch on the Brahmaputra River. The waterway was declared on September 1, 1988, and uses the stretch from Dhubri near the Assam-Bangladesh border and Sadiya in North-East Assam.
- **National Waterway 3 (NW3):** Popularly known as the West Coast Canal, the National Waterway No. 3 is a 168-kilometre stretch that runs from Kollam to Kottapuram in Kerala. The waterway does not follow a specific river. It consists of several canals that form the Kerala Backwaters.
- **National Waterway 4 (NW4):** The most complex inland waterway, the National Waterway No. 4, was declared on November 24 in 2008. The waterway consists of the Kakinada-Pondicherry stretch of canals, the Kaluvelly tank, Bhadrachalam-Rajahmundry stretch of River Godavari and the Wazirabad-Vijayawada stretch of River Krishna. It traverses around 1,095 kilometre from Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh to the Union Territory of Pondicherry.
- **National Waterway 5 (NW5):** Another waterway with multiple riverlines and rivulets is the National Waterway No. 5. The waterway was declared in November 2008. The NW5 consists of stretches from Talcher to Dhamra on River Brahmani, the Geonkhali-Charbatia stretch of the East Coast Canal, the Charbatia-Dhamra stretch of River Matai and the Mangalgadi-Paradip stretch of River Mahanadi Delta. The waterway also includes a 91 kilometre stretch between Geonkhali and Nasirabad in West Bengal.
- **National Waterway 6 (NW6):** The last in the list, NW6, is under construction. The waterway is proposed to cover the distance between Lakhimpur and Bhanga near the Bangladesh border in Assam, on the Barak River. The first phase of the two-phase project is scheduled to be completed by 2016-17. The waterway aims to benefit people from the northeastern states.

Appellate Tribunals against Benami Transactions

- The Union Cabinet has approved setting up of Appellate Tribunal and Adjudicating Authority for speedy disposal of cases related to benami transactions.

Salient Features:

- Under the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act of 1998, the government will appoint Adjudicating Authority Appellate Tribunal.
- The officials will come from the existing posts at the same level from the Income Tax Department and the Central Board of Direct Taxes.
- The Adjudicating Authority and Appellate Tribunal will be based in the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD).
- Benches of Adjudicating Authority may sit in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai, and the necessary notification in this regard will be issued after consultation with the Chairperson of the proposed Adjudicating Authority.

Analysis:

- Administrative adjudication has brought about flexibility and adaptability in the judicial as well as administrative tribunals. For instance, the courts of law exhibit a good deal of conservatism and inelasticity of outlook and approach. The justice they administer may become out of harmony with the rapidly changing social conditions. Administrative adjudication, not restrained by rigid rules of procedure and canons of evidence, can remain in tune with the varying phases of social and economic life.
- Administrative justice ensures cheap and quick justice. As against this, procedure in the law courts is long and cumbersome and litigation is costly. It involves payment of huge court fees, engagement of lawyers and meeting of other incidental charges. Administrative adjudication, in most cases, requires no stamp fees. Its procedures are simple and can be easily understood by a layman
- The system also gives the much-needed relief to ordinary courts of law, which are already overburdened with numerous suits.

National Monitoring Framework on Sustainable Development Goals

- The Union Cabinet has approved the constitution of a High Level Steering Committee for periodically reviewing and refining the National Indicator Framework (NIF) for monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with associated targets.

Targets:

- Measures to mainstream SDGs into on-going national policies, programmes and strategic action plans to address the developmental challenges.
- Statistical indicators of NIF will be the backbone of monitoring of SDGs at the national and state level and will scientifically measure the outcomes of the policies to achieve the targets under different SDGs.
- Based on statistical indicator, the MoSPI will bring out national reports on implementation of SDGs. The Report will facilitate assessment of progress, identify challenges and give recommendations for follow up at the national level.
- High Level Steering Committee will review the National Indicator Framework on regular basis for its improvement.
- Data source Ministries / Departments will be responsible for providing regular information to MoSPI on these indicators at required intervals and disaggregation for national and sub-national reporting of SDGs.
- Advanced IT tools will be used for close and effective monitoring.

Analysis:

- SDGs integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. It intends eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world with basic motto of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikash'.
- SDGs with 17 Goals and 169 Targets intend for promotion of sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.
- NIF will help in outcome-based monitoring & reporting on progress on SDGs at National level.

- There is no direct financial implication on implementation of the National Indicator Framework. However, the respective Ministries will need to re-align and strengthen their data systems to facilitate monitoring of the SDG indicators.
- SDGs are expected to bring change in the lives of people and the monitoring of progress of implementation of SDGs will benefit the entire nation.

SC bans sale of BS-IV vehicles from 2020

- The Supreme Court has banned the sale and registration of motor vehicles conforming to the emission standard Bharat Stage-IV in the entire country from April 1, 2020.
- The country will have to shift to the cleaner Bharat- VI fuel from April 1, 2020. Bharat Stage (BS) emission norms are standards instituted by the government to regulate output of air pollutants from motor vehicles.
- The BS-IV norms have been enforced across the country since April 2017. In 2016, the Centre had announced the country would skip the BS-V norms altogether and adopt BS-VI norms by 2020.
- The apex court said there cannot be any compromise on the health of citizens and this has to take precedence over the “greed” of a few automobile manufacturers who want to stretch the timeline.

What are BS norms?

- Bharat Stage emission standards, introduced in 2000, are emission standards that have been set up by the Central government to regulate the output of air pollutants from internal combustion engine equipment, including motor vehicles.
- The different norms are brought into force in accordance with the timeline and standards set up by the Central Pollution Control Board which comes under the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change.
- The move from BS-IV or Euro 4 to BS VI will require significant investment in technologies like Diesel Particle Filter (DPF) and Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR). DPF, which comes under BS-V norms will now be incorporated in BS-VI vehicles. In stage VI, selective catalytic reduction technology has to be optimized .

DPF(Diesel Particulate Filter)

- The diesel particulate filter (DPF) for removing particulate matter is a cylindrical object that has to be mounted inside the engine compartment.
- In India, where small cars are preferred, fitting DPF into the limited bonnet space would involve major redesign. The bonnet length may have to be increased, which would make vehicles breach the prevalent excise bracket for sub-4 metre cars.
- The DPF would further have to be optimised for Indian operating conditions
- In Indian conditions, low driving speed means it is difficult to achieve temperatures of 600°C required to burn the soot in DPF. Usually diesel is injected to increase temperatures but excess fuel can cause a fire.
- The injection rate has to be optimised, vehicles re- engineered keeping in mind safety.

SCR(Selective Catalytic Reduction)

- The selective catalytic reduction (SCR) module is used to reduce oxides of nitrogen. When the exhaust is moving, an aqueous urea solution (AUS 32) is injected into the system.
- AUS 32 contains ammonia, which reacts with and reduces the nitrogen. This means a container needs to be put on board the car for deploying the AUS 32.
- Separately, infrastructure also needs to be set up across the country for supply of AUS 32. The optimisation and fitment of this technology would again take three to four years.

National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC)

- The Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India along with National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) jointly organized a Conference at VigyanBhawan to review the functioning of the State Commissions and District Fora.

- The Conference was attended by Presidents of State Commissions and Secretaries in charge of Consumer Affairs of States and UTs.
- The Conference is being held to discuss the issues relating to the functioning of the Consumer Fora such as pendency of case and filling up of vacancies in the post of President and Members of the Commissions,
- The Conference is being held at a crucial time, when the Government has introduced a new Consumer Protection Bill, 2018 in the Lok Sabha repealing the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 with substantial changes for meeting the emerging challenges faced by consumers in the new markets.

About NCDRC:

- The National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC), India is a quasi-judicial commission in India which was set up in 1988 under the Consumer Protection Act of 1986. Its head office is in New Delhi.
- The commission is headed by a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- The commission is presently headed by Justice R K Agrawal, former judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- Section 21 of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 provides that the National Consumer shall have jurisdiction:- to entertain a complaint valued more than one crore and also have Appellate and Revisional jurisdiction from the orders of State Commissions or the District fora as the case may be.
- Section 23 of Consumer Protection Act, 1986, provides that any person aggrieved by an order of NCDRC, may prefer an Appeal against such order to Supreme Court of India within a period of 30 days.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

11th Global Agriculture Summit – 2018

- 11th Global Agriculture Leadership Summit & Awards were recently organised by Indian Council of Food and Agriculture (ICFA) with support of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare; Ministry of Food Processing Industries and Ministry of Commerce.

About Global Agriculture Summit:

- Global Agriculture Summit is an annual event organized by Indian Council of Food and Agriculture to discuss the broad scenario and trends in agriculture sector, trade, technology, investments and the need for appropriate policy initiatives on the part of the Government by bringing together eminent personalities of Indian and global agriculture on one platform.
- The summit aims to discuss the broad issues in agriculture and agribusiness, and measures to empower farmers and unleash the potential of India's agriculture sector by deliberating upon national and global challenges for farmers, agribusinesses and startups, the issue of employment and agriculture development and bring out a road map for the same.

Objectives:

- To discuss the national and global marketing scenario and success models to provide the best marketing models and linkages to Indian farmers through policy reforms and collaborative efforts.
- To discuss the marketing issues and challenges faced by farmers in India and globally, the issue of access and equity in trade and marketing and the emerging trends in agri value and supply chains.
- To discuss the policy, trade, and market perspectives to agriculture on national and global level and to address the issue by creating opportunities for farmers through agri startups and farmers organisations.

- To discuss the role of the States, industry and institutions towards promoting FPOs, agribusinesses, start-up ventures and value chain development to help farmers with better marketing options.
- To discuss the issue of climate change and food security, and the need for collective action through partnerships and the increased role of private sector in providing farmers market connects to increase farmers' incomes.

WTO sets up dispute panel on India-US case on export subsidies

- The World Trade Organisation's dispute settlement body has set up a panel to examine the US complaint against certain export-subsidy measures by India as both the sides failed to resolve the issue at consultation level.

Background:

- In March, the US dragged India to the global trade body's dispute settlement mechanism over export subsidies, saying that these incentives were harming the American companies.
- The US has requested for the establishment of a dispute panel to examine the allegations on India's export incentive measures.
- Seeking consultation under the aegis of the WTO is the first step of dispute settlement process. If the two nations are not able to reach a mutually agreed solution through consultation, the complainant can request for a WTO dispute settlement panel to review the matter.
- The US has challenged India's export subsidy programmes such as Merchandise Exports from India Scheme in the WTO, asserting that these initiatives harm its companies by creating an uneven playing field.
- They have stated that all WTO members, including India, are required to provide subsidies consistent with provisions of the WTO's Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, including refraining from providing subsidies contingent upon export performance.

About Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)

- The Export Incentive Scheme- MEIS scheme grants benefits of up to 5% as compared to earlier scheme which offered benefits up to 7%. However, this scheme removes various kind of previous restriction. Product and market base is also significantly widened in comparison to earlier scheme. Unlike earlier schemes, this scheme has been made applicable to exports made by SEZ units. Benefits under MEIS scheme for exports are extended to developed country which was eligible for a very limited extent under the earlier schemes. The benefits of MEIS is also extended to e-commerce sector.

MEIS schemes are introduced with following objective

- To boost India's export by offsetting infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved
- To provide a level playing field to exporters
- Finally to increase export of Goods
- The Government of India has introduced Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) through the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2015-20 w.e.f. April 1, 2015.

Salient features of MEIS are as under :

- MEIS is result of major consolidation and simplification:
- Earlier there were 5 different schemes for rewarding merchandise exports with different kinds of duty scrips with varying conditions attached to their use. Now all these schemes have been merged into a single scheme, namely Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS).

CSIR develops Less Polluting Firecrackers

- CSIR scientists have developed Less Polluting Firecrackers which are not only environment friendly but 15-20 % cheaper than the conventional ones.
- These crackers have been named as safe water releaser (SWAS), safe minimal aluminium (SAFAL) and safe thermite cracker (STAR).

About Technology:

- About SWAS (Safe Water Releaser): SWAS crackers eliminates usage of (KNO₃) Potassium nitrate and Sulphur with consequent reduction in particulate matter (30-35%) SO₂ and NO_x. It has matching sound intensity with commercial crackers in the range of 105-110 dBA. SWAS has been tested for shelf life up to 3 weeks with consistent performance.
- About SAFAL (Safe Minimal Aluminium): SAFAL has minimal usage of aluminium (only in flash powder for initiation) with consequent significant reduction in particulate matter (35-40 %) compared to commercial crackers. It has matching sound intensity with commercial crackers in the range of 110-115 dBA.
- About STAR (Safe Thermite Cracker): STAR eliminates usage of KNO₃ and S with consequent reduction in particulate matter (35-40%), SO₂ and NO_x. It has matching sound intensity with commercial crackers in the range of 105-110 dBA.

Analysis:

- Indian Fireworks industry is over 6000-crore worth of annual turnover and provides employment opportunities to over 5 lakh families directly or indirectly. This endeavour of CSIR aims at addressing the pollution concerns at the same time protecting the livelihoods of those involved in this trade.
- The firecracker manufactures took keen interest with laboratories throughout the process and the new crackers would not require changes in their manufacturing facilities.
- It has unique property of releasing water vapour and /or air as dust suppressant and diluent for gaseous emissions and matching performance in sound with conventional crackers.

IMPRESS Scheme

- Union HRD Ministry has launched the web portal of IMPRESS scheme with an aim to build a research ecosystem in educational institutions.

IMPRESS Scheme:

- Impactful Policy Research in Social Science (IMPRESS) aims to provide a research roadmap to address policy challenges pertaining to society and so, social science areas.
- The identified domains encompass the major areas or themes that have been in public policy debate due to new developments, earnest concerns, emerging issues, critical deficiencies, and amplified expectations.
- Some sub-themes within a broad domain that have contributed towards growing importance of the domain have also been identified.
- The research based inputs are the crucial requirements in the process of policy making as a policy should evolve from the society and its concerns and the policy is expected to cater to the needs of the society at various intervals of its life. Most of the times there is a wide gap between the policy makers and the society which needs to be bridged for rendering policy more acceptable and implementable which in turn enhances the efficacy of the policy.
- Social science researchers can be very helpful in identification of the gaps between the society and policy makers and they may attempt to provide vital inputs or evidences about the perception and appreciation of the government's policies among various layers of the society.

- Besides, there may be crucial areas where policy makers require evidence, feedback, appraisal, awareness and participation, all in the form of document, in order to make policy substantially effective.
- So, IMPRESS is dedicated to address the issue of bridging the gap between policy making, implementing and the society by generating or encouraging vital inputs from researches in social science disciplines and also to inspire researches in these domains to take up the task of assessment of policies and also that of coordination between policy makers, academics and the society.
- Besides that various ministries and departments of the government have commonality of policy interests and for that they need to have interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary evidence based inputs that could serve their common interests and can help formulate an approach which is more comprehensive and inclusive.