

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**FASTags**

From December 1, lanes on national highway toll plazas across India will accept toll only through FASTag — fitted in a vehicle that pays toll automatically when the vehicle crosses the boom barrier of the toll plaza.

About:

- FASTag is a radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology sticker that can be installed on the windshield of any vehicle. By this, toll payments can be made directly from the pre-paid account linked to it, thus avoiding the need of vehicles to stop at toll plazas for payment of fees.
- Indian Highways Management Company Ltd. (IHMCL), a company promoted by NHAI, is implementing the National Electronic Toll Collection Program (NETC) in the country under the brand name “FASTag” which was launched in April 2016.
- A FASTag is valid for five years, and can be recharged as and when required.
- E-commerce portals like Amazon and PayTM sell these tags issued by various banks. They are available at 27,000 points of sale set up by 22 banks and the NHAI.

What about state highways:

- Under a new “One Nation One FASTag” scheme, the NHAI is trying to get states on board so that one tag can be used seamlessly across highways, irrespective of whether it is the state or the Centre that owns/manages it.
- Recently as part of a pilot, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana signed MoUs with the Centre to accept FASTags in state highways also.

Web-portal of “National Youth Parliament Scheme”

The President of India, Ram Nath Kovind launched the Web-Portal of “National Youth Parliament Scheme”.

About:

- The web-portal of the National Youth Parliament Scheme is available at www.nyps.mpa.gov.in.
- The main objective of the portal is to increase the outreach of the youth parliament programme of the Ministry to all parts of the country.
- All recognised educational institutions of the country are eligible to participate in this programme.
- The registration for participation will be done by the education institutions through the web-portal. After successful registration, the educational institutions will be able to conduct youth parliament sittings in their respective institutions.
- Each student taking part in the sitting will get a Digital ‘Certificate of Participation’ and each Teacher-in-charge and Head of Institution will get a ‘Certificate of Appreciation’ through the web portal.

Related Info: Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs has been implementing Youth Parliament programme since 1966 in Schools under the Directorate of Education, Government of NCT of Delhi and NDMC, Kendriya Vidyalayas, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and Universities/ Colleges.

Mission 41K

Indian Railways has started Procurement of Power in Punjab for Northern Railway as Deemed Licensee under Open Access to reduce the cost of operations under “Mission 41K”.

About:

- “Mission 41K” document was unveiled by Ministry of Railways in 2017. It targets for saving of Rs. 41,000 Crore through integrated Rail Energy Management System by 2025.
- Railway Energy Management Company Limited (REMCL), a JV of Ministry of Railways and RITES Ltd., has been endeavouring to achieve this target by gradual migration from Consumer to Deemed Licensee.

- Deemed Licensee status enables Indian Railways to buy electricity directly from any generating company by paying wheeling charges to Central and State transmission system under open access as per The Electricity Act, 2003.
- These efforts have resulted in keeping electricity price at most economical rate on sustainable basis since 2015 on Indian Railways.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

EB-5 US VISA

New rules governing the EB-5 visa of the United States came into effect, which include a significant increase in the investment amount required to obtain the visa.

About:

- The EB-5 is one of five employment-based immigrant visas that can be obtained in the United States (others being EB-1, EB-2, EB-3, EB-4). An immigrant visa allows its holder to live and work in the US permanently, as opposed to a non-immigrant visa like the H-1B.
- Under the US immigration rules, the EB-5 is a category of visa which enables an individual to apply for permanent residency in the United States (also called green card) after meeting certain investment and employment-generation criteria.
- **The applicant is required:**
 - to make the necessary investment in a commercial enterprise in the United States, and
 - create or, in certain circumstances, preserve 10 full-time jobs for qualified United States workers.
- The US uses the visa scheme to generate employment in what are called 'targeted employment areas'. The TEAs consist of areas that have an average unemployment rate of at least 150% of the national average unemployment rate of the US, as well as certain rural areas.

YUWAAH

UNICEF has launched 'YuWaah' Generation Unlimited in India on 1.11.2019.

About:

- According to UNICEF, Generation Unlimited, called YuWaah in India, is a multi-stakeholder alliance which aims to facilitate youth to gain relevant skills for productive lives and the future of work.
- The target age group of YuWaah includes adolescent girls and boys.
- Its key mission is to promote access to foundational, transferable and 21st century skills for youth inside and outside formal education systems, which includes defining foundational skills, life skills and flexible learning and identifying and scaling impactful delivery models.
- YuWaah intends to create platforms to guide youth to market opportunities (career guidance, mentorship, internships, apprenticeships) and facilitate integration of career guidance in school education.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Disclosure Norms For Listed Companies

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has approved stricter disclosure norms for listed companies.

Salient features of Norms:

- In case of default in repayment of loans beyond 30 days, listed companies will have to disclose the fact of such default within 24 hours. The new default rule will come into force on January 1, 2020.
- An early disclosure can act as an early warning system, which can help investors make considered decisions on whether to stay on or sell the stock and exit, cutting their losses.
- It is also expected that the move will lead to greater credit discipline in the banking industry.

Other recent steps by SEBI:

- SEBI has amended Portfolio Managers (PM) Regulations, 2019 following which net worth requirement of portfolio managers has been enhanced from two crore to five crore rupees.

- SEBI has approved a proposal to reduce the overall time taken for a rights issue from 55 days to 31 days.
- Besides, SEBI has also extended the Business Responsibility Report requirement to top 1,000 companies, from 500 currently.

ISSUES RELATED TO INTERNAL SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

International conference on “landslides risk reduction and resilience-2019”

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs inaugurated the 1st International Conference on “Landslides Risk Reduction and Resilience” in Delhi. It has been organized by the National Institute of Disaster management (NIDM).

Landslides:

- A landslide is the movement of rock, debris or earth down a slope. Landslides are known also as landslips, slumps or slope failure.
- Reasons: They result from the failure of the materials which make up the hill slope and are driven by the force of gravity. Landslides can be triggered by natural causes or by human activity.

Types of Landslide Movement:

- Fall: This is generally characterised by a rapid to extremely rapid rate of movement with the descent of material characterised by a freefall period.
- Topple: This is characterised by the tilting of rock without collapse, or by the forward rotation of rocks about a pivot point. Topples have a rapid rate of movement and failure is generally influenced by the fracture pattern in rock. Material descends by abrupt falling, sliding, bouncing and rolling.
- Flow: This is the most destructive and turbulent form of landslide. Flows have a high-water content which causes the slope material to lose cohesion, turning it into a slurry. They are channelled by the landscape and move rapidly.
- Spread: This phenomenon is characterised by the gradual lateral displacement of large volumes of distributed material over very gentle or flat terrain.

Landslip monitoring stations in the highlands:

- Based on the recommendations of the National Centre for Earth Science Studies (NCESS), the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) has initiated steps to establish a network of landslip monitoring stations in the highlands.
- The units based on acoustic emission technology will also have an early warning mechanism to alert the local community.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Coalbed Methane (CBM)

The Ministry of Coal has asked the state-run coal miner Coal India Limited (CIL) to produce 2 MMSCB (million metric standard cubic metres) per day of coalbed methane (CBM) gas in the next 2 to 3 years.

Coalbed methane (CBM)

- CBM is extracted from unconventional gas reservoirs — where gas is extracted directly from the rock that is the source of the gas.
- The methane is held underground within the coal and is extracted by drilling into the coal seam and removing the groundwater. The resulting drop in pressure causes the methane to be released from the coal.
- CBM has been looked at as a clean alternative fuel with significant prospects.
- CBM can be used for power generation, as compressed natural gas (CNG) auto fuel, as feedstock for fertilisers, industrial uses such as in cement production, rolling mills, steel plants, and for methanol production.

Indian scenario:

- According to the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, India’s CBM resources are estimated at around 92 trillion cubic feet (TCF), or 2,600 billion cubic metres (BCM).

- The Damodar Koel valley and Son valley are prospective areas for CBM development.
- According to the Directorate, CBM production in March 2015 was around 0.77 MMSCMD from 5 CBM blocks.
- In 2018, the Union Cabinet relaxed the rules for Coal India Limited (CIL) to extract natural gas lying below coal seams to boost production.

DEFENCE

Defence Industrial Corridors

The Government has set up defence industrial corridors in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

About:

- These defence corridors will facilitate a well-planned and efficient industrial base that will lead to increased defence production in the country.
- According to data released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India topped the list of arms importer accounting for 13% of the trade in weapons platform between 2012-2018.
- The corridors overlap with existing defence public sector companies, and aim to ensure connectivity among various defence industrial units.

Defence Acquisition Council

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has approved the procurement of weapons and equipment worth ₹ 22,800 crore. The focus was on 'Make in India' initiative i.e. on indigenous design, development and manufacturing of weapons and equipment.

Weapons and Equipment Approved

- Thermal Imaging Night Sights for Assault Rifles: These would enable troops to undertake long range accurate engagements in dark and all weather conditions thereby enhancing the night fighting capabilities.
- Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft for the Indian Air Force (IAF).
- These platforms would provide on-board command & control and 'early warning' which would assist the Indian Air Force (IAF) in achieving effective air space dominance in the least possible time.
- Induction of these aircraft will greatly enhance both the Air defence and offensive capabilities of the IAF.
- The shortage of such force multipliers was felt during the aerial engagement with the Pakistan Air Force, a day after the Balakot air strike in February, 2019.
- P8I long range patrol aircraft for the Indian Navy: These aircraft would greatly strengthen the Navy's capabilities for maritime surveillance, Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) and Anti-Surface Vessel (ASV) strike. These would be procured from the United States.
- Twin Engine Heavy Helicopters (TEHH) for the Indian Coast Guard: These aircraft would enable the Coast Guard to undertake missions to prevent maritime terrorism, infiltration of terrorists by sea routes as well as search & rescue operations.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Keep Calm and Study Hard..