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MINISTRY OF
SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY

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Bengal village basks in the lustre of metal

Lalbazar, on the boundary with Jharkhand, is becoming a hub for *dokra* metalcraft, thanks to an artist from Kolkata who made this once nondescript village his second home four years ago

Bishwanath Ghosh
KOLKATA



Dokra figurines on display.

Nestled in the forests with a population less than 100, Lalbazar was a nondescript village until not too long ago. Today, it is not only an art hub but also moving towards becoming a centre for *dokra*, a metalcraft popular in Bengal, all thanks to a Kolkata artist who made the place his second home four years ago.

“Two places are famous in West Bengal for *dokra* work – Bikna in Bankura and Dariyapur in Bardhaman. But if you notice carefully, the quality of their products is deteriorating. We are trying to keep things original,” said

Mrinal Mandal, an alumnus of the Government Arts College who chanced upon Lalbazar, sitting on the boundary with Jharkhand, in 2018, while trying

to document folk art.

He is, at the moment, curating a *dokra* workshop in the village with the help of Kolkata’s Chalcitra Academy.

For the workshop, which began 45 days ago and in which 15 people from Lalbazar (from its total population 80) and five from surrounding villages are participating. Mr. Mandal has brought in six artisans from Bikna, including two master craftsmen – Amar Karmakar and Mahadeb Karmakar.

“*Dokra* is an ancient tradition; its documented history is about 5,000 years old. Making *dokra* art is a difficult process. Each figure

takes about a month to make. There are many processes involved, for which seven or eight varieties of clay are required, apart from other raw material. What works in our favour is that the raw materials, including the metal, are easily available here [in Lalbazar],” he said.

“The workshop will continue all of next year and production too will continue. The craftsmen have already created about 300 pieces of art so far, which have gone to shops in Kolkata and also abroad. Once the villagers pick up the art, they will substantially add to their income,” Mr. Mandal said.

DOKRA METALCRAFT

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 - Art & Culture)

Context: Lalbazar, on the boundary with Jharkhand, is becoming a hub for *dokra*, a metalcraft popular in West Bengal.

- Lalbazar, also known as Khwaabgram (‘village of dreams’), is located about 4 km from Jhargram and is peopled by members of the Lodha tribe, once outlawed by the British.

Dokra Metalcraft

- **About:** Dokra is an **ancient tradition**; its documented history is about 5,000 years old.
 - There are **many processes involved**, for which seven to eight varieties of clay is required, apart from other raw material.
- **A type of folk art:** Dokra Metal Craft is an **age-old wax-casting technique** also known as Lost-wax process.
 - Dokra is an **alloy of brass, nickel and zinc** which gives an antique look.
 - The oldest specimen using such technique was during Harappan Period (famous Dancing Girl of Mohenjo-daro).
- **Dokra Tradition is practised in the following states:**
 - Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Nagaland (Konyak Naga Tribe).
- **Motifs:** Its motifs are **mostly drawn from folk culture** which includes animal figures like elephant, horse, gods and goddesses, containers with lids, lamp and lamp stands, intricate designs in shape of trees and branches.

Sidbi to give finance firms support for micro lending

SHARLEEN D'SOUZA

Small Industries Development Bank of India (Sidbi) has now gone back to its earlier avatar when it comes to microfinance institutions (MFIs). According to Sivasubramanian Ramann, chairman and managing director, the bank has started identifying finance companies to give them enhanced support for micro lending.

Speaking at *Business Standard's* BFSI Summit, Ramann added that the state-owned small industries lender is once again looking at how to bring capital to microfinance institutions. Also, the fund of funds activity of Sidbi has provided capital to many venture capital and private equity firms.

"The private equity segment will chase the upper end of the spectrum, where the growth is fast and the money is quickly made. Sidbi is there for a development effort," Ramann said.

Also, under Sidbi's Prayas scheme, which has about ₹600 crore for micro lending, lends in the range of ₹100,000-₹500,000.

Ramann said that lending cannot happen through its 75-odd branches but it is through small towns and villages, where such loans are disbursed. And, it has built partnerships with MFIs, NGOs and banking correspondents for small loans.

"We have got a fully-digitised platform where

the person on the street is available there with a tab, puts in all the data and sends it to us. We have a simple business rule engine. Roughly within 48 hours, we are able to disburse loans of those amounts directly into the bank accounts of micro enterprises," Ramann added.

He believes that there is a huge scope to scale up lending through Prayas as it is relying on its partner institutions.

Sidbi is also actively working on putting its money in incubators and accelerators.

Ramann said that Sidbi needs to work more with the National Innovation Fund.

"We stopped working with them and we need to restart this. There will be many other persons who would be able to bring in equity to a variety of small projects," he said.

Sidbi cannot be worried about the schemes failing, Ramann said if money is put into 1,000 companies, and even if 50 work, then it gets its money back.

He added that Sidbi has provided finance to about 300 entities under the World Bank scheme of energy efficiency during the last five years.

"We have saved over 0.3 million tonnes of CO2 emissions. We have successful partnerships with several world organisations. We are going ahead with a solar rooftop plan with the World Bank. We will do 1,000 solar rooftops in 1,000 MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises),"



The private equity segment will chase the upper end of the spectrum, where growth is fast and money is quickly made. Sidbi is there for development effort

We have a simple business rule engine. Roughly within 48 hours, we are able to disburse loans directly into the bank accounts of micro enterprises

We've saved over 0.3 mt of CO2 emissions...We're going ahead with a solar rooftop plan with the World Bank. We will do 1,000 solar rooftops in 1,000 MSMEs



SIVASUBRAMANIAN RAMANN
Chairman & MD, Sidbi

he said.

He said that MSMEs get solar rooftops with an investment of ₹1 crore-₹2.5 crore, which takes care of all its power needs.

Payback will be seen after 36-42 months and

the plant will run for another 15 years.

Ramann added, "We are moving to an era where energy-efficient solar panels and rooftop solar panels are the substitutes for power, which today is the fulcrum of any business."

Financial Support of SIDBI to MSMEs:

- **Indirect financing** by way of refinancing the banks, refinancing financial institutions for onward lending to MSMEs.
- **Direct financing** by way of service sector financing, receivable financing, risk capital and sustainable financing, etc.

- **Credit plus approach:** Apart from providing financial assistance, **SIDBI focuses on the "credit plus approach"** under which it facilitates technology modernisation & upgradation, cluster development, enterprise development, upgrading the skills and support marketing activities.

SIDBI

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Economy)

Context: Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has now gone back to its earlier avatar when it comes to microfinance institutions (MFIs).

SIDBI

- **About:** The **apex regulatory body** for overall licensing and regulation of micro, small and medium enterprise finance companies in India.
- **Statutory body:** SIDBI was set up on **2nd April 1990** under an act of the Indian Parliament.
 - The **shares of SIDBI are held by Central Government** and 29 other institutions including public sector banks (PSBs), insurance companies owned and controlled by Central Government.
- **Nodal Ministry:** It is under the jurisdiction of **Ministry of Finance**.
 - SIDBI is **one of the four All India Financial Institutions** regulated and supervised by the **Reserve Bank of India**; other three are India NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development), EXIM Bank (Export-Import Bank) and NHB (National Housing Bank).
- **Functions:** It acts as the **Principal Financial Institution** for Promotion, Financing and Development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector.
 - SIDBI **also functions as a Nodal/Implementing Agency** to various ministries of the Government of India viz., Ministry of MSME, Ministry of Textiles, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Food Processing and Industry, etc.

Govt appoints former SC judge Hemant Gupta as chief of NDIAC

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 21

TWO MONTHS after his retirement as a judge of the Supreme Court, the Centre has appointed Justice Hemant Gupta as Chairperson of the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre.

In a notification issued December 19, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet approved Justice Gupta's appointment. He retired on October 16, after a four-year tenure in the top court.

During his tenure as a judge of the apex court, Justice Gupta delivered several important judgments, including the verdict in the Karnataka Hijab ban case. In the split verdict in the Hijab case, Justice Gupta, just three days before his retirement, had dismissed the appeals challenging the March 15 judgement of the Karnataka High Court which had refused to lift the ban. Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia disagreed with Justice Gupta.

NDIAC

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 - Govt. Policies & Interventions)

Context: Two months after his retirement as a judge of the Supreme Court, the Centre has appointed Justice Hemant Gupta as Chairperson of the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC).

- During his tenure as a judge of the apex court, Justice Gupta delivered several important judgments, including the verdict in the Karnataka Hijab ban case.

New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (NDIAC)

- About:** Set up through **New Delhi International Arbitration Centre act, 2019**, the NDIAC has been declared to be an institution of national importance.
- Composition:** It is mandated to be a **seven-member body**:
 - A Chairperson who may be a Judge of the Supreme Court or a High Court, or an eminent person with special knowledge and experience in the conduct or administration of arbitration.
 - Two eminent persons having substantial knowledge and experience in institutional arbitration.
 - Three ex-officio members, including a nominee from the Ministry of Finance and a Chief Executive Officer (responsible for the day-to-day administration of the NDIAC).
 - A representative from a recognised body of commerce and industry, appointed as a part-time member, on a rotational basis.
- Term and superannuation:** The members of NDIAC will **hold office for three years and will be eligible for re-appointment**.
 - The retirement age for the Chairperson is 70 years and other members is 67 years.
- Functions:** **Facilitating conduct of arbitration and conciliation** in a professional, timely and cost-effective manner; and promoting studies in the field of alternative dispute resolution.
- New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (Amendment) Bill, 2022:** Recently, the parliament passed the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre (Amendment) Bill, 2022 which amends the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre Act, 2019. **Key features:**
 - Renaming of New Delhi International Arbitration Centre:** The Bill renames the New Delhi International Arbitration Centre as the India International Arbitration Centre.
 - Alternative Dispute Resolution:** The 2019 Act requires the Arbitration Centre to strive to facilitate the conduct of international and domestic arbitration and conciliation.
 - The Bill expands this to **include conduct of other forms of alternative dispute resolution**.
 - The manner of conduct of arbitration and other forms of alternative dispute resolution will be specified by the central government through regulations.
 - Removal of difficulties:** The 2019 Act allows the central government to provide for removing any difficulties in implementing the Act up to two years from the date of commencement of the Act.
 - The Bill extends this **time period to five years**.
 - Drafting errors:** The Bill also **corrects several drafting errors** in the 2019 Act.

ANTI-DUMPING DUTY

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Economy)

Anti-dumping duty on stainless steel tubes from China

Saurav Anand &
Subhash Narayan

NEW DELHI



The duty is expected to raise the prices of such Chinese products.

ISTOCK

The Centre has imposed anti-dumping duty on stainless steel seamless tubes and pipes imported from China for five years to remove "injury" to the domestic industry.

"The antidumping duty imposed under this notification shall be effective for a period of five years (unless revoked, superseded or amended earlier) from the date of publication of this notification in the Official Gazette, and shall be payable in Indian currency," according to a government notification.

The recommended anti-dumping duty ranges from \$14 per tonne to \$3,801 per tonne of stainless pipe and tubes of different grades. Effectively, the duty is expected to raise the price of such products and prevent their unwanted use in the market at the cost of domestic stainless steel producers of similar grade and make.

The Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) in the Commerce Ministry in September recommended the duty on imports of stainless-steel seamless tubes and pipes from China after concluding in its probe that the products are being dumped in India -- that is sold for prices that are lower than the prices in the domestic Chinese market -- which

impacts the Indian industry.

These products were sold at prices that were as low as those of the raw material used to make them, leaving little room for domestic players in the market.

DGTR initiated the investigation after Chandan Steel Ltd, Tubacex Prakash India Pvt Ltd and Welspun Specialty Solutions Ltd sought anti-dumping probe. "The imposition of anti dumping duty on Chinese companies is a welcome move and will be in public interest. Indian manufacturers are capable to cater to the domestic demands in this segment. This will not only make the idle capacities operative, but will also bring revenue to the exchequer, leave aside employment," said Rajamani Krishnamurti, president, the Indian Stainless Steel Development Association (ISSDA).

saurav.anand@live-mint.com

Context: The government has imposed an **anti-dumping duty on stainless steel** seamless tubes and pipe imports from China for five years to remove "injury" to the domestic industry, according to a government notification.

Anti-dumping duty

- **About:** It is imposed when imported goods are priced at less than the normal price charged in the exporter's domestic market.
 - It is an instrument to **ensure fair trade** and is not just a measure of protection per se for the domestic industry.
- **Nodal authority:** The **Department of Commerce** recommends the anti-dumping duty, provisional or final.
 - The Department of Revenue in the **Finance Ministry** acts upon the recommendation within **3 months and imposes such duties**.
- **Validity:** Valid for a **period of five years** from the date of imposition unless revoked earlier.
- **Sunset Review:** can be extended for a **further period of five years** through a sunset or expiry review investigation.
 - A Sunset review/ expiry review is an evaluation of the need for the continued existence of a program or an agency.
 - It allows for an assessment of the effectiveness and performance of the program or agency.
 - Such a review can be initiated suo moto or on the basis of a duly substantiated request received from or on behalf of the domestic industry.
- **WTO's Provisions Related to Anti-Dumping Duty:** The use of anti-dumping measures as an instrument of fair competition is **permitted by the World Trade Organisation**.

Tight Remedy

ANTI-DUMPING MEASURES

Against specific producer/exporter/ country

Dumped imports

Discriminatory price, unfair competition from foreign exporters

COUNTERVAILING DUTY MEASURES

Against specific country

Subsidised imports

Subsidies granted by govt of exporting country, individual rates

SAFEGUARD MEASURES

Global measure, imposed on global imports

Sudden surge in imports, unforeseen circumstances

Govt Mulls Cactus Plantation on Degraded Land for Biofuel, Food

Yogima.Sharma
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: India is looking to replicate available global models to commercially grow cactus on degraded land, eyeing its multiple uses as bio-fuel, food, fodder and bio-fertiliser.

Budget 2023-24 could lay out a road-map for Cactus plantation and the use of the plant in driving India's energy requirements.

A proposal in this regard has been discussed in multiple meetings over the last one month in the rural development ministry, a senior government official told ET. These meetings were chaired by rural development minister Giriraj Singh.

Government estimates show degraded land increased to 97.84 million hectares in 2018-19 from 96.32 million hectares in 2011-13.

The government is committed to increase farmers' income and cultivation of cactus can significantly push up the rural economy in states

Green Gold

Aim to reap multiple benefits of the plant | Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat to benefit the most

Will help increase farmers' income; rural economy

Benefits of Cactus

Food, fodder, fertiliser, Bio-fuel medicine, industrial raw material, and cosmetics



which have vast tracts of degraded land. "The minister is of the view that biofuel production will reduce the fuel import burden of the country apart from contributing towards employment and income generation for the poor farmers of these areas," the official, who was part of one of the meetings said.

The rural development ministry

has roped in the ministry of petroleum and agriculture along with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Land Areas (ICARDA) for setting up a pilot project in Amlaha Farm of ICARDA in Madhya Pradesh with technical assistance from the ministry of petroleum.

The ministry had earlier held meetings with top officials of several countries including Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Morocco, Tunisia, Italy and South Africa as India wants to replicate the success story of Cactus cultivation elsewhere.

The department of land resources has been mandated to restore degraded lands in India through its watershed development component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (WDC-PMKSY).

Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat are the top three states with most degraded land either due to climatic conditions or deforestation along with some north-eastern states.

GREEN GOLD: CACTUS (Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Env & Eco)

Context: India is looking to replicate available global models to **commercially grow cactus** on degraded land, eyeing its multiple uses as biofuel, food, fodder and bio-fertiliser.

Cactus

- **About:** It is a **Xerophytic Plant** which though grows relatively at a slower pace has an immense potential.
 - It is **native to central Mexico**.
- **Significance:** It is a long-domesticated cactus crop that has emerged as one of the most suitable crop species for **arid and semi-arid climate** for not only for its better Water Use Efficiency (WUE) and Rain Use Efficiency (RUE) but also a source to meet the requirements of food, forage and host of other benefits along with ecological advantages.
- **Conservation:** All cacti are included in **Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**, which "lists species that are not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled."
- **Key features:**
 - Capacity to produce good biomass throughout year using minimum water
 - Drought tolerant
 - Potential for rangeland and pastureland management
 - Helps in soil and water conservation
 - Source of a variety of agri-foods available in more than 50 products
 - Medicinal uses such as Antacid, arterio sclerosis, anticholesterolic, prostatitis, Diabetes and hyperglycaemia.
- **Economic Usage:** It will help in achieving **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** for the country as well.
 - Cactus plantation will be **picked up by the farmers of degraded land areas**, if the benefits outweigh their existing level of incomes.
 - **Experiences of countries** like Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Morocco and various others are being explored which will be of great help for realisation of the objective.

Nod for ₹700cr in central funds for city roads

Money Can Be Used By Agencies Such As PWD And MCD For Infra Makeover In The Capital

Abhinav Rajput &
Dipak Dash | TNN

New Delhi: The central government has committed Rs 700 crore for the construction, repair, maintenance and beautification of roads in the capital in preparation for the G20 meetings. Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari gave the go ahead for this amount from the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) at a meeting with lieutenant governor VK Saxena on Tuesday.

While the National High-

ways Authority of India will invest in all the highways projects in the city, the CRIF amount has been sanctioned for other roads. Sources said at Tuesday's meeting, Gadkari told Saxena that nearly Rs 200 crore of CRIF earmarked for Delhi was lying with the ministry. "The minister said up to Rs 700 crore from CRIF could be used for works undertaken by the city's other road-owning agencies," an official present at the meeting revealed.

The central funds will be used by road-owning agencies such as the Public Works De-

While NHAI will invest in all highways projects in the city, the CRIF amount has been sanctioned for other roads. At Tuesday's meeting, Nitin Gadkari told VK Saxena that nearly Rs 200 crore of CRIF earmarked for Delhi was lying with the ministry

partment and MCD for makeover of road infrastructure in the capital. "The agencies can contact NHAI for such work. The minister has instructed his officials to do the needful," said an official in the LG's office.

Gadkari also directed NHAI to bear the cost of repa-

ir, refurbishing and beautification of all national highways passing through the city. One such stretch is Mahipalpur (IGI Airport)-Dhaura Kunan, added the official.

NHAI would use the inert material gathered during trommelling at the three landfills in

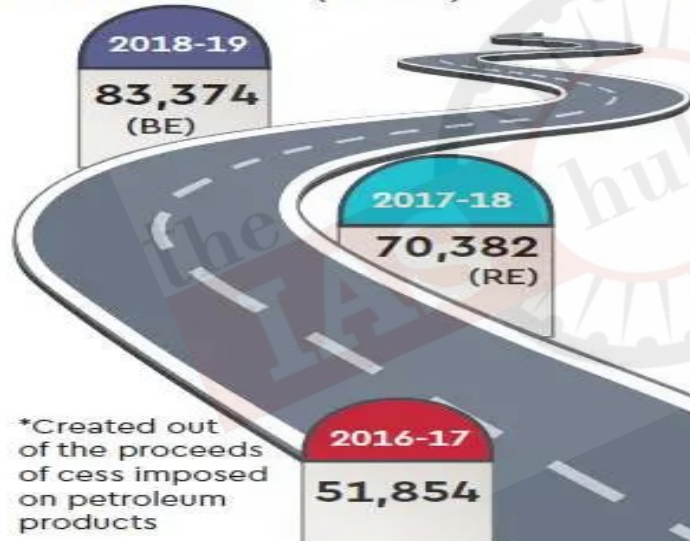
Delhi for road construction. "The minister underlined that despite the fact that lifting inert from the landfills would result in increased transportation cost for NHAI, it would help Delhi flatten the garbage mountains," said the official.

According to officials, while the meeting was called for resolution of issues pertaining to NHAI projects like the Urban Extension Road II, Dwarka Expressway, Delhi-Dehradun Highway and the parallel flyover at Vasant Kunj, the LG's office had given approval for most of the pending works a day be-

fore. Pending issues like tree cutting, translocation permissions, allotment of land, handing over possession of allotted land, removal of garbage collection point, shifting of power transmission line on the parts of Delhi government, DDA and MCD had also been resolved.

These issues had been sorted with active steering by the LG in the last few months, the last being the approval to proposals for tree translocation on December 19. This has cleared the bottlenecks in the implementation of the critical NHAI projects, the official noted.

Flows to the Central Road Fund* (₹ crore)



■ Key amendments proposed to revamp the way the Fund is used, administered

■ It can now be used to fund educational institutions, hospitals and all infra sectors

■ MoRTH may find the new arrangement hitting its EPC and hybrid projects

*Created out of the proceeds of cess imposed on petroleum products

Context: The central government has committed Rs 700 crore for the construction, repair, maintenance and beautification of roads in the capital in preparation for the G20 meetings.

- Union road transport and highways minister gave the go ahead for this amount from the **Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF)**.

Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF)

- **About:** The Central Road Fund was established in 2000 under **Central Road Fund Act, 2000**.
 - The **Central Road Fund Act (Amendment), 2018** renamed the Central Road Fund as Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF).
- **Objectives:** To **provide finances** for the development of National Highways, State Highway, Rural roads, railway over and under bridges.
- **Nodal Ministry:** The administrative control of Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) falls under the **Ministry of Finance**.
 - Earlier it was under the domain of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- **Funds:** The fund comprises of a **cess imposed along with excise duty on petrol and diesel**.
 - This collected amount is then **released to National Highways Authority of India**, and to the state/union territory governments for the development of national and state highways.
 - The Central Road Fund Act (Amendment), 2018 allowed using the proceeds of the road cess under CRIF to **finance other infrastructure projects** including waterways, some portion of the railway infrastructure and even social infrastructure including education institutions, medical colleges etc.

Mining Surveillance System (MSS)

For Curbing Illegal Mining

Context: Minister of Coal, Mines and Parliamentary Affairs has informed the Lok Sabha about the **details of offences of illegal mining detected**, volume of mineral illegally mined and amount of penalty etc for the last three years for Rajasthan State based on the inputs provided by the State Government.

- Ministry of Mines through Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM) have developed the **Mining Surveillance System (MSS)** with the assistance of Bhaskaracharya Institute for space applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG-N), Gandhinagar for identification of illegal mining around Major Mineral Leases.

Mining Surveillance System (MSS)

- **About:** It is a **satellite-based monitoring system** which aims to check illegal mining activity through automatic remote-sensing detection technology in order to establish a regime of responsive mineral administration.
 - It has been developed under the **Digital India Programme**.
- **Working Mechanism:** In the MSS, **Khasra (a unique number that is assigned to plots in villages) maps** of mining leases have been geo-referenced and are superimposed on latest satellite remote sensing scenes obtained from **CARTOSAT(Cartography + Satellite) & U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)**.
 - It has capacity to **check any unusual activity** such illegal mining at a region of 500 meters around the existing mining lease boundary.
 - It has been incorporated with **automatic software** which leverages image processing technology to generate automatic triggers of unauthorized activities.
 - These automatic triggers will be studied at a **Remote Sensing Control Centre** and then transmitted to the district level mining officials for field verification.
 - Besides, a user-friendly mobile app also has been created for these officials to submit compliance reports of their inspections.
 - The **mobile app** aims to establish a participative monitoring system in which the citizens also can use this app and report unusual mining activity.
 - MSS also has an **executive dashboard** to work as a decision support system.
 - Using it officials at all levels can track the **current status of mapping of the mining leases**, status of inspections and penalty levied etc. for all major mineral mining leases across the country.

Implementation of 15 Points Programme for Minorities Welfare Schemes

Posted On: 21 DEC 2022 2:31PM by PIB Delhi

Context: The Minister of Minority Affairs in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha today informed that Pre-Matric, Post Matric and Merit-cum Means based Scholarship Schemes for meritorious students from the notified minority communities are implemented by the Ministry of Minority Affairs under the **Prime Minister's New 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities**.

- The schemes of the Ministry of Minority Affairs covered under the 15 Point Programme are exclusively meant for **notified minorities**.
- However, **15% of the outlays and targets**, to the extent possible, of schemes/initiatives implemented by other participating Ministries/Departments are earmarked for notified minorities

PM's 15 Point Programme

- **About:** Prime Minister's New 15 point Programme for minorities is a programme launched by Indian government for **welfare of religious minorities** in furtherance of reports by committees such as the **Sachar Committee Report**.
 - The report highlighted that minorities, especially Muslims, in the country were often in a **worse socio-economic and political condition** than communities such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes communities that have been oppressed over millennia through the caste system (also referred to as the varna system).
 - It pegged the status of minorities on various indicators such as nutrition, health, education et al. of minorities and specially Muslims at an abysmally poor level.
- **The 15 Point Programmes are:**
 1. **Equitable availability of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** - Aims at development of children and pregnant/lactating mothers from minorities and those living below the Below Poverty Line (India), by providing services such as better supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up and free education.
 2. **Improving access to School Education** — Implement various Government schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme and other similar schemes in villages/localities having a substantial minority communities population.
 3. **Greater resources for teaching Urdu** - Assistance in recruitment and posting of Urdu language teachers in primary and upper primary schools in villages/localities where at least one-fourth belong to that language group.
 4. **Modernizing Madarsa Education** — Provide basis educational infrastructure and resources for the modernization of Madarsa education.
 5. **Scholarships for meritorious students** from minority communities
 6. Improving educational infrastructure through the **Maulana Azad Education Foundation**.
 7. **Self-Employment and Wage Employment for the poor** — Earmark certain percentage of Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana scheme for minorities.
 8. **Upgradation of skill through technical training** — Open new ITIs in areas predominantly inhabited by minority communities and upgrade some ITIs to 'Centres of Excellence'.
 9. Enhanced **credit support** for economic activities
 10. Recruitment to State and Central Services
 11. **Equitable share in rural housing scheme** — Earmark certain percentage in Indira Awaas Yojana for minorities.
 12. Improvement in condition of slums inhabited by minority communities — Implement Integrated Housing & Slum Development Programme and Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission in minority populated regions.
 13. Prevention of **communal incidents**
 14. Prosecution for **communal offences**
 15. Rehabilitation of **victims of communal riots**.

HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Sci & Tech)

Largest bird flu outbreak in Europe, 50 million birds culled in the past one year: Report

Risk of transmission to humans by exposure to contaminated poultry products is considered negligible

By DTE Staff
Published: Wednesday 21 December 2022



Context: Europe has suffered the largest, most devastating epidemic of **highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)** from October 2021 to September 2022, according to a report brought out by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) December 20, 2022.

Key Points

- Some **2,520 HPAI outbreaks in poultry**, 227 in captive birds and 3,867 in wild birds were recorded in 37 countries on the continent.
- The **risk of transmission to humans** by exposure to contaminated poultry products is considered **negligible**.
- **Waterfowl** might be responsible for the spread of the HPAI virus into poultry farms as their habitat was more likely to overlap with the location of poultry establishments than seabird colony sites.
- It warned that **avian influenza could further spread between establishments**, primarily in areas with high poultry densities.
- This was because of the **persistent presence of HPAI A(H5) viruses** in wild birds and in the environment; the continuous occurrence of primary outbreaks in several countries and the possible reduction of biosecurity compliance.
- Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) virus occurs **mainly in birds**, is highly contagious among birds, and can be deadly, especially in domestic poultry.

Influenza Virus

- **About:** There are **four types of influenza viruses**: influenza A, B, C, and D
 - **Influenza A and B** are the two types of influenza that cause epidemic seasonal infections nearly every year.
 - **Influenza C** mainly occurs in humans, but has been known to also occur in dogs and pigs.
 - **Influenza D** is found mainly in cattle. It's not known to infect or cause illness in humans yet.
- **Avian influenza (Type A viruses):** Type A viruses are classified based on two proteins on their surfaces – **Hemagglutinin (HA) and Neuraminidase (NA)**.
 - There are about **18 HA subtypes and 11 NA subtypes**.
 - Several combinations of these two proteins are possible e.g., **H5N1, H7N2, H9N6, H17N10, H18N11 etc.**
 - All known subtypes of influenza A viruses can infect birds, except subtypes **H17N10 and H18N11**, which have only been found in bats.

Why farmers have been urging Centre to control import of arecanuts

In September this year, the Centre relaxed import restrictions on arecanuts from Bhutan



NEXT NEWS >

By Shagun
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“Sirsi Supari” Gets GI Tag

- Arecanut (also known as supari or betel nut) is the latest entrant in the list of agricultural produce with a **geographical indication (GI) tag**.
- ‘Sirsi Supari’ grown in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka has received the Geographic Indication (GI) tag.
- The arecanut has unique features like a **round and flattened coin shape, particular texture, taste** and has a hard seed.
- These features are not seen in arecanut grown in any other regions.
- It is **cultivated in Yellapura, Siddapura and Sirsi taluks** in Karnataka
- **Totgars’ Cooperative Sale Society Ltd.**, Sirsi, is the registered proprietor of the GI.

Context: A Lok Sabha member from Shivamogga district in Karnataka urged the Centre to levy a **hefty import duty on arecanut** to check falling prices in the domestic market.

Key Points

- The country’s arecanut farmers are faced with an **unfair challenge as imports of cheaper varieties**, especially from Bhutan, flooded the domestic markets and dragged down the price of the product, after the central government relaxed import restrictions.
- This is when they have been already reeling from **massive crop damage and financial losses** due to plant diseases, like yellow leaf disease, fruit rot disease and blast disease, and excess rainfall.
- In **Karnataka**, which produces **around 80 per cent of the country’s arecanut**, about 35-40 per cent of the crop has been affected in 2022, owing to various reasons.
 - **Arecanut is considered a horticulture crop in the state**, a commercial crop at the national level and a dry fruit at an international level.
- In September this year, the central government allowed the import of 17,000 tonnes of green (fresh) arecanut from Bhutan without **minimum import price (MIP)**.
 - MIP is the rate below which no imports are allowed.
- **Imports without MIP or at low rates threaten the domestic prices** and lead them to crash. One of the main reasons for that is the flooding of imported inferior quality products into the market.

Areca nut

- **About:** The fruit of the **areca palm (Areca catechu)**, which grows in much of the tropical Pacific (Melanesia and Micronesia), South Asia, Southeast Asia, and parts of east Africa.
- **Harmful:** Consumption has many harmful effects on health and is **carcinogenic to humans**.
 - Various compounds present in the nut, including **arecoline** (the primary psychoactive ingredient which is similar to nicotine), contribute to histologic changes in the oral mucosa.
 - It is known to be a **major risk factor for cancers** (squamous cell carcinoma) of the mouth and esophagus. As with chewing tobacco, its use is discouraged by preventive efforts.
- **Neglected global public health emergency:** Consumption by hundreds of millions of people worldwide – mainly of South Asian or Southeast Asian origins – has been described as a **"neglected global public health emergency"**.

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