UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 17-08-2023

Cabinet approves Mutual Recognition Arrangement of Authorised Economic Operators between India and Australia

The Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved the signing and ratification of the Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) between the Central Board of Indirect taxes and Customs (CBIC), Department of Revenue, Government of India and the Department of Home Affairs incorporating the Australian Border Force, Australian Government.

- The arrangement is aimed at providing reciprocal benefits to accredited and trusted exporters of both the signatories in the clearance of goods by the Customs authorities of the importing country.
- Mutual recognition of Authorized Economic Operators is a key element of the World Customs Organisation's SAFE Framework of Standards to secure and facilitate global trade to strengthen end-to-end security of supply chains while providing higher facilitation to trade at the global level.
- This arrangement shall benefit our exporters to Australia and thereby promote a trade relationship between the two countries.

Union Cabinet approves new Central Sector Scheme 'PM Vishwakarma' to support traditional artisans and craftspeople of rural and urban India

Scheme to have a financial outlay of Rs.13,000 crore

Eighteen traditional trades to be covered in the first instance under PM Vishwakarma

The scheme aims to strengthen and nurture the Guru-Shishya parampara or family-based practice of traditional skills by artisans and craftspeople working with their hands and tools.

The scheme also aims at improving the quality, as well as the reach of products and services of artisans and craftspeople and to ensure that the Vishwakarmas are integrated with the domestic and global value chains.

Under PM Vishwakarma scheme, the artisans and craftspeople will be provided recognition through PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card, Credit Support upto Rs.1 lakh (First Tranche) and Rs.2 lakh (Second Tranche) with a concessional interest rate of 5%. The Scheme will further provide Skill Upgradation, Toolkit Incentive, Incentive for Digital Transactions and Marketing Support.

The scheme will provide support to artisans and craftspeople of rural and urban areas across India. Eighteen traditional trades will be covered in the first instance under PM Vishwakarma. These trades include

i.Carpenter (Suthar); (ii) Boat Maker; (iii) Armourer; (iv) Blacksmith (Lohar); (v) Hammer and Tool Kit Maker; (vi) Locksmith; (vii) Goldsmith (Sonar); (viii) Potter (Kumhaar); (ix) Sculptor (Moortikar, stone carver), Stone breaker; (x) Cobbler(Charmkar)/ Shoesmith/Footwear artisan; (xi) Mason (Rajmistri); (xii) Basket/Mat/Broom Maker/Coir Weaver; (xiii) Doll & Toy Maker (Traditional); (xiv) Barber (Naai); (xv) Garland maker (Malakaar); (xvi) Washerman (Dhobi); (xvii) Tailor (Darzi); and (xviii) Fishing Net Maker.

“MERI MAATI MERA DESH CAMPAIGN”

To commemorate 75 years of Independence, Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) is being celebrated as the people led initiative.

The Govt of India has launched ‘Meri Maati Mera Desh Compaign’ as a continuation for celebration of AKAM.

- Various activities in line with the theme were conducted at various Air Force Stations in and around Delhi from 09 to 15 August 2023.
- An Amrit Vatika was developed in all these stations by planting 75 saplings of indigenous species to replenish mother earth as ‘Vasudha Vandhan’. ‘Panch Pran’ pledge was also taken by all present.

- At Air Force Station Arjangarh, the ‘Amrit Vatika’ was developed at Baba Mangal Das Park, Ayanagar. Mr Ved Pal (Counsellor & Nagar Adhyaksha) assisted the Station authorities in the successful conduct of the event.
- Whole hearted participation by the personnel of the respective Stations, school children, residents of localities and panchayat made the events a grand success.

Cabinet approves “PM-eBus Sewa” for augmenting city bus operations; priority to cities having no organized bus service

10,000 e-Buses to be deployed on PPP model in 169 cities; Infrastructure to be upgraded in 181 cities under Green Urban Mobility Initiatives.V

Estimated cost of the scheme to be Rs.57,613crore, Expected direct employment generation over 45,000.

The Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved a bus scheme “PM-eBus Sewa” for augmenting city bus operation by 10,000 e-buses on PPP model.

The Scheme would have an estimated cost of Rs.57,613 crore, out of which support of Rs.20,000 crore will be provided by the Central government. The Scheme will support bus operations for 10 years.

Reaching the Unreached:

The scheme will cover cities of Three lakh and above population as per census 2011 including all the Capital cities of Union Territories, North Eastern Region and Hill States. Under this scheme priority will be given to cities having no organized bus service.

Direct Employment Generation:

- The scheme will generate 45,000 to 55,000 direct jobs through deployment of around 10,000 buses in city bus operation.
- The Scheme has two segments:
- Segment A – Augmenting the City bus services:(169 cities)
- The approved bus scheme will augment city bus operations with 10,000 e-buses on Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.
- Associated Infrastructure will provide support for Development/ up-gradation of depot infrastructure; and Creation of behind-the-meter power infrastructure (substation, etc.) for e-buses.

Segment B– Green Urban Mobility Initiatives (GUMI): (181 cities)

- The scheme envisages green initiatives like bus priority, infrastructure, multimodal interchange facilities, NCMC-based Automated Fare Collection Systems, Charging infrastructure, etc.
- Support for Operation: Under the scheme, States/Cities shall be responsible for running the bus services and making payments to the bus operators.
- The Central Government will support these bus operations by providing subsidy to the extent specified in the proposed scheme.

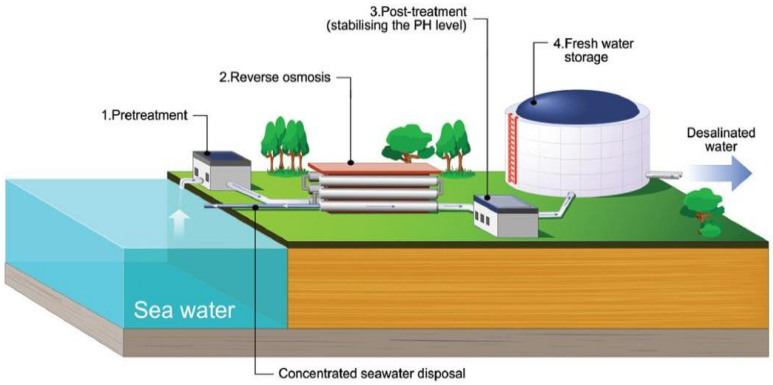
Boost to E-Mobility:

- The scheme will promote e-mobility and provide full support for behind-the-meter power infrastructure.
- Cities will also be supported for development of charging infrastructure under Green Urban Mobility Initiatives.
- The support to bus priority infrastructure shall not only accelerate the proliferation of state-of-the-art, energy efficient electric buses but also foster the innovation in the e-mobility sector as well as development of resilient supply chain for electric vehicles.
- This scheme shall also bring in economies of scale for procurement of electric buses through aggregation for e-buses.
- Adoption to Electric mobility will reduce noise and air pollution and curb carbon emission.
- Modal shift due to increased share of bus-based public transportation will lead to GHG reduction.

ISRAEL'S DESALINATION SUCCESS AND HOW INDIA CAN BENEFIT

The growing importance of desalination as a solution to address water scarcity and climate change challenges. Desalination is emerging as a crucial tool to combat climate change challenges and water scarcity. Increasingly important for water-scarce nations due to falling technology costs and the rise of renewable energy.

- Israel serves as a pioneering model showcasing effective water scarcity mitigation.
- Combination of desalination, water management, and technology to address water scarcity.



- About 25% of Israel's drinking water comes from desalination, compared to the global average of 1%

Israel's Desalination Success Story

- Israel's desalination capacity started in 2005 and has grown to produce 585 million cubic meters annually. Accompanied by a 90% wastewater recycling rate, reducing water-related concerns.
- It has changed public perceptions from water conservation issues to water availability confidence.

Challenges and Lessons for Water-Scarce Regions

- Substantial capital investments required for establishing desalination plants.
- Israel's cost-effectiveness is influenced by favorable project financing and lower labor costs.
- Valuable lessons for other water-scarce regions, though challenges in replicating the model globally.

Optimistic Outlook for Desalination Market

- Global Industry Analysts predict significant growth by 2026, driven by countries like China and the United States.
- Technological proliferation likely to decrease costs, making desalination accessible for low-income nations.

Sustainability and Energy Considerations

- Energy-intensive nature of desalination remains a challenge.
- Renewable energy sources pivotal for sustainability, reducing costs.
- Incorporating solar power and storage systems can decrease costs by 2050.

Holistic Strategies for Water Security

- Alongside desalination, strategies like water use campaigns, wastewater recycling, and efficient farming practices are crucial.
- Paradigm shift from viewing water as freely available to valuing it as a commodity.
- Governments' role in making bold decisions to encourage water conservation.

India's Path to Water Security

India faces water stress due to population growth, urbanization, and climate change.Lessons from Israel's journey can inform India's strategies.

Strategies for India

- Adopting Desalination Technology: India can leverage its coastline for desalination in water-scarce coastal areas.
- Recycling and Reusing Wastewater: Prioritize recycling for non-potable uses to alleviate freshwater pressure and pollution.
- Localized Water Management: Tailor solutions to unique water availability and demand patterns in different regions.
- Integration of Renewable Energy: Aligning with India's commitment to renewables, leveraging solar and wind for desalination.
- Water Diplomacy and Cooperation: Explore diplomatic initiatives for shared water resources management with neighbouring countries.
- Promoting Public Awareness: Encourage citizens to value and conserve water through awareness campaigns.
- Encouraging Innovation: Invest in water sector research and development, nurturing startups and researchers.
- Crafting Comprehensive Policies: Develop regulatory measures that incentivize water recycling and promote sustainable practices.
- Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing: Collaborate with Israel to enhance water management capabilities through training and knowledge exchange.
- Long-Term Vision: Invest in resilient water infrastructure, technologies, and policies to withstand climate change and population growth.
- Focus on Brine Management: Consider the reuse and recovery of brine waste by-product generated in the desalination process.

Global Scale of Desalination and Brine

- World produces over 100 billion liters of water daily through desalination, generating concentrated brine.
- Disposal of brine requires careful consideration due to potential ecological damage.
- Converting brine can be economically and ecologically beneficial.

MURMANSK PORT

India's increasing engagement with Russia's Arctic region, particularly focusing on the strengthening trade relationship and exploration of the Northern Sea Route (NSR).

India-bound goods comprise the largest share of cargo handled by Murmansk, Russia's main northern gateway.

Murmansk port handled 8 million tonnes of cargo in the first seven months of 2023, with India accounting for 35%.

Deputy Director of JSC Murmansk Sea Commercial Port mentioned that the majority is coal destined for India's eastern coast.

Turkey and China also use Murmansk port, with Turkey accounting for 34% and China for 13% of cargo.

Involvement in the Northern Sea Route (NSR)

- NSR is the shortest route connecting Europe and Asia-Pacific, providing record supplies of energy resources for India.
- Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation emphasizes the importance of the NSR for India's economy.
- The NSR includes icebound seas like Kara, Laptev, East Siberian, and Chukchi, necessitating icebreaking operations.
- FSUE Atomflot, a subsidiary of Rosatom, operates nuclear-powered icebreakers for safe navigation.

Comparison with Suez Canal and Route Efficiency

- NSR reduces the gap between Europe and Asia-Pacific countries, possibly as an alternative to the Suez Canal.
- Murmansk to Yokohama via NSR is 6,000 NM; the traditional route is 13,000 NM.
- Rosatom believes NSR's efficiency, safety, and nuclear-powered icebreakers can reduce the carbon footprint of maritime transport.
- NSR's cargo traffic increased from 3.87 million tonnes in 2012 to approximately 34 million tonnes in 2022.

India-Russia Sea-Corridor Proposal

- India and Russia consider a sea-corridor proposal linking Chennai and Vladivostok for transit container traffic.
- A transport and logistics hub in Vladivostok would reduce delivery time and increase route profitability.
- The corridor project could enhance trade between India, Far East countries, and boost cargo transportation between ports.
- Rosatom seeks Indian shipping company participation to develop transit container traffic along the NSR.

Utilizing Arctic Knowledge and Scientific Activity

- Rosatom encourages Indian participation in Arctic projects to develop competence in the Arctic sea container line and maritime services.
- India's knowledge about the Arctic could lead to innovative ideas for national maritime sector development.

About Murmansk Port

Murmansk Port serves as a crucial gateway for trade and transportation in Russia's Arctic region.

Location and Importance

- Murmansk is situated about 2,000 km northwest of Moscow, making it a vital maritime link between Europe and the Arctic region.
- The port's proximity to the Arctic Ocean grants it access to the NSR, a shorter shipping route that offers potential advantages over traditional routes like the Suez Canal.

Coal Transportation

- Coal is a primary commodity shipped through Murmansk Port, with a significant portion destined for India's eastern coast.
- The port's role in facilitating coal transportation underscores its importance in supporting energy supply chains and trade between Russia and India.

A New SC handbook

The Supreme Court has launched a handbook that contains a glossary of gender unjust terms and suggests alternative words and phrases which may be used.

The 30-page Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes aims to free the judiciary and the legal community from the mechanical application of gender stereotypical language in judgments, orders, and court pleadings.

The SC handbook is a 30-page booklet that aims to assist judges and the legal community in identifying, understanding and combating stereotypes about women.

The handbook identifies common stereotypical words and phrases used about women, many of them routinely found in judgements.

E.g., in the 2017 SC ruling awarding the death penalty for the convicts in the Delhi gang-rape case, the verdict repeatedly uses the word “ravished” to say raped.

The handbook quotes other judgements where judges unwittingly use stereotypical characterisations of women.

This handbook flags some of the stereotype promoting language and suggests alternative language (preferred).

E.g., instead of using words like "seductress", "whore" or "woman of loose morals", the word "woman" has to be used.

The handbook also prohibits use of words like "hooker" and "prostitute" and said the term "sex worker" be used instead.

The word "eve-teasing" will now be termed as "street sexual harassment" and "housewife" will now become "homemaker" for judicial discourses.

An attempt to break the false assumptions

- The handbook deals with the so-called inherent characteristics of women.
- One of the identified stereotypes is the idea that women are overly emotional, illogical, and cannot take decisions.
- The reality is that a person’s gender does not determine or influence their capacity for rational thought.
- It also refers to assumptions made about a woman’s character based on her expressive choices, such as the clothes she wears, and her sexual history.
- Such assumptions may impact the judicial assessment of her actions and statements in a case involving sexual violence.
- For instance, they diminish the importance of consent in sexual relationships