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Changes in ISA approved by Union Cabinet

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given ex-post facto approval for moving a Resolution in the first Assembly of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) for amending the Framework Agreement of the ISA for opening up the ISA membership to all countries that are members of the United Nations.

Benefits -

Opening the membership of the ISA will put solar energy in global agenda with the universal appeal for developing and deploying solar energy. It will make ISA inclusive, whereby all member countries that are members of the United Nations could become member. Expanding membership will lead to ISA initiative benefitting the world at large.

PM launches historic Support and Outreach Initiative for MSME Sector

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi recently launched a historic support and outreach programme for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector. As part of this programme, the Prime Minister unveiled 12 key initiatives which will help the growth, expansion and facilitation of MSMEs across the country.

Initiatives -

1. Access to Credit -

- a. Union Government has launched the 59 minute loan portal to enable easy access to credit for MSMEs.
- b. Loans upto Rs. 1 crore can be granted in-principle approval through this portal, in just 59 minutes. A link to this portal will be made available through the GST portal.
- c. All companies with a turnover more than Rs. 500 crore, must now compulsorily be brought on the Trade Receivables e-Discounting System (TReDS). Joining this portal will enable entrepreneurs to access credit from banks, based on their upcoming receivables. This will resolve their problems of cash cycle.

2. Access to markets -

- a. Public sector companies have now been asked to compulsorily procure 25 percent, instead of 20 percent of their total purchases, from MSMEs.
- b. Out of the 25 percent procurement mandated from MSMEs, 3 percent must now be reserved for women entrepreneurs.
- c. All public sector undertakings of the Union Government must now compulsorily be a part of GeM (Government e-Marketplace).

3. **Technology Upgradation** - 20 hubs will be formed across the country, and 100 spokes in the form of tool rooms will be established.

4. **Ease of Doing Business -**
 - a. Clusters will be formed of pharma MSMEs. 70 percent cost of establishing these clusters will be borne by the Union Government.
 - b. The return under 8 labour laws and 10 Union regulations must now be filed only once a year.
 - c. Under air pollution and water pollution laws, now both these have been merged as a single consent. The return will be accepted through self-certification.
 - d. An Ordinance has been brought, under which, for minor violations under the Companies Act, the entrepreneur will no longer have to approach the Courts, but can correct them through simple procedures.
5. **Social Security for MSME Sector Employees -** A mission will be launched to ensure that they have Jan Dhan Accounts, provident fund and insurance.

Guidelines issued for OPERATION GREENS

Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has approved the operationalisation strategy for Operation Greens recently.

Operation GREENS -

Operation Greens was announced in the Budget speech of 2018-19 with an outlay of Rs 500 crores to stabilize the supply of Tomato, Onion and Potato(TOP) crops and to ensure availability of TOP crops throughout the country round the year without price volatility.

Strategy -

1. **Short-Term Price Stabilisation Measures -** NAFED will be the Nodal Agency to implement price stabilisation measures. MoFPI will provide 50% of the subsidy on the following two components:
 - a. Transportation of Tomato Onion Potato (TOP) Crops from production to storage;
 - b. Hiring of appropriate storage facilities for TOP Crops;
2. **Long-Term Integrated Value Chain Development Projects -**
 - a. Capacity Building of FPOs & their consortium
 - b. Quality production
 - c. Post-harvest processing facilities
 - d. Agri-Logistics
 - e. Marketing / Consumption Points
 - f. Creation and Management of e-platform for demand and supply management of TOP Crops.

The pattern of assistance will comprise of grants-in-aid at the rate of 50% of the eligible project cost in all areas, subject to maximum Rs. 50 crores per project. However, in case

where PIA is/are FPO(s), the grant-in-aid will be at the rate of 70% of the eligible project cost in all areas, subject to maximum Rs. 50 crores per project.

Objectives of Operation GREENS -

- Enhancing value realisation of TOP farmers by targeted interventions to strengthen TOP production clusters and their FPOs, and linking/connecting them with the market.
- Price stabilisation for producers and consumers by proper production planning in the TOP clusters and introduction of dual use varieties.
- Reduction in post-harvest losses by creation of farm gate infrastructure, development of suitable agro-logistics, creation of appropriate storage capacity linking consumption centres.
- Increase in food processing capacities and value addition in TOP value chain with firm linkages with production clusters.
- Setting up of a market intelligence network to collect and collate real time data on demand and supply and price of TOP crops.

India re-elected as member of ITU

India has been elected as a Member of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Council for another 4-year term (2019-2022). The elections to the Council were held during the ongoing ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2018 at Dubai, UAE.

By securing 165 votes, India ranked third among the 13 countries elected to the Council from the Asia-Australasia region, and eighth among the 48 countries elected to the Council globally. The ITU has 193 member states who elect representatives to the Council.

Background -

India has been an active member of the ITU since 1869, earnestly supporting the development and propagation of telecom in the global community of nations. The country has been a regular member of the ITU Council since 1952, and has played an important role in harmonizing the contributions of member States from the region, always respecting the principles of equality and consensus-building.

India joins as Member of AMF TCP

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has been apprised of India joining as Member of Advanced Motor Fuels Technology Collaboration Programme (AMF TCP) under International Energy Agency (IEA) on 9th May, 2018. AMF TCP works under the framework of International Energy Agency (IEA) to which India has "Association" status since 30th March, 2017.

Details -

The primary goal of joining AMF TCP by Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoP&NG) is to facilitate the market introduction of Advanced motor fuels/ Alternate fuels with an aim to

bring down emissions and achieve higher fuel efficiency in transport sector. AMF TCP also provides an opportunity for fuel analysis, identifying new/ alternate fuels for deployment in transport sector and allied R&D activities for reduction in emissions in fuel intensive sectors.

Cabinet approves filing of Padur Strategic Petroleum Reserves

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the filling of Padur Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) at Padur, Karnataka by overseas National Oil Companies (NOCs).

Details -

- The SPR facility at Padur is an underground rock cavern with a total capacity of 2.5 million metric tonnes (MMT) having four compartments of 0.625 MMT each. The filling of the SPR under PPP model is being undertaken to reduce budgetary support of Government of India.
- The total 5.33 MMT capacity under Phase-I of the SPR programme is currently estimated to supply approximately 9.5 days of India's crude requirement according to the consumption data for FY 2017-18. Government has given 'in principle' approval in June 2018 for establishing additional 6.5 MMT SPR facilities at Chandikhol in Odisha and Padur in Karnataka, which is expected to augment India's energy security by 11.5 days according to the consumption data for FY 2017-18.

Background -

The Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd. (ISPRL) has constructed and commissioned underground rock caverns for storage of total 5.33 MMT of crude oil at three locations namely Vishakhapatnam (1.33 MMT), Mangalore (1.5 MMT) and Padur (2.5 MMT).

SIMBEX

The 25th edition of SIMBEX, an acronym for "**Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise**" was conducted between 10th to 21st November 2018 off Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.

Background -

- Bilateral cooperation between Singapore and India was first formalised when RSN ships began training with the Indian Navy in 1994.
- The previous edition of the exercise was held off Singapore in the South China Sea in May 2017.

LEAP and ARPIT Programmes launched

Leadership for Academicians Programme (LEAP) -

- It is a three weeks Flagship leadership development training programme (2 weeks domestic and one week foreign training) for second level academic functionaries in public funded higher education institutions.
- The main objective is to prepare second tier academic heads who are potentially likely to assume leadership roles in the future.
- The programme would provide senior faculty, with high academic credentials, the required leadership and managerial skills including skills of problem-solving, handling stress, team building work, conflict management, developing communication skills, understanding and coping with the complexity and challenges of governance in HEIs, financial & general administration.

Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching (ARPIT) -

- It a major and unique initiative of online professional development of 15 lakh higher education faculty using the MOOCs platform SWAYAM.
- For implementing ARPIT, 75 discipline-specific institutions have been identified and notified as National Resource Centres (NRCs) in the first phase, which are tasked to prepare online training material with focus on latest developments in the discipline, new & emerging trends, pedagogical improvements and methodologies for transacting revised curriculum.

AirSewa 2.0 launched

A platform to lodge grievances with respect to civil aviation sector. The web portal and application will help to capture air travellers' feedback for policy interventions.

New additions -

Major improvements include features such as secure sign-up and log-in with social media, chatbot for travellers support, improved grievance management including social media grievances, real-time flight status and details flight schedule.

Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2018

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2018 for regulation and standardisation of education and services by allied and healthcare professionals.

The Bill provides for setting up of an Allied and Healthcare Council of India and corresponding State Allied and Healthcare Councils which will play the role of a standard-setter and facilitator for professions of Allied and Healthcare.

Details -

- Establishment of a Central and corresponding State Allied and Healthcare Councils; 15 major professional categories including 53 professions in Allied and Healthcare streams.
- The Bill provides for Structure, Constitution, Composition and Functions of the Central Council and State Councils, e.g. Framing policies and standards, Regulation of professional conduct, Creation and maintenance of live Registers, provisions for common entry and exit examinations, etc.

Targets -

- An Interim Council will be constituted within 6 months of passing of the Act holding charge for a period of two years until the establishment of the Central Council.
- The Council at the Centre and the States are to be established as body corporate with a provision to receive funds from various sources.
- Councils will also be supported by Central and State Governments respectively through Grant-in-aid as needed. However, if the State Government expresses inability, the Central Government may release some grant for initial years to the State Council.

ACROSS AND NFAR schemes approved

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved continuation of the nine sub-schemes of the umbrella scheme "Atmosphere & Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services (ACROSS)" during 2017-2020 at an estimated cost of Rs. 1450 crore.

It will be implemented by the Ministry of Earth Sciences through its institutes namely India Meteorological Department (IMD), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), and Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Service (INCOIS).

Impact -

The scheme will provide improved weather, climate and ocean forecast and services, thereby ensuring transfer of commensurate benefits to the various services like Public weather service, disaster management, Agro-meteorological Services, Aviation services, Environmental monitoring services, Hydro-meteorological services, climate services, tourism, pilgrimage, power generation, water management, Sports & adventure etc.

Details -

- ACROSS scheme pertains to the atmospheric science programs of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and addresses different aspects of weather and climate services, which includes warnings for cyclone, storm surges, heat waves, thunderstorms etc.

- Each of these aspects is incorporated as nine sub-schemes under the umbrella scheme "ACROSS" and is implemented in an integrated manner through the aforesaid four institutes.
- The ACROSS scheme consists of nine sub-programmes which are multi disciplinary and multi institutional in nature and will be implemented in an integrated manner through IMD, HIM, NCMRWF and INCOIS.
- As the objective of the ACROSS scheme is to provide a reliable weather and climate forecast for betterment of society, the scheme will aim at improving skill of weather and climate forecast through sustained observations, intensive R & D, and by adopting effective dissemination and communication strategies to ensure its timely reach to the end-user of all services like Agro-meteorological Services, Aviation service, Environmental monitoring services, Hydro-meteorological services, climate services, tourism, pilgrimage, mountaineering etc.

Kartarpur Corridor and Sultanpur Lodhi

Development of Kartarpur Sahib corridor -

In a significant decision, the Union Cabinet approved the building and development of the Kartarpur corridor from Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur district to the international border, in order to facilitate pilgrims from India to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur on the banks of the Ravi river, in Pakistan, where Shri Guru Nanak Devji spent eighteen years. Pilgrims would then be able to visit the holy shrine throughout the year.

The Kartarpur corridor will be implemented as an integrated development project with Government of India funding, to provide smooth and easy passage, with all the modern amenities. Government of India will put in place suitable facilities for smooth passage of pilgrims. Government of Pakistan will be urged to recognize the sentiments of the Sikh community and to develop a corridor with suitable facilities in their territory as well.

Development of Sultanpur Lodhi -

The Union Cabinet also decided that the historic town of Sultanpur Lodhi, associated with the life of Shri Guru Nanak Devji, shall be developed as a heritage town and on the Smart City principles, including energy efficiency, to highlight Shri Guru Nanak Devji's emphasis on sustainability and reverence for nature. As a major attraction for pilgrims and tourists, a heritage complex at Sultanpur Lodhi, "Pind Babe Nanak da" will be established to depict life in the times of Shri Guru Nanak Devji. Sultanpur Lodhi railway station will be upgraded and developed with all the modern amenities.

India gets UN Environment Award for combatting transboundary environmental crimes

United Nation Environment has awarded Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India with Asia Environment Enforcement Awards, 2018 for excellent work done by the Bureau in combating transboundary environmental crime.

About the Award -

The Asia Environment Enforcement Awards publicly recognize and celebrate excellence in enforcement by government officials and institutions/teams combating transboundary environmental crime in Asia. The awards are given to outstanding individuals and/or government organizations/teams that demonstrate excellence and leadership in enforcement of national laws to combat transboundary environmental crime in one of the following eligibility criteria areas: collaboration; impact; innovation; integrity and gender leadership.

PAISA Portal launched

A centralized electronic platform for processing interest subvention on bank loans to beneficiaries under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) named “PAiSA – Portal for Affordable Credit and Interest Subvention Access”, was launched recently.

Details -

- The web platform has been designed and developed by Allahabad Bank which is the Nodal bank.
- PAiSA is yet another effort by the government to connect directly with the beneficiaries, ensuring that there is greater transparency and efficiency in delivery of services.
- DBT of subvention on monthly basis under DAY-NULM will give the necessary financial support to small entrepreneurs in a timely manner.

Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti

Raksha Mantri Smt Nirmala Sitharaman has formally launched ‘Mission Raksha Gyan Shakti’ recently.

Details -

The event showcased salient inventions and innovations achieved by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and Ordnance Factories (OFs) which have resulted in successful filing of Intellectual Property Right (IPR) applications.

Emergency Response Support System

The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh launched Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) for Himachal Pradesh at Mandi today. Himachal Pradesh is the first state to launch pan-India single emergency number ‘112’ under ERSS.

PSLV - C43 launches HysIS

The Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C43) successfully launched 31 satellites from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota.

The PSLV-C43 lifted off from the First Launch Pad and injected India's Hyper-Spectral Imaging Satellite (HysIS) into a 645 km sun-synchronous polar orbit.

About HysIS -

- HysIS is an earth observation satellite built around ISRO's Mini Satellite 2 (IMS-2) bus weighing about 380kg. The mission life of the satellite is five years.
- The primary goal of HysIS is to study the earth's surface in both the visible, near infrared and shortwave infrared regions of the electromagnetic spectrum.
- Data from the satellite will be used for a wide range of applications including agriculture, forestry, soil/geological environments, coastal zones and inland waters, etc.

About PSLV -

PSLV is a four stage launch vehicle with a large solid rocket motor forming the first stage, an earth storable liquid stage as the second stage, a high performance solid rocket motor as third stage and a liquid stage with engines as fourth stage.

Nine Point Agenda by India to G-20 for actions against Fugitive Economic Offenders and Asset Recovery

1. Strong and active cooperation across G-20 countries to deal comprehensively and efficiently with the menace fugitive economic offenders.
2. Cooperation in the legal processes such as effective freezing of the proceeds of crime; early return of the offenders and efficient repatriation of the proceeds of crime should be enhanced and streamlined.
3. Joint effort by G-20 countries to form a mechanism that denies entry and safe havens to all fugitive economic offenders.
4. Principles of United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNOTC), especially related to "International Cooperation" should be fully and effectively implemented.
5. FATF should be called upon to assign priority and focus to establishing international co-operation that leads to timely and comprehensive exchange of information between the competent authorities and FIUs.
6. FATF should be tasked to formulate a standard definition of fugitive economic offenders.

7. FATF should also develop a set of commonly agreed and standardised procedures related to identification, extradition and judicial proceedings for dealing with fugitive economic offenders to provide guidance and assistance to G-20 countries, subject to their domestic law.
8. Common platform should be set up for sharing experiences and best practices including successful cases of extradition, gaps in existing systems of extradition and legal assistance, etc.
9. G-20 Forum should consider initiating work on locating properties of economic offenders who have a tax debt in the country of their residence for its recovery.

Konkan-18 begins at Goa

Joint Naval Exercise between India and United Kingdom, started in 2004. The Bilateral KONKAN exercise provides a platform for the two Navies to periodically exercise at sea and in harbour, so as to build interoperability and share best practices.