

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 04-10-2023

Umbrella Scheme of "SHREYAS" comprising 4 central sector sub- schemes

The umbrella scheme of "SHREYAS" which comprises 4 central sector sub-schemes namely "Top Class Education for SCs", "Free Coaching Scheme for SCs and OBCs", "National Overseas Scheme for SCs" and "National Fellowship for SCs". Since all these sub-schemes are central sector schemes, state-wise data is not maintained for these schemes. The brief of the sub-schemes under SHREYAS along with the allocated budget, expenditure details and number of beneficiaries for the last 9 years i.e., since 2014-15 is as under:

i. Free Coaching Scheme for SCs and OBCs:

The objective of the Scheme is to provide coaching of good quality for economically disadvantaged Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) candidates to enable them appear in competitive and entrance examinations for obtaining appropriate jobs in Public/Private Sector as well as for securing admission in reputed technical and professional higher education institutions. The ceiling of the total family income under the scheme is 8 lakhs per annum. 3500 slots are allotted per annum. The ratio of SC: OBC students is 70:30 and 30% slots are reserved for females in each category. In case of non-availability of adequate number of candidates in SC category the Ministry can relax this ratio. However, in no case, a less than 50% SC students shall be permitted.

ii. Top Class Education for SCs:

The Scheme aims at recognizing and promoting quality education amongst students belonging to SCs, by providing full financial support. The Scheme will cover SC students for pursuing studies beyond 12th class. The scholarship, once awarded, will continue till the completion of the course, subject to satisfactory performance of the student. The ceiling of the total family income under the scheme is 8 lakhs per annum. Presently, 266 higher education institutes which includes Government institutes and private institutes such as all the IIMs, IITs, NITs, IIITs, AIIMS, NIFTs, NIDs, NLUs, IHMs, CUs and institutes of national importance, NAAC A++ accredited institutes and top 100 National Institutional ranking Framework (NIRF) ranking institutes.

Under the scheme, (i) full tuition fee and non-refundable charges (there will be a ceiling of Rs. 2.00 lakh per annum per student for private sector institutions (ii) Academic allowance of Rs. 86,000 in the first year of study and Rs. 41,000 in every subsequent year, to take care of living and other expenses is provided.



(iii) National Overseas Scheme for SCs:

Under this scheme financial assistance is provided to the selected students from SCs (115 slots); De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (6 slots); landless agricultural labourers and traditional artisan categories (4 slots), for pursuing masters and Ph.D. level courses abroad. Presently, 125 slots are allotted under the scheme.

Such students can be benefitted under the scheme whose total family income including the candidate is less than Rs. 8 lakhs per annum, having more than 60% marks in the qualifying examination, below 35 years of age and secured admission in top 500 QS ranking foreign Institutes/ Universities. Under the scheme, total tuition fee, maintenance and contingency allowance, visa fee, to and fro air passage etc. are provided to the awardees.

(iv) National Fellowship for SC Students:

Under the scheme fellowship is provided to Scheduled Castes students for pursuing higher education leading to M.Phil/ Ph.D degrees in Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences in Indian Universities/Institutions/ Colleges recognized by University Grants Commission (UGC).

The scheme provides for 2000 new slots per year (500 for science stream and 1500 for Humanities and Social Sciences) who have qualified the National Eligibility Test- Junior Research Fellowship (NET-JRF) of UGC and Junior Research Fellows for Science stream qualifying UGC-Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (UGC-CSIR) Joint Test.

First 800 MW Unit of Telangana Super Thermal Power Project of NTPC to the Nation

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi dedicated the first 800 MW Unit of phase 1 of Telangana Super Thermal Power Project of NTPC dedicated to the nation, at a programme in Nizamabad, Telangana today. The project, situated in Peddapalli district, will provide low-cost power to Telangana and provide a boost to the economic development of the state. It will also be one of the most environmentally compliant power stations in the country.



Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister congratulated the people of Telangana and said that the development of any nation or state depends upon its self-reliant capacity for electricity production as it improves Ease of Living and Ease of Doing Business simultaneously. “Smooth supply of electricity gives momentum to growth of industries in a state”, the Prime Minister remarked. He emphasized that the second unit of the project will also be operational very soon, and upon its completion, the installed capacity of the power plant would rise to 4,000 MW.

The Prime Minister expressed happiness over the fact that the Telangana Super Thermal Power Plant is the most modern power plant out of all NTPC power plants in the country. “The major part of electricity produced in this power plant will go to the people of Telangana”, the Prime Minister said as he emphasized the central government’s efforts to complete completing the projects whose foundation stones are laid. He recalled laying the foundation stone of this project in 2016 and expressed gratitude for inaugurating it today. “This is the new work culture of our government”, he added. The Prime Minister said that the government is working to fulfill the energy needs of Telangana.

Phase I of Telangana Super Thermal Power Project of NTPC is being established at an approved cost of ₹ 10,998 crore on the available land in the premises of NTPC’s existing Ramagundam station in Peddapalli district. It will supply 85% of its power to the state of Telangana.

Being a pit-head power station with ultra supercritical technology, this project will also help the state of Telangana with low-cost power. Further, this being the most efficient power station of NTPC in India, this will reduce specific coal consumption (Total consumption of coal per unit of power generated) and CO2 emissions, making it one of the most environmentally compliant power stations in India.



With commissioning of the 1st unit of the project, the power supply scenario has improved in the state of Telangana as well as in the country. This project will help in strengthening the overall economic growth in the region.

NTPC Ltd. is India's largest integrated power utility, contributing 1/4th of the power requirement of the country. With an installed capacity of more than 73 GW and a diverse portfolio of thermal, hydro, solar, and wind power plants, NTPC is dedicated to delivering reliable, affordable, and sustainable electricity to the nation. The company is committed to adopting best practices, fostering innovation, and emINDIAN AND BANGLADESH ARMIES BEGIN JOINT EXERCISE

SAMPRITI-XI IN UMROI, MEGHALAYA

India and Bangladesh commenced the 11th edition of annual joint military exercise, SAMPRITI on 03rd October 2023 in Umroi, Meghalaya. This exercise, alternately organised by both countries, signifies strong bilateral defence cooperation initiatives. With its inception in Jorhat, Assam in 2009, the exercise has witnessed ten successful editions till 2022.

SAMPRITI-XI, scheduled for 14 days, will engage approximately 350 personnel from both sides. The exercise underscores the importance of enhancing interoperability between the two armies, sharing tactical drills, and promoting best practices.

The Bangladesh contingent comprises 170 personnel, led by Brigadier General Mohammed Mafizul Islam Rashed, Commander of 52 Bangladesh Infantry Brigade. The lead unit from the Bangladesh Army side is 27 Bangladesh Infantry Regiment. Indian contingent mainly comprises troops from a battalion of RAJPUT Regiment. Brigadier SK Anand, Commander of a Mountain Brigade is leading the Indian contingent. The exercise will also witness participation by personnel from diverse units such as artillery, engineers and other supporting arms and services from both sides.

bracing clean energy technologies for a greener future.

The Prime Minister's address at the programme can be watched [here](#).

Achieving 16% Increase, Overall Coal Production Touches 67.21 Million Tonne in September, 2023

Coal India Ltd Production Goes up to 51.44 Million Tonne

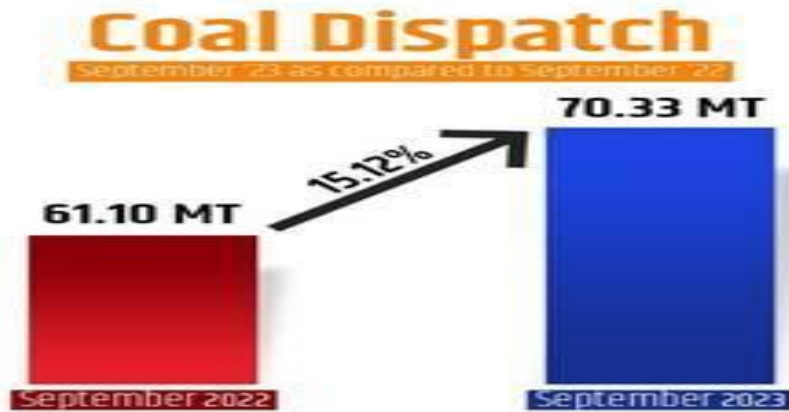
With 11% Increase, Cumulative Coal Dispatch up to September stands at 462.32 million tonne

The Ministry of Coal has achieved a substantial surge in overall coal production during the month of September 2023, attaining 67.21million tonne (MT), production, surpassing the figures of 58.04 MT of the corresponding month in previous year, representing an increase of 15.81%. The production of Coal India Limited (CIL) has risen to 51.44 MT in the month of September 2023 as compared to 45.67 MT in September 2022 with the growth of 12.63%. The cumulative coal production (up to September 2023) has seen quantum jump to 428.25 MT in FY' 23-24 as compared to 382.16 MT during the same period in FY' 22-23, with a growth of 12.06 %.



Additionally, Coal dispatch witnessed a significant boost in September 2023, reaching an impressive 70.33 MT, showcasing notable progress compared to the

61.10 MT recorded in September 2022, with a growth rate of 15.12%. At the same time, Coal India Limited (CIL) dispatch demonstrated outstanding performance, reaching 55.06 MT in September 2023, compared to 48.91 MT in September 2022, representing a growth of 12.57%. The Cumulative Coal Dispatch (up to September 2023) has seen significant increase to 462.32 MT in FY' 23-24 as compared to 416.64 MT during the corresponding period in FY' 22-23 with a growth of 10.96%.



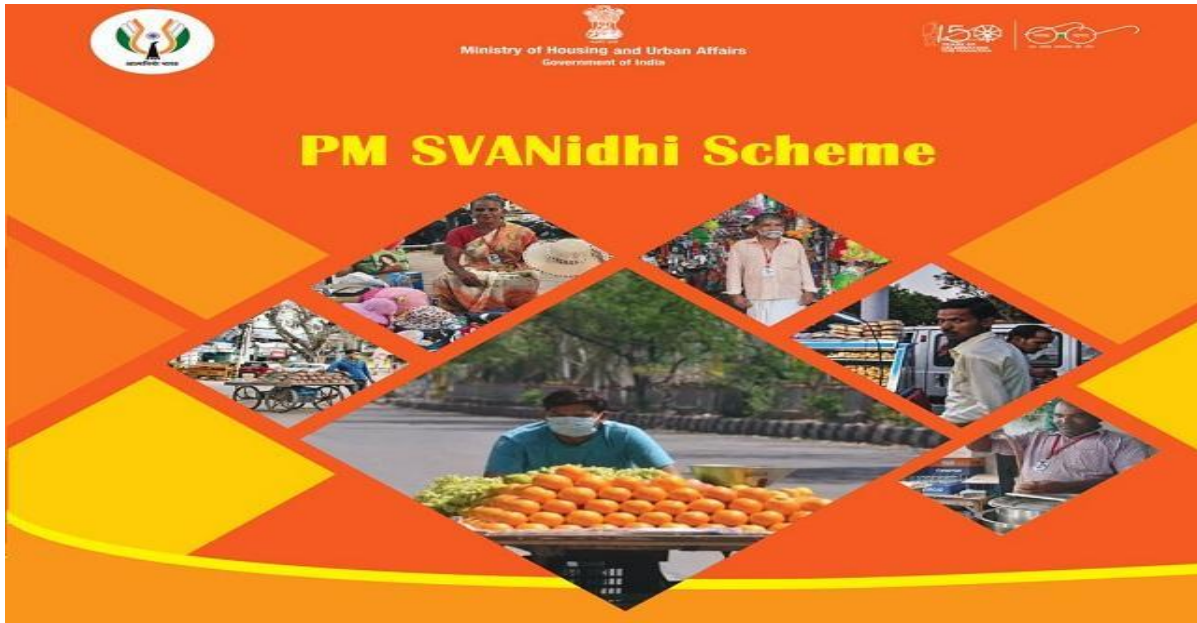
The coal sector has witnessed an unprecedented upswing, with production, dispatch and stock levels soaring to remarkable heights. This exceptional growth is attributed to the unwavering dedication of Coal PSUs, which has played a pivotal role in driving this extraordinary progress. This underscores the efficiency of the coal supply chain, ensuring the seamless distribution of coal nationwide.

The Ministry of Coal remains committed to maintain consistent coal production and dispatch, ensuring an uninterrupted supply for a reliable and resilient energy sector contributing the nation's continued growth and prosperity.

50 lakh Street Vendors covered under PM SVANidhi Scheme

PM SVANidhi achieves target of covering 50 Lakh Street Vendors

The Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) scheme, an initiative under the aegis of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), has achieved a momentous milestone by extending its support to more than 50 lakh street vendors across the nation. Street vendors have long played an integral role in the urban informal economy, providing essential goods and services to urban residents. The PM SVANidhi scheme has been instrumental in bringing them into the formal economic fold, presenting fresh avenues for upward mobility.



Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision to broaden the scheme's reach has prompted concerted efforts towards its expansion. Beginning on July 1, 2023, a campaign was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), revising the targets to be achieved under the Scheme. Several high level review and monitoring was undertaken during this period, including inter alia, review of Public sector banks by Finance Minister, Zonal State Reviews across the country in different locations Dr. Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad, Minister of State for Financial, as well as State/UT review meetings by Shri Manoj Joshi, Secretary MoHUA and Shri Vivek Joshi, Secretary, DFS.

This collective endeavor resulted in disbursement of a remarkable 65.75 lakh loans, benefiting over 50 lakh street vendors, with a total value exceeding ₹ 8600 crore. It is noteworthy that public sector banks have played a pivotal role in achieving this significant milestone through their support of the first-ever micro-credit scheme designed for urban poor socio- economic section. PM SVANidhi is a pioneering initiative by the Government of India aimed at integrating street vendors into the formal economic system and facilitating access to formal channels of credit.

States have wholeheartedly embraced the scheme, with the recent campaign yielding impressive results. Over the past three months, states have successfully onboarded more than 12 lakh new vendors, the highest ever, with many more in the process of enrollment. The Ministry has allocated targets to all states and union territories for the identification of beneficiaries and loan disbursement. States, in turn, have assigned targets to their respective cities, with the aim of achieving them by December 31, 2023. Currently, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, and



Gujarat are among the top-performing states, while Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Indore, and Mumbai are the leading cities in the program's implementation. However, all states are actively participating in the scheme to provide tangible benefits to street vendors.

Beyond facilitating micro-credits, the PM SVANidhi scheme empowers street vendors through digital payments. Promoting digital transactions, participating Lending Institutions/Banks, and Digital Payment Aggregators (DPAs) have offered digital onboarding and training. These collaborations have resulted in over 113.2 Crore digital transactions worth ₹1,33,003 Crores, with ₹58.2 Crore in cashback disbursed to beneficiaries.

The scheme's impact extends beyond providing micro-credits; it has also laid the groundwork for creating a safety net of welfare schemes for vendors' families. The "SVANidhi se Samridhhi" initiative, launched on January 4, 2021, aims to connect beneficiaries' families to eight Government of India socio-economic welfare schemes, promoting holistic development. To date, over 51 lakh sanctions under these schemes have been granted for the upliftment of beneficiary street vendors' families.

The accomplishment of financially empowering 50 lakh street vendors marks a promising future for India's informal economy. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs remains steadfast in its commitment to providing financial stability, recognition, and growth opportunities to this crucial segment of the Indian economy.

"The PM SVANidhi Scheme has exceeded our expectations by reaching over 50 lakh beneficiaries in just over three years. This achievement underscores our commitment to empowering street vendors and integrating them into formal financial systems."

Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, Honorable Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs

About PM SVANidhi Scheme:

The PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbharNidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme, launched on June 1, 2020, is a micro credit scheme for urban street vendors that aims to provide collateral-free working capital loans up to ₹50,000. Under the scheme regular repayments are incentivized with a 7% interest subsidy and digital transactions are rewarded with cashback up to ₹1,200 per year. The scheme employs Aadhaar-based e-KYC, utilizes an end-to-end IT platform, and employs SMS-based notifications for application status updates. All lending institutions, including NBFCs/MFIs and DPAs, have partnered with the aim to alleviate urban poverty in India.

The Shutdown of the Afghan Embassy

On September 30, a statement carrying the seal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan announced the closure of the Embassy of Afghanistan in Delhi.

India-Afghanistan Relationship (Political Nature, Trade, Development Work by India, Taliban's role)

India-Afghanistan Bilateral Relationship:

India and Afghanistan have a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links.

In recent past, India-Afghanistan relations have been further strengthened by the Strategic Partnership Agreement, which was signed between the two countries in October 2011.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) between the two sides, provides for:

Assistance to help rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure and institutions,

Education and technical assistance,

Providing duty free access to the Indian market for Afghanistan's exports

The bilateral trade between the two countries amounts to **\$1.5 billion** (0.19% of India's world trade).

India's exports include pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, computers and related materials, cement, sugar, etc.

Afghanistan's exports include mainly fresh and dried fruits.

India's Major Developmental Projects in Afghanistan:

- India has provided assistance on more than 400 projects in Afghanistan.
- It has built vital roads, dams, electricity transmission lines and substations, schools and hospitals, etc.
- The developmental assistance is estimated to be worth over **\$3 billion**.
- Major projects include:

Afghan-India Friendship Dam:

Located on the **Hari River**, the hydropower and irrigation project was inaugurated by India in 2016.

The Taliban claim the area around the dam is now under their control.

Zaranj – Delaram Highway:

Located close to Afghanistan's border with Iran, 218-km highway was built by India's Border Road Organisation (BRO).

With Pakistan denying India overland access for trade with Afghanistan, the highway is of strategic importance to India, as it provides an alternative route into landlocked Afghanistan through **Iran's Chabahar port**.

India had transported 75,000 tonnes of wheat through Chabahar to Afghanistan during the **Covid-19 pandemic**.

Afghan Parliament:

The Afghan Parliament in Kabul was built by India, at the cost of **\$90 million**.

It was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India in 2015.

Implications of Taliban's Return to Power in Afghanistan:

In August 2021, the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan through a military offensive that swept across the country.

This has raised the following potential concerns for India:

National Security Concerns:

Terrorist groups such as **Lashkar-e-Taiba** and the **Jaish-e-Mohammad** that have been keeping bases and training grounds along the southern provinces of Afghanistan that border Pakistan, could now have more ungoverned spaces to carry out attacks against India.

With Taliban's control over Afghanistan, Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies will have a bigger role to influence outcomes for the country. This will leave a much smaller role for Indian development and infrastructure role in Afghanistan.

Trade Relations:

Trade through Afghanistan under a Taliban regime would be routed through Karachi and Gwadar (both in Pakistan), and the Indian investment in the Chabahar port, meant to circumvent Pakistan, may become unviable.

Threat of Drug Trafficking:

Afghanistan accounted for 85% of the total global opium production in 2020.

Drugs have been a major source of revenue for the Taliban. With the collapse of Afghanistan's economy, the Taliban will rely heavily on drugs money to maintain control over their cadres.

There is a threat of a steep surge in cross-border trafficking of heroin and crystal methamphetamine.

News Summary:

On September 30, a statement carrying the seal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan announced the closure of the Embassy of Afghanistan in Delhi.

In its official communication, the Embassy of Afghanistan blamed multiple factors including lack of cooperation from the Government of India and a lack of resources to operate any further.

Furthermore, the embassy has urged the Indian government to fly the flag of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan over embassy premises. It has also asked New Delhi to hand over the mission to a “legitimate government” of Afghanistan sometime in the future.

Is this the Turning Point in India-Afghanistan Relationship?

The Taliban fighters who quickly took over all the major cities and infrastructure of the country, as the U.S. forces carried out a withdrawal, were not recognised by India as de facto rulers.

- With the displacement of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the embassy of Afghanistan in New Delhi had begun to work as a “stateless mission” as it did not represent the current rulers of Kabul, that is the Taliban, with whom India has no diplomatic relationship.
- In effect, the embassy of Afghanistan was performing a ceremonial or a symbolic role, helping out Afghan citizens and travellers in India deal with the difficulties they have been facing because of the lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries.
- Moreover, the ambassador of the previous regime of President Ashraf Ghani, Farid Mamundzay, left India and has not been seen for over three months.

Does this mean that India-Afghanistan have no Relations?

- Despite the closure of the embassy in Delhi, India and Afghanistan are continuing engagement with each other in a curious way.
- India has been maintaining a “technical team” in Kabul where the staff provides visas to Afghan traders and travellers to India.
- There are two weekly flights that carry Afghan citizens and items to India.

- India uses the flights while sending humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. That apart, some Indian goods are also entering Afghanistan through other countries like Iran and the UAE.

Way Ahead:

- India has not recognised Taliban formally but Indian diplomats have been engaged with the Taliban since the immediate aftermath of the fall of Kabul in August 2021.
- Indian diplomats have met the Taliban's representatives in multiple locations under multilateral initiatives.
- On September 29, India sent a representative to Kazan, Tatarstan in Russia to engage with the Taliban under the Moscow format dialogue.
- That apart, Taliban is quickly gaining international recognition from rival powers like China which sent a new ambassador to Kabul in September.
- With Iran, Pakistan, the UAE, Russia, Qatar and China warming ties with the Taliban, there is obvious pressure on India to reconsider its position on the Taliban.
- The Taliban has been urging India to support it with its economic revitalisation through projects like electricity generation and road building works.
- India, however, has not yet indicated that it will review its position on the Taliban.

Attosecond

This year's Nobel Prize in Physics has been awarded to three physicists for their research into attosecond pulses of light.

About Attosecond:

An attosecond is an astonishingly short unit of time, equivalent to one quintillionth of a second (1×10^{-18} of a second) or one-billionth of a nanosecond.

To put this into perspective, if a second were stretched to cover the entire age of the universe, which is approximately 13.8 billion years, an attosecond would be just a fraction of a second.

The fundamental significance of attoseconds in physics lies in their ability to shed light on phenomena that were previously hidden from our view.

These extremely short time intervals are relevant in the fields of ultrafast optics and laser physics, particularly when studying the behavior of electrons within atoms and molecules.

Applications:

Attosecond physics allows scientists to look at the very smallest particles at the very shortest timescales.

At this timescale, researchers can now capture the dynamics of electrons within atoms and molecules, allowing them to witness the incredibly fast processes that govern chemical reactions and electronic behavior.

Attosecond pulses:

One of the most groundbreaking applications of attosecond science is the ability to create and manipulate extreme ultraviolet (XUV) and X-ray pulses, which are vital for imaging ultrafast processes at the atomic and molecular scale.

These pulses are produced using high-intensity laser systems that generate attosecond bursts of light.

With these attosecond pulses, scientists can "freeze" the motion of electrons within atoms and molecules, providing a real-time view of electron movement during chemical reactions.

The Attosecond pulses can be used to test the internal processes of matter and to identify different events.

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime

Recently, the union Minister of State for Home Affairs participated in the two-day UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime Ministerial Conference at Palermo in Italy.





About United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime:

- It is a multinational treaty against transnational organized crime that **was established by the United Nations in 2000.**
- It is often known as the **Palermo Convention.**
- The UNTOC has a total of **147 signatories and 190 parties** to the convention.
- The Convention is further supplemented by **three Protocols**

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and **Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children;**

The Protocol against the **Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air;** and

The Protocol against the **Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms,** their Parts and Components and Ammunition.

India signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its three Protocols on **December 12, 2002.**

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is the nodal agency for all dealings with UNTOC.