

GOVERNANCE**Parliament informed about Agricultural Mechanization**

The government of India informed Parliament about the initiatives to Promote Farm Mechanization.

Key Points

A special dedicated scheme 'Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)' has been introduced by the Government of India in 2014-15.

Aim: To make farm machines accessible and affordable for the small and marginal farmers (SMFs) through the establishment of Custom Hiring Centers(CHCs), creating Hubs for hi-tech & high-value farm equipment and Farm Machinery Banks.

Distribution of various subsidized agricultural equipment and machines to individual farmers is also one of the activities under the scheme.

For 2021-22 Rs. 1050 crore budget has been allocated for SMAM which is higher than the last year.

Significance: Agricultural mechanization is crucial in the agriculture sector as it contributes towards improving the efficiency of the inputs used in crop production thereby also increasing the productivity of crops.

SOCIAL ISSUE**National AYUSH Mission (NAM)**

Central Government is implementing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of National AYUSH Mission (NAM) through States/UTs for development and promotion of AYUSH systems of medicine including Ayurvedic system.

Key Points

- The Mission inter-alia makes the following provisions for the promotion of AYUSH systems including the Ayurvedic system:
- Co-location of AYUSH facilities at Primary Health Centers (PHCs), Community Health Centers (CHCs), and Districts Hospitals (DHs).
- Up-gradation of exclusive State Government AYUSH Hospitals and Dispensaries.
- Setting up of up to 50 bedded integrated AYUSH Hospital.
- Upgradation of State Government Under-Graduate and Post-Graduate Educational Institutions.
- Setting up of new State Government AYUSH Educational Institutions in the States where it is not available in Government Sector.
- Strengthening of State Government/State Government Co-operatives/PSUs for manufacturing of quality medicines in AYUSH Systems.
- Strengthening of State Drug Testing Laboratories
- Support for the cultivation of Medicinal Plant including processing and post-harvest management to ensure supply of quality raw material for AYUSH medicine and other products.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION**Nord Stream 2 Pipeline**

In a development that could increase tensions between the USA and Germany, the association which is building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline has said that it has resumed work on the controversial project.



Key Points

- In 2015, Gazprom and 5 other European energy firms decided to build Nord Stream 2, valued at around \$11 billion.
- The 1,200 km pipeline will run from Ust-Luga in Russia to Greifswald in Germany.
- It will carry 55 billion cubic meters of gas per year.
- The under-construction pipeline will run along with the already-completed Nord Stream 1 system, and the two together will supply an aggregate of 110 billion cubic meters of gas to Germany per year.

Why is the pipeline controversial?

Nord Stream 2 has drawn criticism from the US, where it is believed that the project would increase Europe's dependence on Russia for natural gas, thus strengthening its President.

Currently, EU countries already rely on Russia for 40% of their gas needs.

MoU signed for the construction of the Lalandar Dam

MoU was signed for the construction of the Lalandar [Shatoot] Dam between India and Afghanistan recently.

Key Points

The project is a part of the New Development Partnership between India and Afghanistan.

Benefits: (1) Meet the safe drinking water needs of Kabul City; (2) Provide irrigation water to nearby areas; (3) Rehabilitate the existing irrigation and drainage network; (4) Aid in flood protection and management efforts in the area; (5) Provide electricity to the region.

Do you know?

This is the second major dam being built by India in Afghanistan, after the India- Afghanistan Friendship Dam [Salma Dam], which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister and the President in June 2016.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**Properties of the 99th element in the periodic table reported**

A team of scientists at the Berkeley Lab has reported some of the properties of element 99 in the periodic table called "Einsteinium", named after Albert Einstein.

Key Points

- For the first time, researchers have been able to characterise some of the properties of this element.
- It was discovered in 1952 in the debris of the first hydrogen bomb (the detonation of a thermonuclear device called "Ivy Mike" in the Pacific Ocean).
- The most common isotope of the element, einsteinium 253 has a half-life of 20 days.
- Because of its high radioactivity and short half-life of all einsteinium isotopes, even if the element was present on Earth during its formation, it has most certainly decayed.
- This is the reason that it cannot be found in nature and needs to be manufactured using very precise and intense processes.

INDIAN HERITAGE & CULTURE**National Research Centre For Makhana**

Union Minister of Agriculture informed Lok Sabha about National Research Centre for Makhana.

Key Points

- ICAR-National Research Centre (NRC) for Makhana, Darbhanga (Bihar) was sanctioned by the Department of Agricultural Research & Education, Govt. of India, as a new scheme during the 9th Five Year Plan period (1997–2002) for Conservation, Research & Development of the Makhana crop.
- However, during the 10th plan period (2002-2007), the NRC for Makhana was merged and brought under the administrative control of ICAR-Research Complex for Eastern Region (RCER), Patna, without changing the mandate.
- Darbhanga in particular and Mithila, in general, is the major Makhana producing region in the country.

Important value additions

- In India, makhana cultivation takes place mainly in West Bengal, Bihar, Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and UP.
- But, Bihar alone is the largest producer of Makhana with 90 percent of overall production across the world.
- It belongs to the Nymphaeaceae family.
- It is a perennial plant.
- It grows in stagnant water like ponds, swamps, and wetlands in the tropical climatic areas very much similar to the lotus.

GEOGRAPHY

Lithium Reserves in Karnataka

Atomic Minerals Directorate issues clarification on media reports about Lithium Reserves in Karnataka.

Lithium

atomic number: 3
 symbol: Li
 electron configuration: [He]2s¹
 name: lithium
 atomic weight: 6.941
 acid-base properties of higher-valence oxides: Strongly basic
 crystal structure: Body-centred cubic
 physical state at 20 °C (68 °F): Solid

Key Points

- Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMD), a constituent unit of the Department of Atomic Energy and Geological Survey of India are two agencies that are involved in mineral exploration.

Lithium is a key element for new technologies.

- It finds its use in ceramics, glass, telecommunication, and aerospace industries.
- The thermonuclear application makes Lithium a “Prescribed substance” under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 which permits AMD for exploration of Lithium in various geological domains of the country.
- Recently, news items on Lithium exploration and resource of Allapatna – Marlagalla sector, Mandya district, Karnataka have been published in various media.
- In some media, the estimates of lithium metal have been quoted to be as high as 14,100 tonnes in a small patch of the surveyed area in Mandya district.
- The Directorate has clarified that exploration efforts have so far established ~1600 tonnes of lithium in the inferred category (low level of confidence).

National Monsoon Mission

Minister of Earth Science informed Rajya Sabha about National Monsoon Mission.

Key Points

- Under the Monsoon Mission, Ministry has developed state-of-the-art weather and climate prediction models, which are now in operational use.
- These models include models for short-range to medium range (1-10 days), extended-range (10days to 30 days), and seasonal (up to one season).

Targets of Monsoon Mission:

- Development of a seamless prediction system using monsoon mission model, on different time scales, like Seasonal, Extended range, Short-range prediction.
- Initiate and coordinate the working partnership between Indian and foreign institutes to develop a system for the prediction of extremes and climate applications
- Develop and implement a system for climate applications having social impacts (such as agriculture, flood forecast, extreme events forecast, wind energy, etc.)
- Advanced data assimilation system for preparing high-quality data for model predictions.

Major achievements of NMM during the last three years:

- Setting up of an advanced prediction system for Seasonal prediction; Extended range prediction and Very high-resolution Short-range prediction.
- Commissioning of a Global Ensemble Forecast System (GEFS) for short and medium-range prediction at 12km.

BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENT

World's Smallest Reptile discovered in Madagascar

A chameleon discovered in Madagascar by scientists from Germany and Madagascar may be the world's smallest adult reptile.

The discovery has been reported in the journal Scientific Reports.

Key Points

- The team found one male and one female of the species, named *Brookesia nana*, during an expedition in 2012.
- The male has a length (snout to vent) of 13.5 mm and a total length of 21.6 mm when the tail is included.
- Previously, the chameleon species *Brookesia Micra* was thought to be the smallest.



Do you know?

- The longest, the reticulated python, at 6.25 m is almost as long as 289 *Brookesia nana*s.
- Madagascar is home to tiny lizards and also the smallest species of snakes.
- One possible reason for such small species is the so-called "island effect" that causes species on small islands to get smaller.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

Community in news: Koch Rajbongshis

The Koch Rajbongshis community was in news recently.

Key Points

- They are a community that traces its roots to the Kamata kingdom, which comprised parts of Assam, West Bengal, and adjoining territories.
- In the medieval period, the community was dominant and ruled their territory of Kamatapur, which comprised a large part of Bangladesh, West Bengal, Bihar, and India's north-east.
- After Independence, the princely state of Cooch Behar became part of West Bengal.
- Today, Koch Rajbongshis are found in Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, and Bihar, and in Bangladesh, Nepal, and some parts of Bhutan.
- They are estimated to number over 33 lakh in West Bengal, mostly the northern districts, and have a large presence in Assam.



DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns What are the reasons for privatization of public sector banks ? Discuss the associated challenges.(250 words)

Ans:

In the Union Budget for 2021-22, the government has announced taking up the privatisation of two public sector banks (in addition to IDBI Bank) and one general insurance company in the upcoming fiscal.

Reasons for Privatising Public Sector Banks

- Previous reform measures have not yielded results: Years of capital injections and governance reforms have not been able to improve the financial position of in public sector banks significantly. Many of them have higher levels of stressed assets than private banks, and also lag the latter on profitability, market capitalisation and dividend payment record.
- Aligned with Long Term Goal: Privatisation of two public sector banks will set the ball rolling for a long-term project that envisages only a handful of state-owned banks, with the rest either consolidated with strong banks or privatised.
- Reduces Government Burden: Privatisation will free up the government, the majority owner, from continuing to provide equity support to the banks year after year. The government front-loaded Rs 70,000 crore into government-run banks in September 2019, Rs 80,000 crore in in FY18, and Rs 1.06 lakh crore in FY19 through recapitalisation bonds.
- Rationalisation of Banks in Post-COVID Scenario: After the Covid-related regulatory relaxations are lifted, banks are expected to report higher NPAs and loan losses. This would mean the government would again need to inject equity into weak public sector banks. The government is trying to strengthen the strong banks and also minimise their numbers through privatisation.
- Changed Approach to Financial Sector Problems: Privatisation and proposal of setting up an asset reconstruction company entirely owned by banks, underline an approach of finding market-led solutions to challenges in the financial sector.
- Private Participation promotes innovation in market: Private banks' market share in loans has risen to 36% in 2020 from 21.26% in 2015, while public sector banks' share has fallen to 59.8% from 74.28%. They have expanded the market share through new innovative products, latest technology, and better services.

What are the challenges associated with increasing Privatisation of Banks?

- Private banks are not without faults
- In the last couple of years, some questions have arisen over the performance of private banks, especially on governance issues.
- ICICI Bank MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar was sacked for allegedly extending dubious loans.
- Yes Bank CEO Rana Kapoor was not given extension by the RBI and now faces investigations by various agencies.
- Lakshmi Vilas Bank faced operational issues and was recently merged with DBS Bank of Singapore.
- Former Axis Bank MD Shikha Sharma too was denied an extension.

- Moreover, when the RBI ordered an asset quality review of banks in 2015, many private sector banks, including Yes Bank, were found under-reporting NPAs.
- Dangers of private banks repeating the mistakes of 1960s
- There is widespread perception that the private sector then was not sufficiently aware of its larger social responsibilities and was more concerned with profit.
- This made private banks unwilling to diversify their loan portfolios as this would raise transaction costs and reduce profits.
- The expansion of branches was mostly in urban areas, and rural and semi-urban areas continued to go unserved

Conclusion

The initial plan of the government was to privatise four. Depending on the success with the first two, the government is likely to go for divestment in another two or three banks in the next financial year.

DAILY QUIZ

1. From the below, identify the incorrect statement about Van Dhan Yojana?
 - a) It is a component of the Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through MSP & Development of Value Chain for MFP.
 - b) Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is the nodal implementing agency at Central level.**
 - c) It was launched on 14th April, 2018 and seeks to improve tribal incomes through value addition of tribal products.
 - d) It is 100% Central Government Funded with TRIFED providing Rs. 15 lakhs for each 300 member Van Dhan Kendra.
2. From the below, identify the correct statement with reference to 'The Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS)'?
 - a) The identified manual scavengers, one from each family, would be eligible for receiving cash assistance of Rs. 4,00,000 immediately after identification.
 - b) Loan up to a maximum cost of Rs. 10 lacs will be admissible under the scheme and Rs. 15 lacs in case of sanitation related projects.**
 - c) This Scheme is implemented by Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
 - d) There is cap on income to be eligible for this scheme.
3. The term, 'Miyawaki' method is often seen in news. What is it associated with?
 - a) Desalination of Seawater
 - b) Afforestation**
 - c) Zero Budget Natural Farming
 - d) Algal Bloom
4. Consider the following statement regarding Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) Scheme –
 1. This Scheme targets to form and promote 100,000 new FPOs in the country with budgetary provision of Rs 6865 crore.
 2. There are 09 implementing agency, which will engage Cluster Based Business Organizations (CBBOs) to aggregate, registered & provide professional handholding support to each FPO for a period of 5 years.
 3. National Project Management Agency (NPMA) has been engaged for providing overall project guidance, coordination, compilation of information.Which of the above statements is/are correct?
 - a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) 1 only
 - c) 2 and 3 only**
 - d) All of the Above
5. The term 'TROPEX 21' is related to which of the following?
 - a) A type of intercontinental ballistic missile
 - b) A submarine of Indian Navy
 - c) A bilateral military exercise between India and USA
 - d) A theatre level exercise of Indian Navy**