

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 11-11-2023

Ben Gurion Canal Project

The Ben Gurion Canal Project was first envisioned in the 1960s.



Ben Gurion Canal Project

The Ben Gurion Canal Project or Israeli Canal is a proposed canal project through the state of Israel.

It would connect the Gulf of Aqaba to the Mediterranean Sea.

David Ben Gurion, for whom it would be named, is considered the Founding Father of Israel and was the first Prime Minister of Israel.

The canal would rival the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal which runs through Egypt and has had many disturbances in its history, such as the Israeli blockage through the Suez Canal and Straits of Tiran, the Closure of the Suez Canal



(1956–1957), Closure of the Suez Canal (1967–1975), and the 2021 Suez Canal obstruction.

It would be almost one-third longer than the 193.3 km Suez Canal, at around 292.9 km.

Route

Starting from the Southern end at the Gulf of Aqaba, by the port city of Eilat in Israel on the Israeli and Jordanian border, through the Arabah Valley for about 100 km between the Negev Mountains and the Jordanian Highlands and veers West before the Dead Sea basin and the Dead Sea which is 430.5 metres below sea level, and heads through a valley in the Negev Mountain Range, then heads North again to get around the Gaza Strip and link up with the Mediterranean Sea.

Urgency of the Israeli Ben Gurion Canal

The project is driven by the need to restrain the rise of the economic power of China, and to hold back its ongoing project “One Road, One Belt”.

The Chinese project aims to build a train line that starts from the provinces of China in the west towards West Asia and secure water routes around the world.

The US is trying to hamper the Chinese trade route by creating an alternative route to compete with. So, the new stage of struggle will witness an economic war aiming to control seaports and global trade routes.

Significance of the Project

The Ben Gurion symbolizes a tectonic shift in global trade dynamics.

Significantly broader than its counterpart, the Suez Canal, its design intends to usher in a new age of maritime efficiency.

Beyond accommodating an increased volume of ships because it would be built on harder terrain than the sand in the Suez, the canal can be crafted to permit simultaneous two-way traffic, allowing vessels to transit in both directions concurrently.



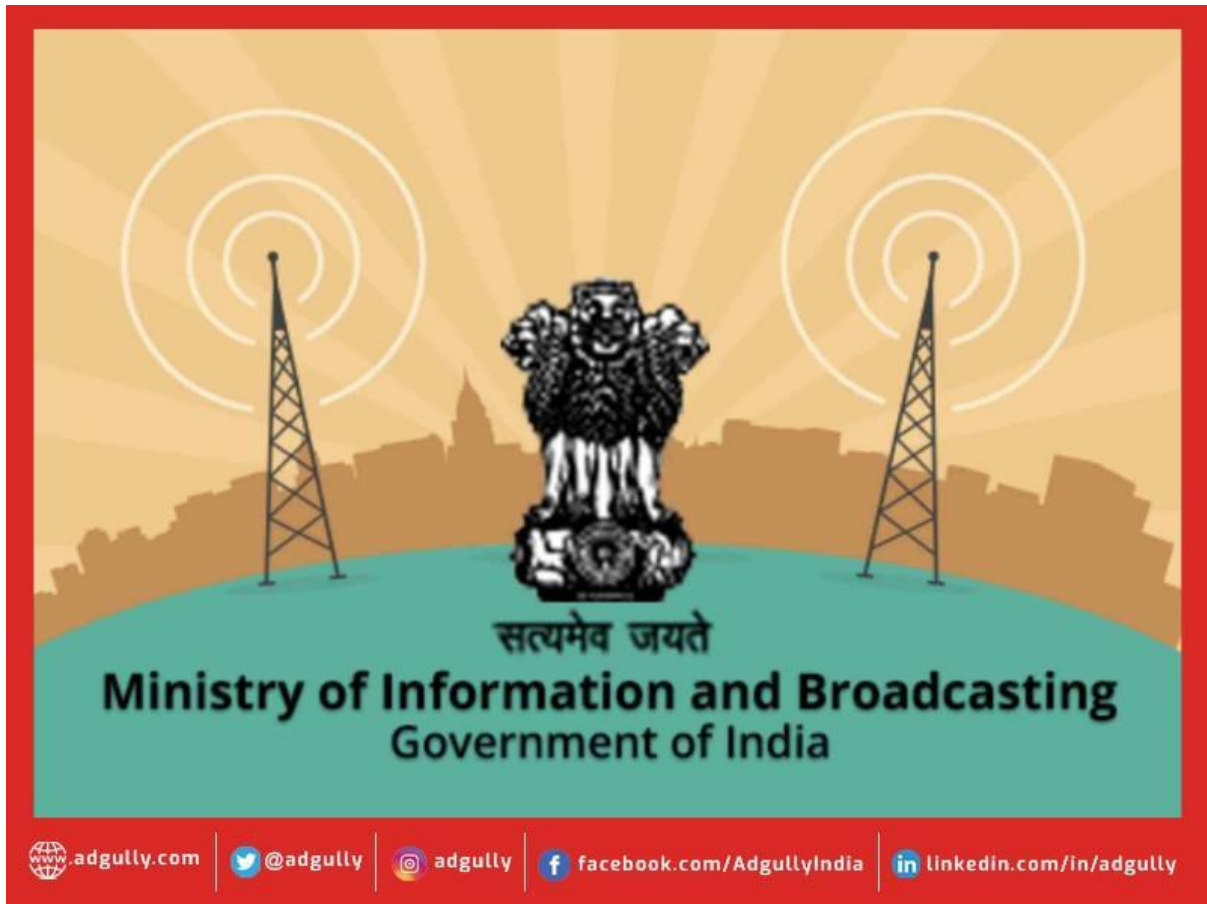
This project isn't just a logistical enhancement; it's a profound assertion of Israel's intention to become the fulcrum of global maritime commerce.

The Ben Gurion Canal Project, once completed, would transform global maritime dynamics by taking away Egypt's monopoly over the shortest route between Europe and Asia.

By directly contesting the Suez Canal's longstanding dominance, the stage is set for Western powers to wrestle financial and geopolitical control from Egypt. This nation has been the sentinel of this pivotal passageway for generations. This shift isn't merely about diversifying revenue streams; it's an overt strategy to re-orient the balance of power.

DIGITAL ADVERTISEMENT POLICY 2023

The Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting approves the "Digital Advertisement Policy, 2023," enabling the Central Bureau of Communication, the government's advertising wing, to conduct campaigns in the digital media space.



Key points in the Digital Advertisement Policy 2023

Objective and Rationale

Empowerment of the Central Bureau of Communication (CBC) for digital media campaigns.

Response to the changing media landscape and increased digitalization of media consumption.

The Central Bureau of Communication (CBC) operates under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and is responsible for creating awareness and disseminating information about various government programs, schemes, and policies in India.

Shift to Digital Media

The policy recognizes the changing landscape of media consumption, with a substantial movement towards digital platforms.



This acknowledgement is crucial as it reflects an awareness of the evolving preferences of the audience.

OTT and Video on Demand (VOD) Empowerment

The CBC, the government's advertising arm, is granted the authority to engage with agencies and organizations operating in the Over-The-Top (OTT) and Video on Demand (VOD) space.

This step indicates a strategic move to tap into the viewership on digital streaming platforms and cater to the changing habits of the audience.

Mobile Application Outreach

A significant development is the ability of the government to convey public service campaign messages through mobile applications.

This recognizes the prevalence of mobile apps in everyday life and aims to utilize them as a channel for government communication.

Social Media Platform Integration

Acknowledging the role of social media platforms in public discourse, the policy streamlines the process of government advertisements on these platforms.

Empowering the CBC to empanel digital media agencies for broader outreach on social media indicates a commitment to leveraging popular channels for communication.

Dynamic Adaptation to Digital Landscape

Recognizing the dynamic nature of the digital space, the policy allows the CBC to incorporate new and innovative communication platforms.

This adaptive approach ensures that the government can stay relevant in the ever-changing digital landscape.

Competitive Bidding for Transparency

Introducing competitive bidding for rate discovery brings transparency to the process of allocating resources for digital advertising.



This move is likely to foster efficiency and fairness in the selection of agencies for government campaigns.

Three-Year Rate Validity

Rates discovered through the competitive bidding process will remain valid for three years.

This provides stability and predictability in financial planning for the government's advertising initiatives.

Enhanced Digital Outreach through CBC

The CBC is positioned as the designated organization for issuing advertisements through all forms of media.

This includes traditional as well as digital media, emphasizing the CBC's role in amplifying the reach of government messages.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Discussion

The policy formulation involved wide-ranging discussions with multiple stakeholders.

This collaborative approach ensures that the perspectives of various entities are considered, contributing to a well-rounded and inclusive policy.

BROADCASTING SERVICES (REGULATION) BILL 2023

The Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has invited comments on the proposed Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023, aiming to overhaul regulations in response to the changing broadcasting landscape and technological advancements.



The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995 has been in effect for three decades, overseeing content on linear broadcasting, including cable networks. However, the broadcasting landscape has changed significantly with the advent of new platforms like DTH, IPTV, and OTT.

Need for Regulation

With the digitization of the broadcasting sector, there is a growing need to update and streamline the regulatory framework. The aim is to ensure ease of doing business and enhance adherence to the Programme Code and Advertisement Code by broadcasters and Distribution Platform Operators.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has proposed the Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023, to replace the existing Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, and other Policy Guidelines governing the broadcasting sector.

The Draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill 2023 comprises six chapters, 48 sections, and three schedules.

Key highlight of the proposed Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill 2023

Consolidation and Modernization



The bill consolidates and updates regulatory provisions for various broadcasting services under a single legislative framework.

Recognizing technological advancements, the regulatory purview is extended to cover Over-the-Top (OTT) content and digital news, areas currently regulated through the Information Technology Act 2000.

Contemporary Definitions and Future-Ready Provisions

Introduces comprehensive definitions for contemporary broadcasting terms, ensuring clarity and relevance.

Incorporates provisions that anticipate and accommodate emerging broadcasting technologies to future-proof the legislation.

Strengthening the Self-Regulation Regime

Introduces 'Content Evaluation Committees' to contribute to the self-regulation process.

Expand the existing Inter-Departmental Committee into a more participative and broader 'Broadcast Advisory Council' to provide a collaborative and informed approach to regulation.

Differentiated Programme Code and Advertisement Code

Permits a differentiated approach to Programme and Advertising Codes across various services.

Requires broadcasters to self-classify content and implement robust access control measures for restricted content.

Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

Address the specific needs of persons with disabilities in the broadcasting sector.

Includes provisions that enable the issuance of comprehensive accessibility guidelines, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all.

Statutory Penalties and Fines



Introduces non-monetary penalties such as advisory, warning, and censure for operators and broadcasters.

Includes monetary penalties linked to the financial capacity of the entity. Imprisonment and/or fines are reserved for very serious offences.

Equitable Penalties

Ensure fairness and equity in the imposition of penalties.

Links monetary penalties and fines to the financial capacity of the entity, taking into account their investment and turnover.

Infrastructure Sharing, Platform Services, and Right of Way

Address operational aspects and ensure efficient dispute resolution.

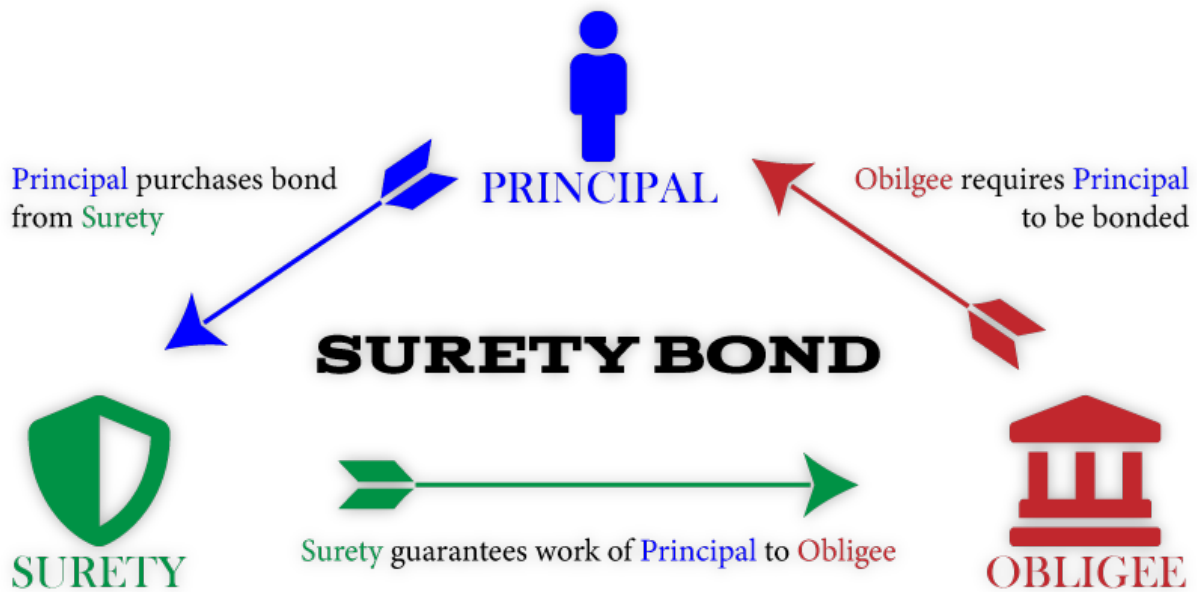
Includes provisions for infrastructure sharing among broadcasting network operators.

Addresses the carriage of platform services.

Streamlines the Right of Way section to handle relocation and alterations more efficiently. Establishes a structured dispute resolution mechanism.

Insurance Surety Bond

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has accepted Insurance Surety Bond for the monetization program of the upcoming bid of Toll Operate Transfer (TOT) Bundle 14.



It is the first time this innovative instrument (Insurance Surety Bond) is being utilized as a Bank Guarantee (BG) in the road infrastructure sector for monetization of bids.

NHAI has been working closely with Highway Operators Association of India (HOAI), SBI General Insurance and AON India Insurance to implement this initiative.

About Insurance Surety Bond:

These bonds can be defined in their simplest form as a written agreement to guarantee compliance, payment, or performance of an act.

These are instruments where insurance companies act as ‘Surety’ and provide the financial guarantee that the contractor will fulfil its obligation as per the agreed terms.

Surety is a unique type of insurance because it involves a three-party agreement.

The three parties in a surety agreement are:

Principal: The party that purchases the bond and undertakes an obligation to perform an act as promised.



Surety: The insurance company or surety company that guarantees the obligation will be performed. If the principal fails to perform the act as promised, the surety is contractually liable for losses sustained.

Obligee: The party who requires and often receives the benefit of the surety. For most surety bonds, the obligee is a local, state or federal government organisation.

Significance

It will act as a security arrangement for infrastructure projects and will insulate the contractor as well as the principal.

The product gives the principal a contract of guarantee that contractual terms and other business deals will be concluded in accordance with the mutually agreed terms.

In case the contractor doesn't fulfil the contractual terms, the Principal can raise a claim on the surety bond and recover the losses they have incurred.

Unlike a bank guarantee, the Surety Bond Insurance does not require large collateral from the contractor, thus freeing up significant funds for the contractor, which they can utilise for the growth of the business.

The product will also help in reducing the contractors' debts to a large extent, thus addressing their financial worries.

Vampire Viruses

Several 'Vampire Viruses' have been recently discovered on US soil for the first time.



They are pathogens that latch onto other viruses in order to replicate themselves.

They emerge when a bacteriophage attaches to a soil-based virus, utilising its "life" for independent survival.

This viral relationship between two pathogens is called a satellite and a helper. The satellite is the infectious strand that relies on the helper for support through its life cycle.

Satellites depend on both their host organism and helper virus to complete its life cycle.

The satellite virus depends on the helper virus to build the protective shell that covers its genetic material, called a capsid or to help it replicate its DNA.

Most satellite viruses contain a gene that allows them to integrate into the host cell's genetic material after they enter the cell.

This enables the satellite to reproduce whenever a helper enters the cell from then on.

The host cell also copies the satellite's DNA and its own when it divides.

What is a Bacteriophage?



Bacteriophages (BPs) are viruses that can infect and kill bacteria without any negative effect on human or animal cells. They are composed of a protein capsule around an RNA or DNA genome.

For this reason, it is supposed that they can be used, alone or in combination with antibiotics, to treat bacterial infections.

2+2 MEETINGS

Indian Defence Minister met their counterparts from the US government, for the fifth 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue held in New Delhi.

2+2 meetings

The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue is a diplomatic summit that has been held every year since 2018.

It was initially held between the Minister of External Affairs or Foreign Minister, and Defence Minister of India with the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense of the United States to discuss and work on common issues of concern to improve and strengthen India–United States relations.

In 2019, the summit involved the respective Foreign and Defence ministers between both India and Japan. In 2021, the summit was expanded to meetings with the Foreign and Defence ministers of Australia and Russia.

History

The dialogue came to existence from an agreement between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump.

The dialogue was created to replace the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue which started under the Obama administration. Both nations agreed to the summit during Modi's visit to the United States in June 2017 which was officially announced the following month in August after a phone call between Modi and Trump.



The 2+2 meetings have been held annually with the US leaders since 2018.

What are 2+2 meetings and what is the rationale behind them?

The 2+2 meetings signify the participation of two high-level representatives, Ministers holding Foreign and Defence portfolios, from each of the two countries who aim to enhance the scope of dialogue between them.

The 2+2 meetings have been held annually with the US leaders since 2018.

The launch of the dialogue was seen as a “reflection of the shared commitment” by India and the US to provide “a positive, forward-looking vision for the India-US strategic partnership and to promote synergy in their diplomatic and security efforts”.

Additionally, India has held 2+2 meetings with ministers from Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom and Russia.

Notably, in this year’s meeting, Antony Blinken reiterated the significance of India’s relations with some of these countries that are also important US allies.

Defence and strategic agreements under 2+2

Over the years, the strategic bilateral relationship with its partners, including the dialogues held in the 2+2 format, has produced tangible and far-reaching results for India.

India and the US have signed a troika of “foundational pacts” for deep military cooperation, beginning with the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, followed by the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) after the first 2+2 dialogue in 2018, and then the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020.

The strengthening of the mechanisms of cooperation between the two militaries is of significance in the context of an increasingly aggressive China.



This is because China threatens a large number of countries in its neighbourhood and beyond, and which has been challenging several established norms and aspects of international relations.

The establishment of the mechanism with Japan, which is also wary of China's role, is another example of this.

However, India also talks to Russia through 2+2 dialogues, keeping in mind its security and energy interests and the countries' historical depth of relations.