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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 01-10-2024

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Vizhinjam International Seaport

Syllabus: GS-1; Geography- Major ports, GS-3; Infrastructure Development

Context

- *Vizhinjam International Seaport Ltd (VISL) received permanent ISPS (international ship and port security) code from the International Maritime Organization under the United Nations.*



About

- *The Vizhinjam International Seaport is an ambitious deep-water, multi-purpose port project being developed near the coastal city of Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), in Kerala, India.*
- *Managed by the Adani Group, this port is positioned to become a significant maritime hub in India and the South Asian region due to its strategic location and capacity to handle large container ships.*

Key Features

- **Strategic Location:**
 - *Situated near the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent, the port is ideally located on international shipping routes that connect the Persian Gulf, Europe, and Southeast Asia.*
 - *This makes it a valuable spot for transshipment and trade.*
- **Natural Depth:**
 - *Vizhinjam has a natural depth of around 20 meters, one of the deepest in India.*

- *This allows the port to accommodate the largest container ships (Ultra Large Container Vessels or ULCVs) without the need for extensive dredging.*
- **Transshipment Hub:**
 - *It is being developed as a major transshipment hub, aimed at reducing India's dependence on foreign ports like Colombo (Sri Lanka), Singapore, and Dubai for handling large container volumes.*
- **Multi-purpose Port:**
 - *The port is designed to handle various types of cargo, including containers, bulk cargo, and liquid cargo.*
 - *It will also have facilities for passenger vessels and cruise ships.*
- **Phased Development:**
 - *The project is being developed in phases.*
 - *The first phase includes the construction of a breakwater, berths, and other basic port infrastructure.*
 - *Future phases will expand the port's capacity and its handling capabilities.*
- **Breakwater:**
 - *A key component of the project is the 3.1-kilometer-long breakwater, which is among the largest in India, designed to protect the port from oceanic waves and cyclones.*
- **Employment and Economic Growth:**
 - *The port is expected to generate significant employment opportunities both during its construction and operational phases.*
 - *It is also anticipated to boost economic development in the region by improving connectivity and fostering industries such as trade, logistics, and tourism.*

Challenges and Controversies

- **Environmental Concerns:** *Local communities and environmental activists have raised concerns over the ecological impact of the project, particularly on marine life and the coastline.*
- **Displacement and Fishermen's Livelihood:** *There have been protests from local fishermen fearing displacement and loss of livelihood due to the project.*
- **Delays:** *The project, which began in 2015, has faced delays due to legal challenges, land acquisition issues, and weather-related setbacks.*

Benefits

- **Boost to India's Maritime Economy:** *Once operational, the port will help reduce India's maritime trade costs by allowing direct cargo handling without relying on international transshipment hubs.*

- **Enhanced Connectivity:** *It will enhance connectivity not only within India but also globally, fostering better trade links with Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia.*

Overall

The Vizhinjam International Seaport is seen as a game-changer for India's maritime infrastructure and is expected to strengthen the country's position as a key player in global shipping and logistics.

Manual Scavenging Survey

Syllabus: GS-2: Social Justice

Context:

- *The Government of India, through its NAMASTE programme, is conducting the first-ever comprehensive survey to profile workers involved in the hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.*

NAMASTE Programme Overview:

- **Launch Year:** 2023-24
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
- **Aim:**
 - *Mechanise sewer and septic tank cleaning.*
 - *Eliminate deaths due to hazardous cleaning.*
 - *Transform workers into "sanipreneurs" (sanitation entrepreneurs).*
 - *Ensure safety and dignity of sewer and septic tank workers through training and equipment.*

Survey Insights on Sewer and Septic Tank Workers (SSWs):

- **Demographics:**
 - *91.9% of the 38,000 SSWs profiled belong to SC/ST/OBC categories.*
 - *68.9% SC, 14.7% OBC, 8.3% ST, and 8% General Category.*

➤ **Incidence of Deaths:**

- *Between 2019 and 2023, 377 deaths occurred due to hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.*

Targets and Progress:

➤ **Goals:**

- *Profile all SSWs in India.*
- *Provide safety training, protective gear, and mechanised equipment.*
- *Offer financial support and capital subsidies for self-employment.*
- *Create a centralised database of SSWs for policy tracking.*

➤ **Progress:**

- *38,000 SSWs profiled across 29 states and UTs, with 12 states completing the process.*
- *31,999 workers validated in 2023-24.*
- *₹2.26 crore in capital subsidies provided to 191 beneficiaries.*
- *₹10.6 crore given to 413 workers and dependents for sanitation-related projects.*

Challenges:

- *Several states like Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya, and West Bengal have yet to start profiling SSWs.*
- *Tamil Nadu and Odisha have their own programmes and have not shared data with the Centre.*

Social Composition of Manual Scavengers (2018 Data):

- *Of the 58,098 manual scavengers identified until 2018, 97.2% belonged to SC communities.*
- *All identified manual scavengers received ₹40,000 as a one-time cash transfer, with 18,880 opting for skills training.*

Best Practices:

➤ **Eco-Sanitation Solutions (South Africa):**

- Use of "dry toilets" and EcoSan systems that do not require manual cleaning, reducing reliance on manual scavenging.

Significance: The NAMASTE programme and survey represent a crucial move toward ending hazardous manual cleaning and improving the safety, dignity, and livelihood of sanitation workers in India.

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Syllabus: GS-3; Global Financial Architecture

Context

- Pakistan cuts 1.5 lakh jobs and dissolves six ministries to secure \$7 billion IMF loan

About

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a global financial institution established to promote international monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.

Founding and Purpose

- **Established:** 1944, during the Bretton Woods Conference.
- **Headquarters:** Washington, D.C., USA.
- **Members:** 190 countries (as of 2024).
- **Mission:** The IMF's primary goal is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system. This includes the system of exchange rates and international payments that enables countries to transact with each other.

Key Functions

- **Surveillance:** The IMF monitors global economic trends and provides economic analysis and policy advice to member countries. It assesses the risks that could impact global financial stability and suggests policy adjustments.
- **Lending:** The IMF provides financial assistance to countries facing balance of payments problems. It lends money to help member countries stabilize their economies and restore growth, often under conditions that encourage policy reforms.

- **Capacity Development:** *The IMF provides technical assistance and training to help member countries strengthen their capacity to design and implement effective policies in areas such as fiscal management, monetary policy, exchange rate policies, and financial systems.*

Special Programs and Tools

- **Special Drawing Rights (SDRs):** *An international reserve asset created by the IMF to supplement its member countries' official reserves. SDRs are based on a basket of currencies (USD, EUR, CNY, JPY, GBP).*
- **Quota System:** *Each IMF member country is assigned a quota based on its size in the global economy.*
Quotas determine a country's financial contribution to the IMF, voting power, and access to IMF resources.
- **Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT):** *The IMF supports low-income countries with concessional financing aimed at reducing poverty and promoting growth.*

IMF Programs and Assistance

- *The IMF typically offers short- to medium-term financial assistance through arrangements like Stand-By Arrangements (SBA), Extended Fund Facility (EFF), and Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI), among others.*
- *In exchange for financial support, countries often agree to undertake policy reforms aimed at correcting macroeconomic imbalances, which can include fiscal austerity, structural adjustments, and currency devaluation.*

Governance

- **Executive Board:** *The IMF's day-to-day work is overseen by the Executive Board, composed of 24 Executive Directors representing member countries or groups of countries.*
- **Managing Director:** *The IMF is headed by a Managing Director, currently Kristalina Georgieva (as of 2024), who is appointed by the Executive Board for a renewable five-year term.*

Criticism and Controversy

- *The IMF has been criticized for the **conditionalities** it imposes on borrowing countries, which some argue lead to austerity measures, reduced social spending, and negative economic impacts, particularly on vulnerable populations.*
- *There has also been debate about the IMF's role in promoting **neoliberal economic policies** that prioritize market liberalization and deregulation.*

Recent Developments

- The IMF has been actively involved in assisting countries during economic crises, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, offering financial packages and policy advice to help stabilize economies.

Pusa-2090

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Agriculture – crop varieties

Context:

- Pusa-44, a widely cultivated high-yield rice variety, has contributed to environmental challenges like stubble burning and high water usage in Punjab and Haryana.
- To address these issues, the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) introduced **Pusa-2090**, a high-yield variety with a shorter maturation period and reduced environmental impact.

Genetic Features:

- **Developed by:** Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi.
- **Genetic Composition:** Crossbreed of Pusa-44 and CB-501 (an early-maturing Japonica rice line).
- **Goal:** Retain the high yields of Pusa-44 while reducing the maturation time.

Key Comparisons: Pusa-2090 vs. Pusa-44

Feature	Pusa-2090	Pusa-44
Maturity Time	120-125 days	155-160 days
Yield	34-35 quintals/acre	35-36 quintals/acre
Stubble Burning	Less likely (shorter growth cycle)	Common (late harvesting)
Water Requirement	5-6 fewer irrigations	29-30 irrigations
Crop Rotation	Highly suitable	Limited suitability due to delayed

Feature	Pusa-2090	Pusa-44
		<i>harvesting</i>

Significance of Pusa-2090:

➤ **Environmental Impact:**

- Reduces the need for **stubble burning**, a major cause of air pollution in northern India.

➤ **Water Efficiency:**

- Requires fewer irrigations compared to Pusa-44, making it suitable for water-scarce regions.

➤ **Crop Rotation:**

- Early maturation allows farmers to clear fields sooner, enabling timely sowing of wheat or other crops, thus ensuring efficient crop cycles.

➤ **Sustainability:**

- Pusa-2090 supports sustainable agricultural practices by addressing pollution, water usage, and crop rotation challenges, contributing to long-term environmental and agricultural benefits.

This variety marks a step forward in addressing both ecological concerns and logistical issues associated with traditional rice farming in northern India.

J & K Militancy

Syllabus: GS-3: Internal Security.

Context:

➤ The ongoing Jammu & Kashmir Assembly elections mark a significant milestone in the region's political and security landscape. Here's a breakdown of key aspects based on the provided data:

Improved Security Situation in J&K:

➤ **Decline in Terror-Related Incidents:**

- Terror incidents decreased from 222 in 2014 to 23 in 2024.

- *Security forces' fatalities dropped from 47 in 2014 to 25 in 2024, with 17 deaths reported in Jammu.*
- *Civilian killings also declined from 28 in 2014 to 16 in 2024 (11 in Jammu, 5 in Kashmir).*
- **Reduction in Terrorist Activities:**
 - *The number of terrorists killed dropped from 110 in 2014 to 45 in 2024.*
 - **No grenade attacks, IED strikes, or hartal calls were reported in 2024, compared to 23 grenade attacks, 9 IED strikes, and 41 hartal calls in 2014.**
- **Improved Voter Turnout:**
 - *Four districts in Kashmir (Kulgam, Shopian, Pulwama, and Srinagar) witnessed better voter turnout than in 2014, indicating an improved security environment.*

Governance, Constitution, and Polity:

- **Election Processes:**
 - *The increased voter turnout and reduced violence in J&K demonstrate the positive impact of better security management post-Article 370 abrogation.*
- **Federalism and Security:**
 - *The reorganization of J&K into a Union Territory has played a key role in enhancing internal security, governance efficiency, and election management.*

Internal Security:

- **Internal Security Challenges:**
 - *The sharp decline in terror incidents and the smooth conduct of elections reflect the success of counter-insurgency operations and improved security policies.*
- **Terrorism and Society:**
 - *The reduction in terrorist activities underscores the efficacy of counterterrorism strategies, restoring a semblance of normalcy in society and improving civic participation.*

These developments can be cited as examples in the UPSC GS papers to highlight the evolving security situation and governance improvements in Jammu & Kashmir post-Article 370 abrogation.

