

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**Vat Cau festival:**

- Vat Cau is a centuries-old sport which began as a training exercise for soldiers in Vietnam and contains elements of wrestling and rugby.
- Vat Cau is the main draw of a three-day annual festival held during Vietnam's much celebrated Tet Lunar New Year. Dating back to the 11th century, the game was invented by a revered general to teach his recruits about the importance of teamwork, intelligence and strength when fighting against foreign invaders.
- A single match has four separate teams of eight men wearing waist straps of different colours. They tussle over a 17kg (37-pound) ball made from the wood of a jackfruit tree, laboriously inching it towards one of the holes dug in each team's corner.

Abu Dhabi includes Hindi as third official court language:

- Abu Dhabi has included Hindi as the third official language used in its courts, alongside Arabic and English, as part of a move designed to improve access to justice.
- This is aimed at helping Hindi speakers to learn about litigation procedures, their rights and duties without a language barrier.
- The Indian community in the UAE, numbering 2.6 million, constitutes 30% of the total population and is the largest expatriate community.

India-Norway Ocean Dialogue

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has signed a letter of Intent establishing the India-Norway Marine Pollution Initiative together with the Norwegian ministry of Foreign Affairs.

- Earlier, the Indian and Norwegian governments agreed to work more closely on oceans by signing a MoU and establishing the Dialogue.
- A joint Task Force on Blue Economy with government officials, researchers and experts as well as private sector was established to develop sustainable solutions within strategic areas of the blue economy, such as maritime and marine sector in addition to energy sector.
- Both partners will share experiences and competence, and collaborate on efforts to develop clean and healthy oceans, sustainable use of ocean resources and growth in the blue economy.

INDIAN ECONOMY**Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) facility**

In a boost to energy security of the country, PM recently dedicated to the nation, 1.33 MMT Visakhapatnam Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) facility of Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserve Limited (ISPRL). The cost of the Project is Rs. 1125 crore. The Facility has the largest underground storage compartment in the country.

SPR programme:

- To ensure energy security, the Government of India had decided to set up 5 million metric tons (MMT) of strategic crude oil storages at three locations namely, Visakhapatnam, Mangalore and Padur (near Udupi). These strategic storages would be in addition to the existing storages of crude oil and petroleum products with the oil companies and would serve as a cushion during any external supply disruptions.
- In the 2017-18 budget, it was announced that two more such caverns will be set up Chandikhole in Jajpur district of Odisha and Bikaner in Rajasthan as part of the second phase.
- The construction of the Strategic Crude Oil Storage facilities is being managed by Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), a Special Purpose Vehicle, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas.

Need for strategic oil reserves:

- In 1990, as the Gulf war engulfed West Asia, India was in the throes of a major energy crisis. By all accounts India's oil reserves at the time were adequate for only three days. While India managed to avert the crisis then, the threat of energy disruption continues to present a real danger even today.

- It is unlikely that India's energy needs will dramatically move away from fossil fuels in the near future. Over 80% of these fuels come from imports, a majority of which is sourced from West Asia. This is a major strategic risk and poses a massive financial drain for an embattled economy and its growing current account deficit.
- To address energy insecurity, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government mooted the concept of strategic petroleum reserves in 1998. Today, with India consuming upwards of four million barrels of crude every day (January 2015 figures), the case for creating such reserves grows stronger.

RBI restructuring package for small businesses

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) restructuring package for small businesses announced last month will help recast Rs 1 lakh crore of loans for 7 lakh eligible micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

The scheme:

- The scheme announced by RBI is a one-time scheme wherein a loan tenor and interest rate can be revised without classifying the asset as a NPA.
- The facility is available for standard advances of up to Rs 25 crore only.
- The scheme will help free up additional resources which will fuel demand and create further opportunities in the industry.
- The restructuring must be implemented by March 31, 2020. Banks will need to make a provision of 5% towards these restructured loans. Each bank/NBFC should formulate a policy for this scheme with board approval. Those MSMEs that are not exempt from GST will need to be registered on the GSTN on the date on restructuring.

What was the issue with MSMEs?

- SMEs were the worst hit among various industry segments following demonetisation and implementation of the Goods and Services Tax. Availability of credit to MSMEs declined further after the IL&FS default crisis which led to bank credit to non-banking finance companies drying up. This in turn reduced the ability of NBFCs to lend to MSMEs.
- The sector was facing a liquidity problem because of lack of confidence of banks who had turned risk-averse in the wake of rising bad loans.

Significance of MSMEs and the need for creating an enabling environment: MSMEs form an important component of the Indian economy and contribute significantly to the country's gross domestic product, exports, industrial output and employment generation. Considering the importance of MSMEs in the Indian economy, it is considered necessary at this juncture to take certain measures for creating an enabling environment for the sector.

SDG India Index Baseline Report

Recently NITI Aayog released the SDG India Index: Baseline Report 2018.

SDG India Index: Baseline Report 2018

- The report is a useful comparative account of how well different States and Union Territories have performed so far in their efforts to achieve these goals. However, it has not been possible to establish suitable indicators for three of the 17 goals, including climate action (SDG-13).
- This is on account of either lack of identification of appropriate indicators or of the inability to compare different States. On the whole, 62 indicators representing 14 goals have been identified based on their measurability across States over time.
- A progress performance assessment has been made towards targets set by the Government of India, or the UN SDGs target for 2030, or the average of the three best-performing States.
- For reasons of comparability, all these indicators are normalised.

States are categorised into four groups

- Based on a scale of 0 to 100, the States are categorised into four groups: achievers, front runners, performers, and aspirants.
- Achievers are those States which have already accomplished the set target.

- Front runners are those States that are very close to realising them.
- A majority of the States are categorised as performers and some lag behind as aspirants.

Arbitrariness in the exercise

- Although classification sounds like an appropriate thing to do, there is arbitrariness in the exercise.
- In a unitary range, those States with scores till the midpoint are categorised as aspirants and a cluster of States in a close range of progress are termed as performers.
- A few States are designated as front runners.
- The three front runner States — Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Himachal Pradesh — assume values of 66, 69 and 69, respectively, as against a range of States with values between 50 and 64.
- With the national score being 57, almost 17 States qualify as above or equal to the national score.
- Plotted on a graph, there is a negatively skewed distribution of scores.
- This needs to be recognised in classification; otherwise the arbitrariness with which the classification is made somewhat hints at a purposive designation of a few States in two extremes and a major share of them in between.

The problem of averaging

- Further, when one reads into the performance on various SDGs, it is found that many States fall into the aspirant category, especially for SDG-5 (gender equality), SDG-9 (industry innovation and infrastructure) and SDG-11 (sustainable cities and communities).
- These kinds of differences could well be emerging owing to a different number of indicators considered under different SDGs as well as their corresponding variability across the States.
- This is evident in the variation of scores across different goals.
- For instance, in case of goals 1 and 2, the range for the majority of the States is between 35 and 80.
- For goals 3 and 6, the range is between 25 and 100.
- Again, for goal 5, it ranges between 24 and 50.
- Given these variations across different goals, merely averaging them not only compromises on robustness but also masks the disaggregated story to a large extent.

Difference between two states doesn't give a clear picture

- The difference in progress between the three front runner States is three points.
- This is perhaps not similar to the distance between the performing States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which too have a three-point difference.
- Such comprehension of achievement is limited as regards to comparing States, let alone designating them into four categories.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

Forest Rights Act

The Odisha State Food Commission has again asked the State government to expedite implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, that would help ensure food and nutritional security to the vulnerable section of society.

Forest Rights Act (FRA): The act was passed in December 2006. It deals with the rights of forest-dwelling communities over land and other resources. The Act grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities, partially correcting the injustice caused by the forest laws.

Rights under the Act:

- Title rights – Ownership to land that is being farmed by tribals or forest dwellers subject to a maximum of 4 hectares; ownership is only for land that is actually being cultivated by the concerned family, meaning that no new lands are granted.
- Use rights – to minor forest produce (also including ownership), to grazing areas, to pastoralist routes, etc.
- Relief and development rights – to rehabilitation in case of illegal eviction or forced displacement; and to basic amenities, subject to restrictions for forest protection.

- Forest management rights – to protect forests and wildlife.

Eligibility: Eligibility to get rights under the Act is confined to those who “primarily reside in forests” and who depend on forests and forest land for a livelihood. Further, either the claimant must be a member of the Scheduled Tribes scheduled in that area or must have been residing in the forest for 75 years.

Process of recognition of rights:

- The Act provides that the gram sabha, or village assembly, will initially pass a resolution recommending whose rights to which resources should be recognised.
- This resolution is then screened and approved at the level of the sub-division (or taluka) and subsequently at the district level.
- The screening committees consist of three government officials (Forest, Revenue and Tribal Welfare departments) and three elected members of the local body at that level. These committees also hear appeals.

DEFENCE

Defence Innovation Hubs

The Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) framework under the Defence Ministry is envisaging setting up of independent Defence Innovation Hubs (DIHs) where innovators can get information about needs and feedback from the Armed Services directly and create solutions for India’s major defence platforms. Defence Innovation Hubs are aimed at attracting more innovators to work for the defence sector in India.

Guidelines for Setting up of Defence Innovation Hubs

The Framework to Fund Defence Innovation Hubs under iDEX has been approved by the Board of Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO). The framework prescribes the following minimum criterion for setting up Defence Innovation Hubs: Any Central Government recognized Incubator including but not limited to:

Department of Science and Technology (DST) recognized Incubators.

- Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog created Atal Incubation Centers (AICs) and Established Incubation Centers (EICs).
- Ministry of MSME recognized incubators.
- Any other incubator recognized or funded through any Central government scheme.
- The incubator located in districts mentioned in the list of SME clusters hosted by the Ministry of MSME in collaboration with UNIDO.
- Incubator / Hub promoted by local industry associations.
- The Defence Innovation Organisation set up under iDEX has announced setting up of two DIHs in Tamil Nadu (Coimbatore) and Maharashtra (Nashik).

Defence Innovation Organisation: Defence Innovation Organisation is a not for profit company under section 8 of the Companies Act. The Defence Innovation Organisation is funded by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL). The headquarters of the Defence Innovation Organisation is located at Bengaluru.

Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme: Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme aims to create an ecosystem to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging Industries including MSMEs, Startups, Individual Innovators, R&D institutes and Academia and provide them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D which has good potential for future adoption for Indian defence and aerospace needs. The Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) functions as the executive arm of the Defence Innovation Organisation.