



PLUTUS ACADEMY

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1. Plastic Parks Scheme- Need and Challenges.

The Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers has approved to set up ten plastic parks in the country under the Plastic Park scheme. The Scheme was launched in 2019.

Key Facts

- The plastic parks will be set up in Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand.
- A plastic park is a dedicated zone of plastic and related industries.
- 6 Out of the 10 plastic parks are being implemented currently. While the draft plan for the four is underway.
- The Government of India will share Rs 40 crore per project and rest of the cost will be borne by the state government.

About the scheme

The plastic Park scheme has been launched with an aim to increase the competitiveness and value addition in the plastic processing industry. This will be achieved through research and development in the field.

Need of the scheme

The scheme would boost the plastic trade. Currently, India's share in the Global market of plastics is very low. The Global trade of plastics is 1 trillion USD while India's share is just 1%.

Challenges

Major challenge with the plastic industries in India is its Recycling. Only 60% of plastic waste gets recycled in India. This further causes pollution which is also threatening aquatic resources at a larger scale.

Plastic Industry in India

Plastic industry is classified into two categories:

1. Upstream Category- which is associated with the manufacturing of polymers.
2. Downstream Category- which are involved in conversion of processable polymers into useful end products.

2. 46th Foundation Day of Central Pollution Control Board

The government organised a webinar to commemorate 46th foundation day of Central Pollution Control Board on September 23, 2020.

About Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)

- It is a statutory organisation under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.
- It was constituted in September, 1974
- It entrusts powers and functions Under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.
- It provides technical services to the Ministry of Environment and Forests under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- It is a technical wing of the Government for doing environmental research, monitoring and regulating it and to enforce it in the country.

Functions of CPCB

Some of the functions include:

1. To promote cleanliness in States by prevention and control of water pollution
2. To improve the air quality and to prevent and control air pollution.
3. To set sector specific standards for pollution.
4. To do real time surveillance of industries.
5. To conduct river basin studies to take remedial actions on river pollution.
6. To establish extensive monitoring network and data management for public dissemination
7. To set national air quality standards and
8. To fix water quality criteria.

Significance

The Central Pollution Control Board collects real time data on pollution which thus acts as a key policy input for the concerned agencies to improve air quality. Data provided by the board is crucial to tackle the problem of environmental degradation because of rapid industrialization and population growth. The board is continuously working towards re-defining the pollution control technologies and management strategies.

3. Stubble Burning- Causes, Impact and Solution.

The Supreme Court had appointed the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority on the problem of stubble burning. The authorities have said to the chief secretaries of Punjab and Haryana that early burning of crop residue is taking place in the region. It has also urged them to look after the issue urgently. Recent SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research under the Central government) estimate based on the INSAT-3, 3D and NASA satellite data, there were 42 fires on September 21, 2020.

Key Facts

- Agricultural fires begin around late September and peak around the last week of October after the paddy crops have been harvested.
- These fires caused pollution in and around the Delhi region as particulate matter floats into the city.
- As per a report, Stubble burning in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh contributes 17% to 78% to the particulate matter emission in Delhi during winter.

Causes of Stubble Burning

- To prepare the field for the sowing of winter (Rabi) wheat quickly.
- High cost of collecting the stubble, prompts the farmer to burn it on the field.
- Equipment like Rotavator and happy seeder are expensive.
- Less number of biomass power plants in India.

Impact of Stubble Burning

- Paddy stubble burning affects air quality.
- Burning of crop residues emits methane, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, Sulphur dioxide and particulate matters which are poisonous and affects human health.
- It deteriorates the organic content in the soil.

Government Steps to tackle the problem

1. Use of Super Straw Management System (SMS)- Punjab government has ordered to use harvester machines compounded with the Super Straw Management System (super SMS) to curb stubble burning. It provides in situ management of crop residue thus, the farmers are not required to burn residues before sowing the next crop.
2. 'Promotion of Agricultural Mechanisation for the In-Situ Management of Residue in the Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi' – It has been centrally sponsored and has reduced the burning by 15% in all these States as per the satellite data.

Under the scheme, financial assistance of 50% of the total cost is provided to the farmers for purchase of in-situ crop residue management machines.

3. The Global Positioning System is being used to monitor the stubble burning.
4. Happy Seeder machine- developed by Punjab Agricultural University. The machine does not require a stubble-free land to plant wheat.

4.State Disaster Relief Fund eased by Prime Minister to help States

PM Modi in the recent meet with chief ministers have eased the norms for State Disaster relief Fund. The meeting was with the chief ministers of seven states including Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, that have been severely affected by the covid-19 virus. More than 63% of active cases of covid-19 are concentrated in these seven States.

Key Facts

- The Prime Minister announced that the limit of use of state disaster response fund (SDRF) is being increased from 35 % to 50%.
- The increased limit would help the states in developing covid-19 related infrastructure.
- In March this year, the Government of India had declared covid-19 as a notified disaster under disaster management Act 2005.
- This was done to help the states to use the State disaster response Funds for covid-19 relief measures.
- Apart from Covid-19, there are 13 disasters covered under the act for which the disaster response funds can be used- landslides, earthquakes, cyclone, hailstorm, drought, fire, pest attacks, Tsunami, Avalanche, Frost, cloudburst and cold waves.

State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)

On the recommendations of the 13th finance commission, SDRF was constituted under disaster management Act, 2005. The Government of India allocates 75% of SDRF to the states and 90% for special category states annually. The disbursement of the fund for a state is based on the Recommendation of the finance commission. Apart from that, the ministry of home affairs is empowered to release 25% of the central share in case of emergency. The fund is audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India every year.

5.Why Over 380 Whales Died of Mass Stranding?

Around 380 whales have died in a mass stranding in southern Australia on September 23, 2020. The entire pod of 460 long whales got stuck in **Macquarie Harbour, Tasmania Island, Australia**. It is the largest mass stranding recorded in Australia and in the world. The whales have been found stranded over an area of 10 kilometres. The causes of mass stranding is unknown even to scientists. However, Such Mass Stranding of whales is natural in Australia and New Zealand. Mass stranding is also common in the North Sea.

Mass Stranding

It is a natural phenomenon in which Whales move towards the shore when they are sick, in their old age, due to bad weather, navigation errors and sometimes for hunting seals in the shore. Majority of the mass stranding occurs when their echolocation does not work. Echolocation is used by them for navigation.

Reasons for mass stranding

Possible reasons of mass stranding could be:

1. Climate and Weather change.
2. Aquatic species become poisonous.
3. Changing Earth's magnetic field because of which whales lose their sense of direction.
4. Natural diseases and sickness.
5. Old age.
6. For hunting the seals.
7. When attacked by sharks.

How are they disposed of?

The dead whales are often moved away from the shipping lanes and back to the sea where they are allowed to decompose naturally. In case whales are half dead, the large whales might take weeks to die. They might require a dose of potassium chloride to the heart or explosives. While, smaller whales are usually shot with a firearm.

6.Indian Railways: CAG Report

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India submitted its report titled "Assessment and Utilisation of Locomotives and Production and Maintenance of LHB coaches in Indian Railways" on Indian Railways in the Parliament on September 23, 2020.

Findings of the Report

- As per the report, the number of diesel locos has been increased by 20% between 2012 and 2018.

- CAG highlighted that there is an increase because the Indian Railway Board failed to assess the requirement of electric locos.
- This also highlights the lacunae in the implementation of the Mission Electrification and De-Carbonisation that is being operated under Indian Railways. As per these directives, railway has planned for 100% electrification by 2022 that was later postponed to 2023.
- According to the report, 46% of new locos failed within 100 days of commissioning because of defective materials used in manufacturing.
- Half of the electric and diesel locos failed to receive timely maintenance.
- The CAG report says that accidents data show there is an urgent need to switch over to Linke Hoffmann Busch (LHB) coaches to ensure safety of passengers.

As per the reply of railway minister, 63% of railway lines have been electrified in the country and 23,765 routes are yet to be electrified. He also said that the vacant land of Railways needs to be utilised in the interim period for commercial development of additional financial resources. But the Railways did not have adequate facilities in their workshops for intermediate and periodical overhauling. Reason being this, the production initiative was not able to meet the requirement of coach production.

7.Provisions of the Major Port Authorities Bill, 2020

The Major Port Authorities Bill, 2020 was passed in Lok Sabha on September 23, 2020. The bill replaces the Major Ports Act, 1963. It aims to regulate, operate and plan major ports in India. The bill will provide a greater autonomy to ports in the country.

Key provisions

- The bill specifically deals with the major ports including Visakhapatnam, Paradip, Mormugao, V.O. Chidambaranar, New Mangalore, Kolkata, Kandla, Mumbai, Jawaharlal Nehru Port, Chennai, Cochin port.
- As per the Bill, ports will be managed by the Port Authorities Board and every port will have a port authority which will act under the leadership of a central board.

Port Authority Board

- The Port authority boards will replace the port trusts.
- The board comprises chairperson, members from respective state governments, representatives from Defence Ministry, Railway Ministry and Customs Department.
- The chairperson of the board will be appointed by the Central Government.

- The board will also include two to four independent members who will represent the interests of the port authorities.
- The board will be empowered to use its properties and fix scales of rates for assets.

Other functions

- **Adjudicatory Board:** The Adjudicatory Board will do the functions of the tariff authority of the ports. It will review the stressed PPP projects and adjudicate on the disputes related to rights of major ports.
- **Financial Powers:** The board will be empowered to raise loans from any scheduled banks and financial institutions. For the loans greater than 50%, the board will require prior sanction from the central government.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility:** The board also have the power to use its funds to provide social benefits including health, education, skill development, environment and housing.

8.What is Kritagya Hackathon?

Kritagya (Krishi-Raknik-Gyan) Hackathon was launched by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICMR) on September 23, 2020 under the National Agricultural Higher Education Project. It was launched with an objective to promote Farm Mechanisation specially women friendly equipment.

Key Facts

- Students from any university and college can apply and participate in the event.
- The event will distribute prizes as well:
 1. first prize winner will receive Rs 5 lakhs,
 2. second prize will receive Rs 3 lakh and
 3. third prize winners will receive Rs 5 lakh.
- The hackathon aims to enhance the farm productivity and profitability by enhancing the innovation in farm mechanization.
- This event is providing an opportunity to the students, faculties, innovators, entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders to present their innovative approaches and technological solutions to promote farm mechanization in India.
- The hackathon is in line with the high-quality higher education that provides equity and ensures inclusion as is the target of National Education Policy(NEP) 2020.

National Agricultural Higher Education Project

The National Agricultural Higher Education project was launched in 2019. The total cost of the project was Rs 1100 crores. The World Bank provides funding support to the project. The share of funds between GoI and the World Bank is in the ratio of 50:50. The programme supports ICAR and participating agricultural universities. Under the project,

- Four year degree in Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries and Forestry will be considered a professional degree.
- Rajendra Agriculture University was upgraded as Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University. This was done to strengthen the government's effort in order to bring green revolution in Eastern and North East India.
- Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) is being set up in Barhi, Jharkhand and in Assam.

9. World Maritime Day is observed on September 24.

The World Maritime Day is observed on September 24 by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and other international organizations. The day is celebrated on the last Thursday of September every year. Theme for this year is **Sustainable Shipping for a Sustainable Planet**.

Key Facts

- **The World Maritime Day was celebrated for the first time in March 1978.**
- **It was first celebrated to mark the IMO Convention.**

Significance

As per the reports of UNCTAD, around 80% of global trade by volume and 70% of global trade by value are carried through sea and handled by ports worldwide. These shares stand higher in the Developing countries. More than 50,000 merchant ships operate for trading internationally. They are involved in transporting every kind of cargo and are manned by more than a million seafarers. So the day is significant as it spread awareness about the importance of shipping safety, marine environment and maritime security.

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

IMO is an agency of the United Nations which is responsible for regulating the shipping. It was established in 1948 and came into force in 1959. It is headquartered in London, United Kingdom. It has 171 members and 3 associate members. India joined IMO as a member-state in 1959. Its main function is to develop and maintain a regulatory framework for shipping.

National Maritime Day

India also celebrates its National Maritime Day which is observed on April 5 every year. It was first celebrated in 1964.

Maritime Initiatives involving India

- 1. The Indo-Pacific Initiative– India has adopted this initiative to ensure a safe and secure Indian and the Pacific ocean. This is being achieved through partnerships among countries through marine resources. This initiative is supported by Australia, Japan and Thailand.**
- 2. Djibouti Code of Conduct– India recently became an observer of Djibouti Code of Conduct, established by International Maritime Organization. It works to repress the piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Gulf of Aden and western Indian Ocean.**