

GOVERNANCE**PM-DAKSH Scheme**

Recently, the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has informed the Lok Sabha that the amount of funds earmarked under PM-DAKSH (Pradhan Mantri Dakshta Aur Kushalta Sampann Hitgrahi) Yojana during 2020-21 and 2021-22 are Rs.44.79 crores and Rs.79.48 crores respectively. Earlier, the Ministry launched 'PM-DAKSH' Portal and 'PM-DAKSH' Mobile App to make the skill development schemes accessible to the target groups - SC (Scheduled Caste), OBC (Other Backward Classes), Economically Backward Classes (EBC), Denotified tribes, Sanitation workers.

What are the Key Points?**About:**

- It is being implemented from the year 2020-21.
- Under this, eligible target groups are provided with the skill development training programmes on Short Term Training Program; Up-Skilling/Reskilling; Entrepreneurship Development Programme, and Long Term Training Programme. These training programmes are being implemented through the government training institutes, sector skill councils that have been constituted by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and other credible institutions.

Eligibility:

- Marginalised persons of SC, OBC, EBC, Denotified tribes, Sanitation workers including waste pickers, manual scavengers, transgenders and other similar categories.

Implementation:

- **It is implemented by the three Corporations under the Ministry:**
 1. National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC),
 2. National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC),
 3. National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC).

Status of Skill Development Training of Target Groups:

- Skill development training has been imparted to 2,73,152 people of the target groups in the last 5 years.
- A target, during the year 2021-22, has been set to provide the skill development training to approx 50,000 people of the target groups through these three corporations.

What is the Significance of the Scheme?

- **Minimal Economic Assets:** Most of the persons of the target groups have minimal economic assets; therefore, provision of training and enhancing their competencies is essential for economic empowerment/ upliftment of these marginalised target groups.
- **Helps Category of Rural Artisans:** Many of the persons of the target groups belong to the category of rural artisans who have become marginalised owing to the coming of better technologies in the market.
- **Empowers Women:** Women due to their overall domestic compulsions, cannot be involved in wage employment which normally involves long working hours and sometimes migration to other cities, there is a need to empower the women amongst the target groups.

What are the Initiatives Related to Skill Development?

- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0:** It was launched by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in 2021 in a bid to empower India's youth with employable skills by making over 300 skill courses available to them.
- **National Career Service Project:** Launched in 2015 to offer free online career skills training to job-seekers registered with it. It is an initiative of the Ministry of Labour & Employment.
- **Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood (SANKALP):** Its focus is on district-level skilling ecosystem through convergence and coordination. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme which is collaborated with the World Bank.
- **Kaushalacharya Awards:** Launched to recognize the contribution made by skill trainers and to motivate more trainers to join the Skill India Mission.
- **Scheme for Higher Education Youth in Apprenticeship and Skills (SHREYAS):** The scheme is to provide industry apprenticeship opportunities to the general graduates exiting in April 2019 through the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS). It was launched by the Ministry of Education.
- **Atmanirbhar Skilled Employee Employer Mapping (ASEEM):** Launched by MSDE in 2020, it is a portal to help skilled people find sustainable livelihood opportunities.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION**Phosphorus Bombs**

Recently, Saudi Arabia has mass executed 81 people, including seven Yemenis and one Syrian national for crimes related to terrorism and other capital crimes. This has prompted the Iranian government to suspend talks with the country.

- Both countries have had tense diplomatic relations since a long time ago.
- Regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia, which severed diplomatic ties in 2016, launched direct talks hosted by Iraq in 2021 as UN (United Nations)-led efforts to end a war in Yemen stall. They have held four rounds of talks in Iraq.

What is Background of Saudi Arabia-Iran Conflict?

- **Religious Factionalism:** Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran have been sour in part because of religious differences, which go back centuries. They each follow one of the two main branches of Islam. Iran is largely Shia Muslim, while Saudi Arabia sees itself as the leading Sunni Muslim power.
- **Leader of Islamic World:** Historically, Saudi Arabia, a monarchy and home to the birthplace of Islam, saw itself as the leader of the Muslim world. However this was challenged in 1979 by the Islamic revolution in Iran which created a new type of state in the region - a kind of revolutionary theocracy - that had an explicit goal of exporting this model beyond its own borders.
- **Regional Cold War:** Saudi Arabia and Iran - two powerful neighbors - are locked in a fierce struggle for regional dominance.
 1. Uprisings across the Arab world (after the Arab Spring in 2011) caused political instability throughout the region.
 2. Iran and Saudi Arabia exploited these upheavals to expand their influence, notably in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, further heightening mutual suspicions.
 3. Moreover, external powers like the US and Israel have a major role in exacerbating conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.
- **Proxy Wars:** Iran and Saudi Arabia are not directly fighting but they are engaged in a variety of proxy wars (conflicts where they support rival sides and militias) around the region. For Example, Houthi rebels in Yemen. These groups can acquire greater capabilities which can cause further instability in the region. Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of supporting them.
- **2016 Flash Point:** Many Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions in the Iran following Saudi Arabia's execution of the Shiite Muslim cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

What can be the Possible Impact of Normalization of Relations?

- **Resolution of Israel-Palestine Conflict:** Warming of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia may have a positive impact in dealing with Israel and the Palestinian issue.
- **Stabilization of Oil Market:** Iran and Saudi Arabia share a common interest for stable oil prices given the importance of the market to their economies. Normalization of relations would ensure steady oil revenues for all producing countries and more predictability to economic planners in both Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Way Forward

- **Role of India:** Historically, India has good diplomatic relations with both the countries. Stabilization of relations between the two countries may impact India in a mixed way.
 1. On the negative side, higher oil prices will affect the balance of trade in India.
 2. On the positive side, this could provide easing of investments, connectivity projects across the region.
- **Reciprocity by Iran:** Iran still needs to make a mark in its diplomatic efforts by publicly supporting a cease-fire in Yemen.
- **Easing of US Sanctions:** Clarity on US sanctions over Iran is of prime importance, if Iran-Saudi Arabia relations are to get normalized.

ENVIRONMENT

Project Dolphin

Recently, the Ministry of Jal Shakti expressed his displeasure over the slow pace of the approval process for Project Dolphin.

What is Project Dolphin?

- The initiative got in-principle approval in 2019 at the first meeting of the National Ganga Council (NGC), headed by the Prime Minister. Project Dolphin is one of the activities planned under Arth Ganga, an ambitious inter-ministerial initiative of the government approved in 2019.
- Project Dolphin will be on the lines of Project Tiger, which has helped increase the tiger population.
- It is expected to be implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

1. A Special Conservation program needs to be taken up for Gangetic Dolphin which is a national aquatic animal and also indicator species for the river Ganga spread over several states. Indicator species, organisms—often a microorganism or a plant—that serves as a measure of the environmental conditions that exist in a given locale.
 2. As the Gangetic dolphin is at the top of the food chain, protecting the species and its habitat will ensure conservation of aquatic lives of the river.
 3. So far, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), which implements the government's flagship scheme Namami Gange, has been taking some initiatives for saving dolphins.
- **Global Experience:** The Rhine Action Plan (1987) of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) — representing Switzerland, France, Germany, Luxemburg and the Netherlands — helped in conservation of the salmon fish (also an indicator species).

What are the Key Points Related to Gangetic Dolphin?

- **Scientific Name:** Platanista gangetica gangetica.
- **Discovery:** It was officially discovered in 1801.
- **Habitat:** They live in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh.
 1. The Ganges river dolphin can only live in freshwater and is essentially blind.
 2. They hunt by emitting ultrasonic sounds, which bounces off of fish and other prey, enabling them to “see” an image in their mind. They are also called ‘susu’.
- **Population:** The global population of the species is estimated at 4,000, and nearly 80% found in the Indian subcontinent.
- **Significance:** It is a reliable indicator of the health of the entire river ecosystem.
- **Threats:**
 1. **Bycatch:** These dolphins and people both favour areas of the river where fish are plentiful and the water current is slower. This has led to fewer fish for people and more dolphins dying as a result of accidentally being caught in fishing nets, also known as bycatch.
 2. **Pollution:** Industrial, agricultural, and human pollution is another serious cause of habitat degradation.
 3. **Dams:** Construction of dams and other irrigation-related projects make them susceptible to inbreeding and more vulnerable to other threats because they cannot move to new areas. Dolphins below a dam are threatened by heavy pollution, increased fishing activities and vessel traffic. They also have less food because dams disturb the migration, breeding cycles and habitat of fish and other prey.

Conservation Status:

- Indian Wildlife (Protection), Act 1972: Schedule I.
- International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN): Endangered.
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES): Appendix I (most endangered).
- Convention on Migratory Species (CMS): Appendix II (migratory species that need conservation and management or would significantly benefit from international co-operation).

Other Steps Taken:

- **National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC):** The NDRC is coming up on the 4,400 square metre plot of land on the premises of Patna University for the conservation of the endangered Gangetic river dolphin.
- **Dolphin Sanctuary:** Vikramshila Ganges Dolphin Sanctuary has been established in Bihar.
- **National Ganga River Dolphin Day:** The National Mission for Clean Ganga celebrates 5th October as National Ganga River Dolphin Day.
- **Conservation Plan:** The Conservation Action Plan for the Ganges River Dolphin 2010-2020, which “identified threats to Gangetic Dolphins and impact of river traffic, irrigation canals and depletion of prey-base on Dolphins populations”.

PRELIMS FACT

MANPADS

The United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are shipping weapons into Ukraine, including highly sensitive items such as shoulder-fired missiles called Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems (MANPADS) that can take down aircraft. Countries such as India, Pakistan, Germany, UK, Turkey and Israel have also used MANPADS in their defence efforts.

Russia is by far the biggest exporter of MANPADS, having sold over 10,000 such systems between 2010 and 2018 to various countries including Iraq, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Venezuela, and Libya.

What are MANPADS?

About:

- MANPADS are short-range, lightweight and portable surface-to-air missiles that can be fired by individuals or small groups to destroy aircraft or helicopters.
- They help shield troops from aerial attacks and are most effective in targeting low-flying aircrafts. MANPATs or Man-Portable Anti-Tank Systems work in a similar manner but are used to destroy or incapacitate military tanks.
- MANPADS have a maximum range of 8 kilometers and can engage targets at altitudes of 4.5 km.
- The first MANPADS were introduced by the United States and Soviet Union in the 1960s.

Features:

- **Shoulder-Fired, Light Weight:** They can be shoulder-fired, launched from atop a ground-vehicle, fired from a tripod or stand, and from a helicopter or boat. They are fairly lightweight as compared to other elaborate weapon systems, making them easy to operate by individual soldiers. They weigh anywhere between 10 to 20 kilograms and are not longer than 1.8 meters.
- **Fire and Forget Guidance Systems:** Most of them have passive or 'fire and forget' guidance systems, meaning that the operator is not required to guide the missile to its target, enabling them to run and relocate immediately after firing.
- **Infrared (IR) Seekers:** The missiles are fitted with infrared (IR) seekers that identify and target the airborne vehicle through heat radiation being emitted by the latter.

Common Variants:

- Stinger Missiles (US), Igla MANPADS (Russia), Starstreak (Britain), RBS-70 MANPADS Series (Sweden), Next Generation Light Antitank Weapon or NLAW missiles and Javelin missiles (US and NATO).

Concerns:

- **Civilian Attacks:** According to a 2019 study, more than 60 civilian aircraft have been hit by MANPADS since the 1970s, claiming the lives of more than 1,000 civilians.
- **Illicit Use by Non-State Actors:** Over time, non-state actors such as rebel and terrorist groups are known to have illicitly acquired MANPADS, using them during civil wars and other high-intensity conflicts.
- **Illegal Weapon Trade:** Observers fear that sending lightweight ground-based MANPADS to Ukraine may contribute to intensifying the network of illegal weapon trade.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. Explain the concept of open market operations (OMO). What is its impact on various macroeconomic parameters? (250 words)

Introduction

Open market operations (OMO) is the sale and purchase of government securities and treasury bills by RBI or the central bank of the country. The objective of OMO is to regulate the money supply in the economy. It is one of the quantitative monetary policy tools. Commercial banks and financial institutions participate in the Open Market Operations (OMO).

Body

About OMO

- Open market operations are the major instrument of monetary control in industrial countries and are becoming important to developing countries and economies in transition.
- Open market operations allow central banks great flexibility in the timing and volume of monetary operations at their own initiative, encourage an impersonal, business like relationship with participants in the marketplace, and provide a means of avoiding the inefficiencies of direct controls.
- There are two types of open market operations namely Outright OMO and Repo.

Impact on various macroeconomic parameters

- **Expansionary policy**
 1. During a recession or economic downturn, RBI will seek to expand the supply of money in the economy, with a goal of lowering the rate at which banks lend to each other overnight.
 2. To do this, the RBI will purchase bonds from banks and other financial institutions and deposit payment into the accounts of the buyers.
 3. This increases the amount of money that banks and financial institutions have on hand, and banks can use these funds to provide loans.
 4. With more money on hand, banks will lower interest rates to entice consumers and businesses to borrow and invest, thereby stimulating the economy and employment.

- **Contractionary policy**

1. RBI will undertake the opposite process when the economy is overheating and inflation is reaching the limit of its comfort zone.
2. When RBI sells bonds to the banks, it takes money out of the financial system, reducing the money supply.
3. This will cause interest rates to rise, discouraging individuals and businesses from borrowing and investing, while encouraging them to put their money in less productive investments such as interest-bearing savings accounts and certificates of deposit.
4. This has the effect of slowing inflation and economic growth.

Conclusion

The RBI performs Open Market Operations based on the macroeconomic scenario in the Indian economy. OMO has been a potent tool to manipulate the readily available liquidity in the economy which in turn have cascading effects on inflation, bond yields etc. RBI's buying or selling of securities has ripple effects through the money supply, interest rates, economic growth, and employment.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Which one of the following is the national aquatic animal of India? (2015)

- a. Saltwater crocodile
- b. Olive ridley turtle
- c. Gangetic dolphin**
- d. Gharial

Q2. What is "Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)", sometimes seen in the news? (2018)

- a. An Israeli radar system
- b. India's indigenous anti-missile programme
- c. An American anti-missile system**
- d. A defence collaboration between Japan and South Korea.

Q3. Other than poaching, what are the possible reasons for the decline in the population of Ganges River Dolphins? (2014)

1. Construction of dams and barrages on rivers
2. Increase in the population of crocodiles in rivers
3. Getting trapped in fishing nets accidentally
4. Use of synthetic fertilisers and other agricultural chemicals in crop-fields in the vicinity of rivers

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1, 3 and 4 only**
- d. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q4. Which one of the following is the national aquatic animal of India? (2015)

- a. Saltwater crocodile
- b. Olive ridley turtle
- c. Gangetic dolphin**
- d. Gharial

Q5. With reference to Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, consider the following statements: (018)

1. It is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
2. It, among other things, will also impart training in soft skills, entrepreneurship, financial and digital literacy.
3. It aims to align the competencies of the unregulated workforce of the country to the National Skill Qualification Framework.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 3 only
- b. 2 only
- c. 2 and 3 only**
- d. 1, 2 and 3