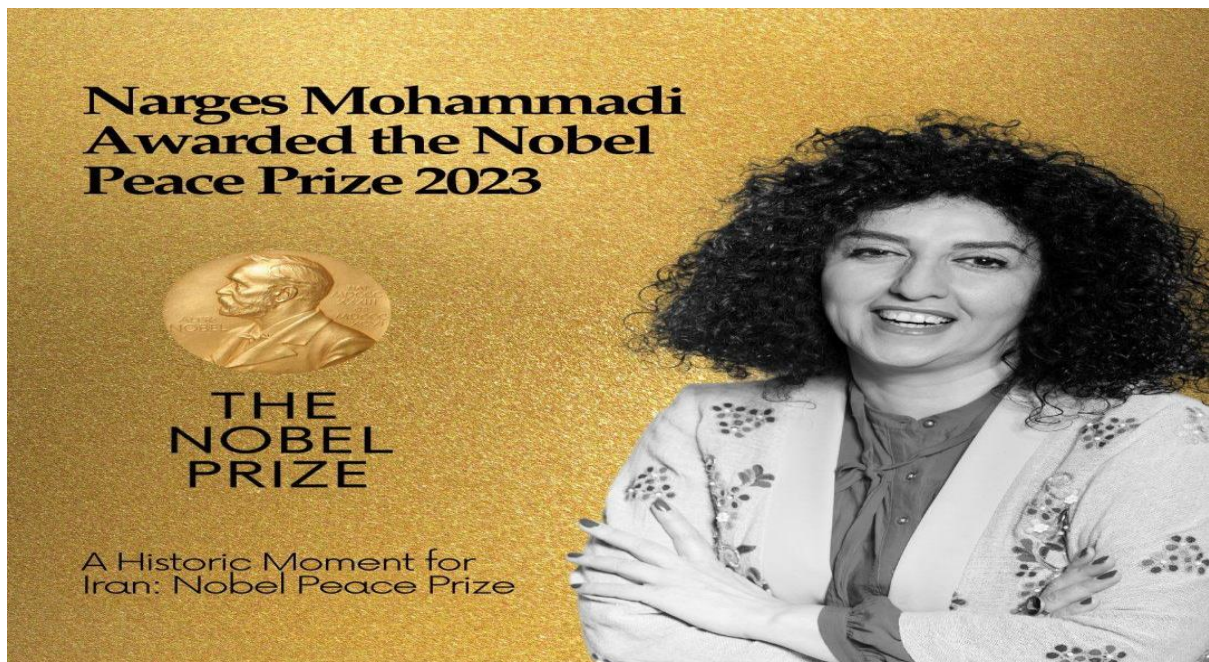


UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 07-10-2023

2023 NOBEL PRIZE FOR PEACE

Narges Mohammadi, an Iranian activist, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2023. The Nobel Committee recognized her dedication to fighting against the oppression of women in Iran and her relentless advocacy for human rights and freedom. It is awarded annually to individuals or organizations that have made significant contributions to promoting peace and fraternity between nations, reducing standing armies, and advancing the cause of peace.



Early Life and Background

Narges Mohammadi was born in Iran in 1972. Her family's history is deeply rooted in political activism, starting with their involvement in the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which ultimately led to the establishment of an Islamic republic after the monarchy's downfall.

Mohammadi's journey into activism was profoundly influenced by two significant childhood experiences. Her mother's regular visits to her imprisoned brother left a lasting impression, as did her exposure to daily television announcements of executed prisoners.

Transition to Activism

From a young age, Narges Mohammadi was actively engaged in various causes, including advocating for women's rights in Iran and protesting against the death penalty and harsh sentences for political protesters.

She worked as an engineer in Tehran but was eventually dismissed from her job due to government directives.

Involvement in Human Rights Organizations

In the 2000s, she became part of the Center for Human Rights Defenders in Iran, founded by the renowned Iranian lawyer Shirin Ebadi, with a mission to abolish the death penalty.

Shirin Ebadi herself received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her efforts in defending human rights in Iran.

Multiple Arrests and Imprisonments

Narges Mohammadi faced her first arrest in 2011 and has had multiple encounters with the Iranian judiciary.

She has been convicted five times, arrested 13 times, sentenced to a total of 31 years in prison, and received 154 lashes. Additional judicial cases were opened against her in 2023, potentially leading to more convictions.

Even while incarcerated, she organized protests alongside fellow women prisoners, standing up against the Iranian government.

In 2022, she authored a book titled 'White Torture,' recounting her experiences in solitary confinement and including interviews with other Iranian women who had also undergone such punishment.

Previous Awards and Recognition

Narges Mohammadi received prominent awards in the West for her activism, including the 2023 PEN/Barbey Freedom to Write Award and the 2023 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

In 2022, she was featured in the BBC's list of 100 inspiring and influential women from around the world.

Legacy of Iranian Nobel Peace Prize Laureates

Narges Mohammadi joins the ranks of Iranian Nobel Peace Prize laureates, with Shirin Ebadi being the first to receive the award in 2003 for her efforts in promoting democracy and human rights.

Both women have faced persecution and imprisonment for their work in defending the rights of women, children, and political activists.

Aligning Higher Education with the United Nations SDGs

It has been eight years since the initiation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but the SDGs Report 2023 has flagged slow progress of goals due to various global reasons.



India, despite having managed the crises of the global economy and relatively succeeded in overcoming the challenges posed by the pandemic, has suffered a setback in achieving these goals.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDGs/Global Goals were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

The SDGs framework sets targets for 231 unique indicators across 17 SDG goals related to economic development, social welfare, and environmental sustainability, to be met by 2030.

The 17 SDGs are integrated; they recognise that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

Countries have committed to prioritise progress for those who are the farthest behind.

The creativity, technology, and financial resources from all of society are necessary to achieve the SDGs in every context.

Key Highlights of the Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2023

The combined impacts of the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, a gloomy global economic outlook and prolonged effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed systemic weaknesses and significantly stalled the progress towards the Goals.

Of the approximately 140 targets that can be evaluated, half of them show moderate or severe deviations from the desired trajectory.

Furthermore, more than 30 per cent of these targets have experienced no progress or, even worse, regression below the 2015 baseline.

According to the report, the impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic stalled three decades of steady progress in reducing extreme poverty, with the number of people living in extreme poverty increasing for the first time in a generation.

If present trends persist, a staggering 575 million people will remain trapped in extreme poverty and an estimated 84 million children and young people will still be out of school by 2030.

India's Initiatives to Meet SDGs

India follows a holistic approach for achieving the SDGs by implementing a comprehensive array of schemes.

Current flagship policies and programmes of the GoI such as Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), PM Awas Yojana (PMAY), PM Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), etc., have substantially contributed to India's progress in this regard.

Namami Gange Mission - a key policy priority towards achieving SDG 6, was launched as a priority programme with a budget of 20,000 crores for the period 2015-2020.

The Role of NEP 2020 in Implementation of SDGs

A Foundation for the Achievement of SDG4

SDG4 pertains to access to quality education. Access to quality education is a prerequisite for the achievement of other goals.

India has a long-standing history of equitable and inclusive education. And it has accelerated efforts to ensure the achievement of SDGs through various reforms.

Among them, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 should be given credit to a great extent.

NEP 2020 is Interconnected with Most of SDGs

NEP 2020 has been prepared in tune with most of the SDGs.

Though NEP 2020 calls for changes at all levels of education, priority should be accorded to higher education as it accelerates social mobility, empowers people through creativity and critical thinking, and grants them employment skills.

How Alignment of Higher Education with UN's SDGs Will Help India Meet its Goals?

According to the OECD data, people with a higher education degree are more employable and earn an average of 54% more than those who only have completed senior secondary education.

Therefore, a university-inclusive education:

Better protects people against poverty (SDG1)

Prevents them from hunger (SDG2)

Supports them for good health and well-being (SDG3)

Promotes gender equality (SDG5)

Provides them decent work, which in turn drives economic growth (SDG 8)

And reduces inequalities (SDG10).

Suggestions for Universities to Utilise NEP 2020 in Achieving SDGs

Strengthen Teaching-Research Combination

Universities should strengthen the research-teaching nexus in university education.

That way, students will become direct benefactors of the knowledge generated from research.

Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary systems of education produce multitalented people who can pursue research, and find innovative solutions to global challenges such as:

Affordable and clean energy (SDG7)

Sustainable cities and communities (SDG11)

Climate change and global warming (SDG13) as well as studying their impact on the economy and the earth.

Development of Innovative and Start-Up Related Curriculum

Sustainable development is possible only if there is a radical change in the ways of production and consumption (SDG12).



To realise these efforts, innovative solutions and start-ups (SDG 9) must be developed in collaboration with private companies.

Introducing Value-Based Education (VBE) will help citizens become responsible towards self, society, and the planet and help India achieve Life on Land (SDG15).

Large Scale Collaboration Among Universities Across India

NEP 2020 demands that Indian higher education should be committed to mapping its day-to-day operations with SDGs.

Ranking universities according to the achievement of SDGs is a welcome move, but is still inadequate to meet the SDG deadline.

To accelerate the progress towards achieving the 2030 agenda, stakeholders of higher education should be educated and oriented so that none of their activities leave any SDG behind.

The 56,205 higher educational institutions and universities in India should work together.

Promote Involvement of Universities in Local Community Service

Universities should play a part in the education, innovation, culture, and civic life of their local communities.

Community health, energy-saving measures, efficient resource allocation, waste reduction, development of local skills, as well as the sharing of services, infrastructure, and facilities with other universities or external partners should become a culture in universities.

Universities Must Incorporate Sustainability in Institutional Strategy: It is high time for universities to adopt sustainability as a mantra and incorporate SDGs into their institutional strategies, both in daily administration and in teaching and research.

National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMSS)

The Ministry of Education recently started online registration for the National Merit cum Means Scholarship Scheme for the year 2023-24.

MHRD

National Means Cum- Merit Scholarship



It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched in May, 2008.

Objective: Award scholarships to meritorious students of economically weaker sections to arrest their dropout at class VIII and encourage them to continue the study at secondary stage.

Benefits:

One lakh fresh scholarships are awarded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development to selected students every year for study in classes from IX to XII in recognized Government, Government-aided, and local body schools.

The amount of scholarship is Rs. 12000/- per annum (Rs. 1000/- per month) per student.

NMMSS scholarships are disbursed directly into the bank accounts of selected students by electronic transfer through the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) following DBT mode.

Eligibility criteria:

Students whose parental income from all sources is not more than Rs. 3,50,000/- per annum are eligible to avail the scholarship.

The students must have minimum of 55 % marks or equivalent grade in Class VII examination for appearing in selection test for award of scholarship (relaxable by 5% for SC/ST students).

The students should be studying as regular student in a Government, Government-aided and local body school.

The students studying in the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS), Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) and residential schools are not eligible for the scholarships under the NMMSS.

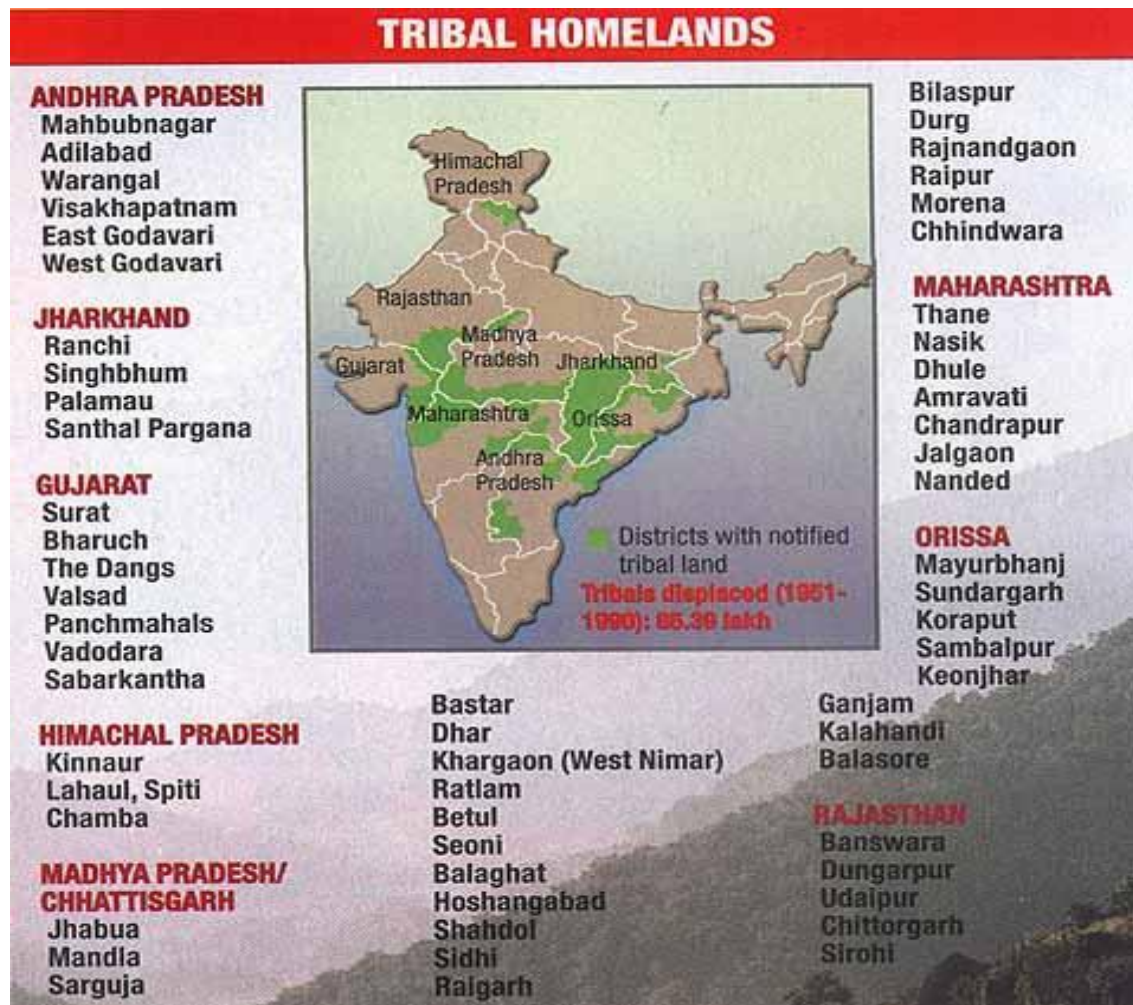
There is reservation as per State Government norms.

Selection Test: Each State and UT conducts its own test to select students for awarding the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship.

NMMSS is boarded on the National Scholarship Portal (NSP) - a one stop platform for scholarship schemes given to students.

Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution

The Supreme Court recently emphasized that Paragraph 5(1) of the Fifth Schedule grants the Governor the power to direct either that the parliamentary or state laws would not apply to Scheduled Areas or it'll apply only with certain exceptions and modifications.



It deals with provisions related to the administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in any State, other than the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.

These areas are treated differently from the other areas in the country because they are inhabited by the aboriginals, who are socially and economically rather backward, and special efforts need to be made to improve their condition.

Declaration of Scheduled Areas:

Article 244(1) The President of India is empowered to declare an area a Scheduled Area.

He can direct that the whole or any specified part of a Scheduled Area shall cease to be a Scheduled Area.

The President can increase or decrease the area of any Scheduled Area in a State after consultation with the Governor of that State and also alter its boundary lines, but only by way of rectification of boundaries.

The criteria followed for declaring an area as a Scheduled Area are

- preponderance of the tribal population;
- compactness and reasonable size of the area;
- under-developed nature of the area; and
- marked disparity in economic standard of the people.

These criteria are not spelt out in the Constitution of India but have become well established.

Special Provisions:

The executive power of a State extends to the Scheduled Areas there in.

The Central Government can give directions to the State regarding the administration of such Areas.

The Governor annually, or whenever required by the President, makes a report to the President regarding the administration of the Scheduled Areas.

Tribal Advisory Council (TAC):

A TAC has to be established in each State, having Scheduled Areas to deal with the welfare and advancement of Scheduled tribes in states.

A similar council can be established in any State having Scheduled Tribes but not Scheduled Areas if the President directs.

It consists of not more than twenty members of whom, three-fourths shall be the representatives of the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of the State.

The TAC shall advise on such matters pertaining to the welfare and the advancement of the STs in the State as may be referred to them by the Governor.

The Governor may make rules prescribing or regulating the number of members of the Council, the mode of their appointment and the appointment of the Chairman of the Council and of the officers and servants thereof, the conduct of its meetings, and its procedure in general.

Applicability of Laws in Scheduled Areas: The Governor may, by public notification, direct that any particular Act of Parliament or of the Legislature of the State shall or shall not apply to a Scheduled Area or any part thereof in the State, subject to such exceptions and modifications as specified.

The Governor may make regulations for the peace and good government of any area in the State, which is for the time being a SA. Such regulations may prohibit or restrict the transfer of land by or among members of the Scheduled tribes in such area;

regulate the allotment of land to members of the STs in such area;

regulate the carrying on of business as money-lender by persons who lend money to members of the STs in such area.

In making such regulations, the Governor may repeal or amend any Act of Parliament or of Legislature of the State or any existing law after obtaining assent of the President.

Money bill

Chief Justice of India said that a seven-judge bench will soon be set up to hear a batch of pleas challenging the Centre's use of the money bill route to pass certain key legislations.

CJI's observation about setting up a seven-judge bench came during the hearing challenging set of amendments to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Finance Bill

In a general sense, any Bill that relates to revenue or expenditure is a financial Bill.

A money Bill is also a specific type of financial Bill, that must deal only with matters specified in **Article 110 (1) (a) to (g)**.

Financial bills are responsible for the fiscal matters such as government spending or revenue.

It specifies the amount of money to be spent by the government and the way it is to be spent.

More specifically, Article 117 of the Constitution deals with the special provisions relating to financial Bills.

Financial bills are a component of the constitution and the union budget.

Money Bill

Article 110 defines a money Bill as one containing provisions dealing with taxes, regulation of the government's borrowing of money, and expenditure or receipt of money from the Consolidated Fund of India, among others.

Article 109 delineates the procedure for the passage of such a Bill and confers an overriding authority on the Lok Sabha in the passage of money Bills.

The Speaker certifies a Bill as a Money Bill, and the Speaker's decision is final.

Over the last seven years, the government has introduced multiple legislations through the money Bill route, the most notable of which are the Aadhaar Act, 2016, and the Finance Act, 2017.

What is the difference between money Bills and financial Bills?

While all Money Bills are Financial Bills, all Financial Bills are not Money Bills.

E.g., the Finance Bill which only contains provisions related to tax proposals would be a Money Bill.

However, a Bill that contains some provisions related to taxation or expenditure, but also covers other matters would be considered as a Financial Bill.

The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill, 2015, which establishes funds under the Public Account of India and states, was introduced as a Financial Bill.

The procedure for the passage of the two bills varies significantly.

The Rajya Sabha has no power to reject or amend a Money Bill.

After being passed by the Lok Sabha, money Bills are sent to the Rajya Sabha for its recommendations.

Within 14 days, the Upper House must submit the Bill back to the Lower House with its non-binding recommendations.

If the Lok Sabha rejects the recommendations, the Bill is deemed to have passed by both Houses in the form in which it was passed by the Lok Sabha without the recommendations of the Rajya Sabha.

Even if the Rajya Sabha doesn't respond with its recommendations within 14 days, the same consequences would follow.

However, a Financial Bill must be passed by both Houses of Parliament.

While an ordinary Bill can originate in either house, a money Bill can only be introduced in the Lok Sabha, as laid down in Article 117 (1).

Additionally, no one can introduce or move money Bills in the Lok Sabha, except on the President's recommendation.

Amendments relating to the reduction or abolition of any tax are exempt from the requirement of the President's recommendation.

The two prerequisites for any financial Bill to become a money Bill are that

It must only be introduced in the Lok Sabha and not the Rajya Sabha.

These bills can only be introduced on the President's recommendation.

Background of the present case

Question regarding the validity of PMLA

In July 2022, a three-judge bench had upheld the PMLA and the vast powers of the ED.

However, the bench had left the validity of amendments to the PMLA through the Money Bill route open for a larger Constitution bench to hear.

The Finance Acts passed in 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019 brought in crucial amendments to the PMLA.

Finance Bills passed during the budget are introduced as money bills under Article 110 of the Constitution.

Aadhaar as money bill

The first major challenge on whether a bill qualified to be a money bill under the Constitution was in the Aadhaar case.

In a 4:1 majority, the Supreme Court in 2018, had ruled in favour of the government and had cleared the Aadhaar Act as a valid money bill under Article 110 of the Constitution.

Incidentally, Justice Chandrachud had been the lone dissenter in the Aadhaar ruling of 2018.

He had called it a “fraud on the Constitution” and “subterfuge”.

Tribunal reform

In November 2019, in Roger Matthew vs Union of India, the SC heard the challenge against tweaks in the service conditions of tribunal members which was also introduced as a money bill in the Finance Act, 2017.


While a five judge bench of the court struck down the law as unconstitutional for interfering with judicial independence, it referred the money bill aspect to a larger constitution bench.

In doing so, the court also expressed doubts over the correctness of a five-judge Constitution Bench’s 2018 verdict upholding the Aadhaar Act which had been passed as a money Bill.

Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF) Scheme


Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently extended the Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF) scheme by another two years and will include beneficiaries of the PM Vishwakarma scheme.

About Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF) Scheme:



RBI's boost to digital payments in India

- Announces Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF)
- Aims to encourage the adoption of 'Points of Sale' machines by businesses in tier-3 to tier-6 centres and Northeastern states
- To make an initial contribution of INR 250 Cr to PIDF covering half the fund*



*Remaining contribution to come from card-issuing banks and card networks operating in India | Source: RBI

It was first launched by the RBI in January 2021 for a period of three years.

Objective: Increasing the number of payment acceptance devices multifold in the country.

PIDF is a fund set up by the RBI, in consultation with major authorised card networks, to facilitate the development of payment acceptance infrastructure in tier-3 to tier-6 cities and the north-eastern states of India.

The Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh will also be given special focus.



Beneficiaries of the PM SVANidhi Scheme in Tier-1 and 2 centres were later included in August 2021.

Funding:

The PIDF is funded by the RBI and the major authorized card networks in India.

The scheme provides financial assistance to banks and non-bank financial companies (NBFCs) for the deployment of PoS terminals and other payment acceptance infrastructure in eligible regions.

Allocation:

When establishing criteria for fund allocation, the primary objective will be to identify and assist merchants who have not yet adopted payment acceptance technology, specifically those who lack any payment acceptance devices.

These merchants may be eligible to receive one physical and one digital acceptance device each through the program.

Merchants providing essential services (transport, hospitality, etc.), government payments, fuel pumps, PDS shops, healthcare, kirana shops, street vendors, etc., may be covered, especially in the targeted geographies.

Governance:

The PIDF will be governed through an Advisory Council and managed and administered by the RBI.

The implementation of targets shall be monitored by the RBI with assistance from card networks, the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) and the Payments Council of India (PCI).

What is PM Vishwakarma scheme?

It is a Central Sector Scheme launched on 17th September, 2023, with a financial outlay of Rs.13,000 crore.

Aim:

This initiative supports small businesses, focusing on traditional artists and craftspeople.

It provides small workers and craftsmen with financial help, training, improved methods, and skill mentoring.

It also aims at improving the quality as well as the reach of the products and services of artisans and craftsmen.



Under this scheme, the artisans and craftspeople will be provided recognition through the PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card, credit support upto 1 lakh (first tranche) and Rs.2 lakh (second tranche), with a concessional interest rate of 5%.

Key Facts about PM SVANidhi Scheme:

Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor’s AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi) Scheme was launched by the Government of India in June, 2020.

Objective: To empower street vendors by not only extending loans to them but also for their holistic development and economic upliftment.

The scheme intends to facilitate-collateral free working capital loans of up to Rs.10,000/- of one-year tenure, to approximately 50 lakh street vendors.

Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs