

“Life is short. Focus on what really matters most. You have to change your priorities over time.” Roy T. Bennett

INTERNATIONAL AND BILATERAL

MALDIVES FAILED TO GET ELECTED TO THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL AND RECENT REFORMS IN UNSC

The Maldives failed to get elected to the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member. Maldives and Indonesia had contested for a seat in the UNSC, but Indonesia won the seat after securing 144 votes against 46 for the Maldives.

In the election, 190 members participated, and the winning members had to get more than two-thirds majority or 127 votes. Indonesia is likely to take up the seat on January 1, 2019 with other newly elected non-permanent members — Germany, Belgium, Dominican Republic and South Africa.

The five new members will replace Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands and Sweden on the council.

There are 15 members on the UN Security Council, including the five permanent ones — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — and 10 non-permanent members, half of which are elected each year. Each candidate country needed to secure two thirds of the votes in order to clinch a seat.

UNSC:

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.

Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.

The Security Council consists of fifteen members. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body’s five permanent members. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on

the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.

The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body’s presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Proposed reforms:

Reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) encompasses five key issues: categories of membership, the question of the veto held by the five permanent members, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, and the Security Council-General Assembly relationship. There is also a proposal to admit more permanent members.

India’s bid for a permanent seat in the council:

India was among the founding members of United Nations.

It is the second largest and a one of the largest constant contributor of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping missions.

Today, India has over 8,500 peacekeepers in the field, more than twice as many as the UN’s five big powers combined.

India, since long time, has been demanding expansion of UNSC and its inclusion as permanent member in it. It has been a member of UNSC for 7 terms and a member of G-77 and G-4, so permanent membership is a logical extension.

NATIONAL

WIDESPREAD URANIUM CONTAMINATION IN GROUNDWATER FROM AQUIFERS ACROSS 16 STATES

Scientists have found widespread uranium contamination in groundwater from aquifers across 16 states in India, much above the WHO provisional standard for the country. The main source of uranium contamination was “natural,” but human factors such as groundwater table decline and nitrate pollution could be worsening the problem.

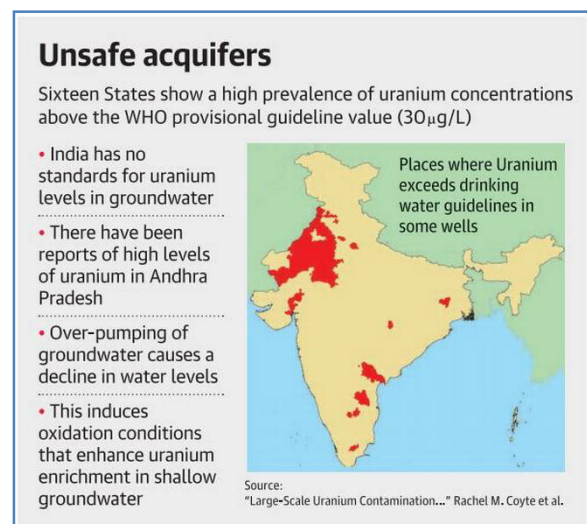
The WHO has set a provisional safe drinking water standard of 30 micrograms of uranium per litre, a level that is consistent with the U.S. EPA standards. However, uranium is not yet included in the list of contaminants monitored under the Bureau of Indian Standards' Drinking Water Specifications.

Main factors responsible for uranium contamination:

When over-pumping of aquifers' groundwater occurs and their water levels decline, it induces oxidation conditions that, in turn, enhance uranium enrichment in the shallow groundwater that remains.

While the primary source of uranium is geogenic (naturally occurring), anthropogenic (human caused) factors such as groundwater table decline and nitrate pollution may further enhance uranium mobilization.

Other factors include the amount of uranium contained in an aquifer's rocks; water-rock interactions that cause the uranium to be extracted from those rocks; oxidation conditions that enhance the extracted uranium's solubility in water; and the interaction of the extracted uranium with other chemicals in the groundwater, such as bicarbonate, which can further enhance its solubility.



There is a need for revision of the current water quality monitoring program in India, evaluation of human health risks in areas of high uranium prevalence, development of adequate remediation technologies, and,

above all, implementation of preventive management practices to address this problem.

Including a uranium standard in the Bureau of Indian Standards' Drinking Water Specification based on uranium's kidney-harming effects, establishing monitoring systems to identify at-risk areas, and exploring new ways to prevent or treat uranium contamination will help ensure access to safe drinking water for tens of millions in India.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN THE PORT AND MARITIME SECTOR

Ministry of Shipping in association with Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY), Ministry of Rural Development recently conducted a workshop on "Skill Development in the Port and Maritime Sector".

India is one of the leading suppliers of seafarers in the world and now wants to be the leading supplier for all talent in the Port and Maritime sector. Skill Development in the Port & Maritime sector is an opportunity to improve India's coastal areas, usher in port led prosperity and provide the world with skilled youth.

DDU GKY:

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) announced the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) Antyodaya Diwas, on 25th September 2014. DDU-GKY is a part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), tasked with the dual objectives of adding diversity to the incomes of rural poor families and cater to the career aspirations of rural youth.

DDU-GKY is uniquely focused on rural youth between the ages of 15 and 35 years from poor families. As a part of the Skill India campaign, it plays an instrumental role in supporting the social and economic programs of the government like the Make In India, Digital India, Smart Cities and Start-Up India, Stand-Up India campaigns.

In order to ensure complete social and regional inclusion the following special schemes have been launched:

Himayat: A special scheme for the youth (rural & urban) of Jammu & Kashmir.

Roshni: A special initiative for the rural youth of poor families in 27 Left-wing Extremist (LWE) districts across 9 states.

Center of Excellence in Maritime and Ship Building (CEMS):

Under the Ministry of Shipping's flagship Sagarmala Programme a world class Center of Excellence in Maritime and Ship Building (CEMS) is being set up in partnership with Siemens and Indian Register of Shipping (IRS).

It will have campuses at Vishakhapatnam and Mumbai and will train 10,512 students per year.

The CEMS aims to become an international nodal Centre in South Asia, attracting students from neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia for skill development in the Port and Maritime sector.

FINANCE MINISTRY HAS SET UP A COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE THE POSSIBILITY OF SETTING UP AN ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANY

The finance ministry has set up a committee to examine the possibility of setting up an asset reconstruction company or an asset management company.

The committee will be headed by Punjab National Bank's non-executive member Sunil Mehta.

The committee include 2 more member

Bank of Baroda's MD and CEO P.S. Jayakumar

One member to be nominated from State Bank of India

The Asset reconstruction company or an asset management company would enable the fast track resolution of stressed assets.

The committee is expected to submit its report within two weeks.

At present, five state-run banks do not have a chief executive and several executive directors' positions are also vacant.

The government has allocated Rs. 65,000 crore for capital infusion into 21 public sector banks during the current financial year.

The Rating agency Moody has pointed out that the government's recapitalization plan for the 21 public sector banks will take care of the provisioning requirement for bad loans but will not be sufficient to support credit growth.

MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT TO LAUNCH NRLM BEST PRACTICES COMPENDIUM AND SELF HELP GROUP PRODUCTS

The ministry of Rural Development, will confer the National Awards on Best Performing Self Help Groups under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM).

The National Awards to the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are intended to provide public recognition to the outstanding performance of the community institutions and incorporate a sense of pride among the poor community members. Conferring awards to best performing SHG and Village Organizations was initiated by DAY-NRLM in 2016-17. For the assessment year 2017-18, 34 SHGs have been shortlisted for receiving DAY-NRLM National Awards.

The DAY-NRLM awards are conferred on the Best Performing Community Based Organizations (Self Help Groups and Village Organizations) after screening the nominations received from the SRLMs. The selection process adopted is that the SHGs are first assessed for their performance on several indicators such as Institution Building-Capacity Building, Financial Inclusion, Livelihoods, Convergence etc. and then nominated by the respective SRLMs for receiving awards. The National Unit of DAY-NRLM then screens the applications thus received and finalizes the awardees list.

The Awards have motivated the State Missions across the country to perform better and it has also brought the programme to the attention to the senior officers in the states. The financial resources leveraged by the Self Help Group members has enabled them to undertake a large ensemble of livelihood activities such as agriculture and allied activities, sheep and goat rearing, horticulture, running of local means of transportation, rearing of milch animals,

irrigation development through bore wells, carpentry etc.

The SHGs are a perfect example of how livelihoods of households can transform through a collective approach, managed in line with core democratic and financial principles. The SHG has contributed to several community level activities for the common good. These include awareness promotion for constructing household toilets using SBM funds, environmental sanitation, liquid waste management and support for maintenance of village commons.

The members are conscious of their social responsibilities and have undertaken several collective activities including campaign against child labour, illicit distillation and child marriages etc. SHG has demonstrated strong features of a progressive community based institution.

The Union Minister of Rural Development, Panchayati Raj and Mines will also launch NRLM Best Practices Compendium and Self Help Group products catalogues for stimulating grass root development. The compendium of 24 select Best Practices under DAY-NRLM will facilitate cross learning from successful implementation and innovation among the State Missions, MoRD has been organizing workshops on Best Practices in DAY-NRLM.

The 1st such workshop was organized during Aug 2016 and the document was published in early 2017. The second workshop was organized during Feb, 2018 at New Delhi. A large number of best practices and innovations in the areas of community institutions and capacity building, skill building, financial inclusion, farm and non-farm livelihoods and health and nutrition were present at the second workshop. The document released presents the best practices and innovations for wider dissemination and adaption.

A catalogue of SHG products will also be released. The SHGs products catalogue has a range of products made by the SHGs like handmade products, displaying various traditional arts, handlooms – silk and cotton

fabrics, applique works etc., handicrafts – wood and clay products, jute items, tribal jewellery, food products, furniture, leather products etc. with the contact nos of the SHGs and the price range.

SARAS Aajeevika Mela is an annual event of DAY-NRLM and it aims to provide a platform to the rural artisans to showcase their skills and products and also develop market linkages for their products.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DHANUSH

India's first indigenous, long-range artillery gun "Dhanush" has passed its final test at Pokhran.

It is now ready for its induction into the Army.

DHANUSH:

Dhanush is a 155mm x 45mm calibre artillery gun and is also called the "desi Bofors".

It has a strike range of 38 kilometres and 81 percent of its components are indigenously sourced.

It has features like electronic gun-laying and sighting systems.

The gun has passed tests under severe cold conditions in Sikkim and Leh and in hot and humid weather in Balasore, Odisha, Babina in Jhansi and in the desert of Pokhran in Rajasthan.

The gun has been developed by the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), Kolkata.

It is manufactured by the Jabalpur-based Gun Carriage Factory (GCF).
