Prelim Bits 09-02-2024 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

MGNREG Scheme

Recently, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development reported that, low budgetary allocation cripples MGNREGA Scheme.

- **MGNREGA** – Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.
- **Launched in** – ***2005***
- **Implementing agency** – Rural Development
- **Objectives** – Providing *at least 100 days of unskilled* manual work in a financial year to every household in rural areas.
- Strengthening the livelihood resource base of the poor and proactively ensuring social inclusion.
- **Beneficiaries** – Every *adult members of rural* household who volunteer to do work.
- **Decentralised planning** – *Panchayat Raj Institutions* plays a vital role in planning and implementing these works.
- *Gram Sabha* to recommend works to be undertaken and at least 50% of the works must be executed by them.
- **Demand driven** – It must provide *work within 15 days* of demanding it, failing which *unemployment allowance* be given.
- **Empowers women** – At least one-third beneficiaries be women.
- **Empowers vulnerable** – In some cases, it can allow *additional 50 days* of wage employment (beyond the stipulated 100 days).
    - For instance, every *Scheduled Tribe* household in a forest area is entitled to get 150 days' work.
    - In such rural areas where *drought or any natural calamity* (as per Ministry of Home Affairs) has been notified.
- **Wages** – It shall be according to Minimum Wages Act.

The range of wages vary from as little as Rs 221 in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to Rs 354 in the 3 gram panchayats of Sikkim.

- **Ensures accountability** – It has mandated *social audit* of all works undertaken
- **Challenges** – *Lower budgetary allocation*, l*ower wages* than market rates and there is *delay in dispensing* the wages, which is supposed to be compensated by a delay allowance.

Delay allowance are at the rate of 0.05% of the unpaid wages per day of delay beyond the 16th day after the closure of the muster roll.

References

1. The Hindu| Issues relevant to MGNREGA
2. Vikaspedia| MGNREGA

World Trade Organisation (WTO)

India holds its stance to object any negotiations on non-trade issues in the upcoming 13th Ministerial conference of WTO that will be held at Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates in Feb, 2024.

- **Formation** – Established in ***1995***, after *Uruguay round* of negotiations under the ***Marrakesh Agreement***, replacing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).
- **Headquarters** – Geneva, Switzerland.

World Trade Organisation (WTO) is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations.

- **Objective** – To ensure that *trade flows* as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible.
- **Eligibility** – A government has to bring its economic and trade policies in line with WTO rules and negotiate its terms of entry.
- Over 20 countries are seeking to join the WTO.
- **Membership** – It has ***over 160 members*** representing 98% of world trade, *India is a founding member*.
- **Organisation structure** – The *General Council* is the top day-to-day decision-making body, meets many times a year in Geneva.
- *Ministerial conferences* usually take place every two years.
- **Decision making** – All major decisions are made by the WTO's member governments.
- **Budget** – Most of the income is from *contributions by its members*.
- **Functions** - Administering WTO trade agreements
    - Forum for trade negotiations
    - Handling trade disputes
    - Monitoring national trade policies
    - Technical assistance and training for developing countries
    - Cooperation with other international organizations
- **Report** – It is provided *annually*, a comprehensive overview of WTO activities over the past year.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is the 7th Director-General of the WTO, becoming the 1st woman and the 1st African to serve as Director-General. Her term of office will expire in 2025.

References

1. The Indian Express| India's stance on non-trade issues in WTO
2. WTO| World Trade Organisation

Kaladan Project

A senior official from Myanmar said that, the Kaladan Project has "almost died" after the rebel Arakan Army (AA) captured the Paletwa township near Mizoram border in January, 2024.

- **KMTTP** – Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, was launched under
- **Framework agreement in** – ***2008,*** between Ministry of External Affairs, India and the Government of Myanmar.
- **Aim** – To provide *connectivity between India and Myanmar*.
- To connect the port of *Kolkata with the port of Sittwe* in Rakhine which would then be connected to Mizoram by road and the Kaladan River which flows by Paletwa.
- **Budget** – Estimated around 500 million USD.
- **Project Development Consultant** (PDC) – Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI).

- **Progress** – ***Sittwe Port was inaugurated*** in May 2023 and has been operationalised.
- **Advantages** – The transportation of goods from Kolkata to Aizawl and Agartala will incur at least *50% lesser cost and time*.
- Marine transport will considerably bring down environmental cost of transport with *drop in fossil fuel carbon emission*.
- **Challenges** – *Funding has been delayed* for multiple reasons, including the Rohingya crisis and recent *tripartite conflict* between the Junta's forces, the Arakan Army and the rebels of Chin state.

References

1. The Hindu| Rebel crisis in Myanmar affects Kaladan Project
2. MDONER| Kaladan Project

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved a new scheme 'Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)' to improve the fisheries sector.

- A *sub scheme* under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana.

> ***Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana*** *is designed to address critical gaps in fish production and productivity, quality, post-harvest infrastructure, modernisation and strengthening of value chain.*

- **Objective** – To gradually *formalise* the fisheries sector and supporting *fisheries micro and small enterprises* with access to institutional credit.
- To facilitate growth of businesses, *creation of jobs* and creation of business opportunities.
- **Implementation** – ***4 years*** from 2023-24 to 2026-27, across all the States and union territories.
- **Budget** – ***Rs. 6,000 crore***.
    - 50% public finance, including the World Bank and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) external financing.
    - 50% is anticipated from the private sector leverage.
- **Beneficiaries** – Fishers, aquaculture farmers, fish workers and fish vendors.
- **Benefits** – Creation of *National Fisheries Digital Platform* to provide 40 lakh small and micro-enterprises work based identities.
- It will support *6.4 lakh micro-enterprises* and 5,500 fisheries cooperatives, providing access to institutional credit.
- It is projected to create *1.7 lakh new jobs*, with a special emphasis on employing *75,000 women*.
- Gradual shift from conventional subsidies to *performance based incentives* in fisheries.
- Address issues of aquaculture crop losses due to disease through *insurance coverage*.
- *Improves quality* of fish and fishery products in domestic market.
- Enhance *export competitiveness* through value addition, value realisation and value creation.

References

1. The Hindu| Launch of PM-MKSSY scheme
2. PMIndia| PM Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana

Save Wetlands Campaign (SWC)

- It is a people's movement to celebrate, revive, and rejuvenate wetlands.
- **Launched by -** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).
- It was launched on the occasion of ***World Wetlands Day (WWD) 2023*** (2nd February) and structured on a “whole of society” approach for wetlands conservation.

India’s wetlands are roughly equalling to 4.8% of its geographical area.

- It is in line with the ***Mission Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE)*** and following the philosophy of ***Mission Sahbhagita .***
- The campaign was implemented at a Pan-India level, across all districts.
- The network of Ramsar Sites served as model sites or anchors for their respective States/UTs.

Quick Facts	
Mission Sahbhagita	**Wetland City Accreditation**

• It was launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) in 2022. • It aims to have a healthy and effectively managed network of wetlands of national and international significance. • It enables a *society ownership approach* for participatory conservation and wise use of Wetlands.	• It was recognized under Ramsar Convention during COP12 held in 2015 as a voluntary Wetland City Accreditation system. • It recognizes cities (urban and peri-urban) which have taken exceptional steps to safeguard their urban wetlands. • To be formally accredited, a candidate should satisfy the standards used to implement each of the 6 international criteria mentioned in the ***Ramsar Convention on Wetlands***.

Reference

PIB | Save Wetlands Campaign

Other Important Topics

Dharavi redevelopment project

The state cabinet of Maharastra has recently given its nod for a proposal to seek Mumbai's salt pan land from the Union government for the Dharavi Redevelopment Project.

• Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) is a project with the purpose of building a rental housing scheme for ***ineligible slum dwellers*** from Dharavi.
• The land will be used by the DRP to rehabilitate the Dharavi residents in Kanjurmarg, Bhandup and Mulund in Mumbai.
• Dharavi residents who are ineligible for rehabilitation will be given accommodation in rental housing projects.

Krishi Rakshak Portal

Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare launched the centralized Kisan Rakshak Helpline 14447 and Portal recently.

• The Krishi Rakshak Portal is a digital portal that allows farmers to lodge their grievances, concerns, and queries.
• The KRPH also acts as a facilitator, bridging the gap between insured farmers and various stakeholders, including insurance companies, bankers, Common Service Centres (CSCs), and governments.
• The KRPH was created to reinforce the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana's (PMFBY) grievance redressal mechanism.

DigiReady Certification Portal (DRC)

• The ***Quality Council of India (QCI) and Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)*** launched the DigiReady Certification (DRC) portal recently.
• DRC is an online platform that evaluates and certifies the digital readiness of small businesses and retailers in India.
• The portal aims to streamline the seller journey, empower MSME entities to seamlessly transition into sellers on the ONDC platform, and enhance their digital capabilities.

Kalingarayan Anicut

• Kalingarayan Anicut is ***13th century barrage on the Bhavani River*** in Erode, Tamil Nadu, one of the oldest water diversion projects in the world.
• It is recognised as a ***World Heritage Irrigation Structure*** by the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) in 2021.
• It was built by Kalingarayan, then king of Poondurai Nadu, one of the subdivisions in Kongu Nadu.
• In 1240, he joined the ***Madurai Pandyas*** as a soldier and in 1265, ***Sadayavarman Sundara Pandyan*** bestowed the title, 'Kalingarayan' and appointed him to rule Poondurai Nadu.

Pantanal wetland

• The Pantanal wetland is the ***world's largest freshwater wetland*** and one of the world's most productive habitats.
• It is located mostly in ***Brazil***, but also extends in parts of Bolivia and Paraguay.
• It is fed through the ***Paraguay River and tributaries.***

Thirumayam Fort

• Thirumayam Fort is situated in the town of Thirumayam, Pudukkottai District in ***Tamil Nadu***, also called 'Oomaiyan fort', after the brother of Veerapandiya Kattabomman.
• The fort was built by ***Vijaya Raghunatha Sethupathi, the Raja of Ramnad, in 1687.***
• The fort stands as a testimony to the bond between 2 dynasties, the ***Sethupathis and the Thondaimans***.
• The fort also held secrets within its outer boundary walls that date not only before the ***Keezhadi civilization*** but also much earlier than the ***Indus Valley Civilisation***.

Southernmost mobile phone base station

• Norway's Telenor recently opened the world's southernmost mobile phone base station in Antarctica.
• It will be bringing regular cell phone services to a corner of the frozen continent for the first time.
• The new 4G service covering the remote Troll research station and its surroundings.
• It will boost security for scientists and staff and enable the use of internet-of-things devices that collect and upload real-time information.

Pure for Sure Initiative

• Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) recently announces the launch of "Pure for Sure".
• The initiative is set to provide Quality & Quantity assurance in LPG cylinders directly at the customer's doorstep, a first-of-its-kind service in the nation.

Gemini

• Google has announced recently that it will be rebranding its AI chatbot ***Bard as Gemini***, releases Advanced tier and launches Gemini app.
• Earlier in December, when Google had released the older versions of Gemini, called Pro and Nano, the largest and most capable model was called ***Gemini Ultra***.
• The AI model was supposed to power the updated chatbot to be called ***Bard Advanced***.
• Gemini Advanced is available in more than 150 countries and territories in English which will expand eventually to other languages.

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