



For success in a changing world

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The Maha Kumbh Mela

Syllabus: GS-1; Art & Culture

Context

- The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025: Embracing Unity in the Sacred Waters of Prayagraj.



About

- Maha Kumbh Mela is a major Hindu pilgrimage and cultural festival held every 12 years in rotation across four sacred sites: Allahabad (Prayagraj), Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik.
- The largest and most significant of all the Kumbh Melas, it draws millions of pilgrims, sadhus (holy men), and visitors from around the world.
- UNESCO listed it as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2017.

Significance

- The festival symbolizes the convergence of spiritual and cultural values, attracting diverse sects of Hinduism.

- Pilgrims take a holy dip in the river at designated ghats (riverbanks) believing it purifies the soul and offers salvation (Moksha).
- The Maha Kumbh is particularly significant for the presence of Akharas (ascetic organizations) and Naga Sadhus, who perform rituals and lead processions.

Mythological Background

- According to Hindu mythology, the event originates from the story of Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean) where gods and demons vied for the nectar of immortality (Amrit).
- During the chase, drops of nectar fell at the four locations where Kumbh Mela is held: Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik.
- The Mela honors these locations as sites of divine significance.

Environmental Impact

- River pollution, waste management, and ecological impact are significant concerns. Measures are increasingly implemented to minimize environmental damage.
- The government collaborates with environmental bodies and NGOs to ensure sustainable practices, such as waste recycling and water purification.

Economic and Cultural Impact

- The event provides an economic boost, generating employment and benefiting local businesses, tourism, and cultural industries.
- It promotes India's spiritual tourism globally, drawing interest from international pilgrims and tourists.

PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme

Syllabus: GS-2; Government policies and Interventions

Context

- The PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme, launched recently, is a new Central Sector scheme that seeks to provide financial support to students so that financial constraints do not prevent anyone from pursuing higher studies.

About

- The **PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme** is a newly introduced **Central Sector scheme** aimed at providing financial support to students, ensuring that no one is restricted from pursuing higher education due to financial constraints.

Features and Benefits of PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme

- **Eligibility for Loans:**
 - The scheme offers **collateral-free and guarantor-free loans** to students accepted into **Quality Higher Education Institutions (QHEIs)**.
 - Students can receive loans to cover **full tuition fees** and other course-related expenses.
- **Eligible Institutions:**
 - Only India's top-quality higher educational institutions, ranked under the **National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)**, are eligible.
 - Eligible institutions include all government and private HEIs ranked within the top 100 in various NIRF categories, state government HEIs ranked 101-200, and all centrally-governed institutions.
 - The list of qualifying institutions will be updated annually.
- **Credit Guarantee for Loans:**
 - For loans up to **Rs 7.5 lakh**, students can receive a **75% credit guarantee** on outstanding defaults, enabling banks to provide these loans more freely.
- **Interest Subsidy:**
 - Students with an annual family income of up to **Rs 8 lakh**, who do not qualify for other government scholarships or interest subsidies, can receive a **3% interest subsidy** on loans up to Rs 10 lakh during the **moratorium period**.
 - The scheme plans to grant interest subsidies to **100,000 students annually**, prioritizing those in government institutions and technical/professional courses.
- **Budget Allocation:**
 - A budget of **Rs 3,600 crore** has been earmarked for this scheme from **2024-25 to 2030-31**, targeting benefits for approximately **7,00,000 new students** during this period.

Additional Scheme Connections

- The PM-Vidyalaxmi Scheme will work alongside the **Central Sector Interest Subsidy (CSIS)** and the **Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Education Loans (CGFSEL)** under the **PM-USP** initiative by the Department of Higher Education.

- Through **PM-USP CSIS**, students with a family income of up to **Rs 4.5 lakh** enrolled in approved technical or professional courses are eligible for a **full interest subsidy on education loans** up to Rs 10 lakh during the moratorium period.

Significance

- **Expands Access to Quality Education:** Provides collateral-free, guarantor-free loans, making top-tier education accessible to students from diverse backgrounds.
- **Incentivizes Enrollment in Ranked Institutions:** Focuses on NIRF-ranked institutions, encouraging quality education standards and allowing students to choose from the best options.
- **Supports Middle-Income Families:** Offers interest subsidies for families with annual incomes up to Rs 8 lakh, filling gaps for those often ineligible for other schemes.
- **Promotes Financial Inclusion with Technology:** Uses a centralized portal and CBDC, simplifying application and disbursement processes for students nationwide.
- **Strengthens Human Capital:** Contributes to India's skilled workforce, aligning with goals under NEP and Skill India Mission.
- **Reduces Financial Burden on Graduates:** Provides a 3% interest subsidy during the moratorium period and 75% credit guarantee, easing repayment stress.
- **Complements Existing Education Schemes:** Works alongside PM-USP, CSIS, and CGFSEL, creating a comprehensive approach to educational financing and inclusion.

What challenges does India face in fertilizer imports?

Syllabus: GS-2, International Relations

Context

- The article discusses about the impact of the conflict in Ukraine on the global fertilizer market and its effects on India

Current Fertilizer Import Scenario

- India is facing a significant gap between the demand and domestic production of fertilizers, leading to heavy reliance on imports.
- The Standing Committee of Parliament on Chemicals and Fertilizers highlighted that:

- Approximately **20%** of the domestic urea requirement is met through imports.
- **50-60%** of the domestic requirement for Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) is sourced from abroad.
- **100%** of the domestic need for Muriate of Potassium (MOP, or Potash) is fulfilled through imports.
- The Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers has yet to release the latest import data, but the trend indicates growing dependency on foreign sources, particularly from countries like China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Iran, and Egypt.

Changes in Fertilizer Production in India

- In **2021-22**, India consumed approximately **579.67 lakh metric tonnes (LMT)** of major chemical fertilizers, a decrease from **629.83 LMT** in **2020-21**.
- Production figures for 2021-22 included:
 - **250.72 LMT** of urea
 - **42.22 LMT** of DAP
 - **89.67 LMT** of NPK
 - **53.34 LMT** of Single Super Phosphate (SSP)
- Despite a slight increase in total fertilizer production from **385.39 LMT** in **2014-15** to **435.95 LMT** in **2021-22**, the output has not kept pace with demand, leading to a shortfall of **143.72 LMT**.

Subsidy Allocations

- The Indian government has allocated **₹1.79 lakh crore** for fertilizer subsidies in the **2023-24** budget:
 - **₹25,500 crore** for indigenous P&K fertilizers.
 - **₹18,500 crore** for imported P&K fertilizers.
 - **₹1,04,063.20 crore** for indigenous urea.
 - **₹31,000 crore** for imported urea.

Impact of Global Crises

- The ongoing crises in Ukraine and Gaza are causing instability in global fertilizer markets.
- The situation may hinder imports from key suppliers, exacerbating the domestic supply issues.

Recommendations for India

- Experts urge India to enhance its fertilizer production capacity and reduce dependency on imports. Strategies include:
 - Utilizing **nano urea**.
 - Transitioning to **natural farming** practices.
 - Increasing the capacity of existing fertilizer production facilities.
- The Standing Committee emphasized the need for investment-friendly policies to boost both public and private sector manufacturing capabilities.
- The successful establishment of **six new urea plants** under the new investment policy implemented in **2012** is a positive step, with a total production capacity increase of **76.2 LMT** per annum.

Conclusion

- In summary, while India's fertilizer production has seen some growth, the country remains significantly dependent on imports to meet its agricultural needs.
- With global geopolitical tensions affecting supply chains, it is crucial for India to invest in increasing domestic production capacity and explore alternative agricultural practices to mitigate the impact of these challenges.

Green crackers

Syllabus: GS-3; Environmental Concern- Government Policies

Context

- Karnataka had Mandates Eco-Friendly 'Green Crackers' for Diwali; Crackdown on Online Non-Green Crackers

About

- Green crackers are a type of firecracker designed to reduce air pollution and minimize the harmful effects traditionally associated with conventional fireworks.
- They are formulated to produce less smoke and sound while maintaining a festive atmosphere.

Components:

- **Reduced Emissions:** Green crackers contain fewer harmful chemicals and are made with eco-friendly materials.
- **Water-based Adhesives:** Instead of conventional binding agents, water-based adhesives are used, which emit less harmful smoke.
- **Alternative Fuels:** They incorporate alternative fuels that help in reducing particulate matter.

Types:

- **Safe Water Reliever (SWAS):** Emits water vapor, thus reducing the amount of particulate matter.
- **Safe Minimal Sound (SMS):** Designed to produce lower noise levels.
- **Green Crackers (GC):** A combination of both reduced emissions and sound.

Benefits:

- **Environmentally Friendly:** Significant reduction in harmful emissions contributes to improved air quality.
- **Health Benefits:** Minimizes respiratory problems and other health issues associated with traditional firecrackers, particularly in urban areas.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Allows for the continuation of traditional celebrations while mitigating environmental impact.

Government Initiatives:

- The Indian government has promoted the use of green crackers, especially in the context of festivals like Diwali, to combat pollution levels in major cities.
- Organizations like the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization (PESO) have been involved in regulating and promoting green crackers.

Challenges:

- **Awareness and Adoption:** There is still a lack of awareness among the general public regarding the benefits and availability of green crackers.
- **Market Penetration:** Traditional firecrackers remain popular, and transitioning to green alternatives requires substantial consumer change.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Ensuring that manufacturers adhere to the guidelines for producing green crackers can be challenging.

India's Defence Revolution

Syllabus: GS-3; Defence & Security

Context

- The recent inauguration of the TATA Aircraft Complex at the TATA Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) Campus in Vadodara, Gujarat, marks a key milestone in India's journey toward *Atmanirbharta* in defence.

About

- India's Defence Revolution refers to the nation's efforts to strengthen its defense sector by emphasizing **self-reliance, advanced technology integration, and reforms in defense manufacturing**.

Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defense

- The government's push for self-reliance in defense manufacturing is a cornerstone of India's Defense Revolution.
- Through **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, India is focusing on indigenizing defense equipment to reduce dependency on imports.
- Key projects include indigenously developed equipment like the **Tejas Light Combat Aircraft, Arjun Main Battle Tank, and INS Vikrant**, India's first indigenous aircraft carrier.

Make in India Initiative

- Make in India is actively promoted in the defense sector to attract foreign and private investment, encourage technology transfer, and build manufacturing capabilities within India.
- Defense corridors in **Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu** are being developed as hubs for manufacturing defense equipment and munitions.

Defense Acquisition Policy (DAP) 2020

- DAP 2020 prioritizes domestic procurement and aims to streamline acquisition processes.
- Categories like Buy (Indian-Indian Designed, Developed, and Manufactured) emphasize a domestic preference.
- Policies for simplified procurement, faster timelines, and support for Indian startups in defense technology are also part of DAP 2020.

Defense Production and Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) 2020

- The DPEPP aims to boost defense production capabilities and facilitate exports, with a goal to reach \$5 billion in defense exports by 2025.
- This policy supports Indian industries in accessing global defense markets, showcasing products at international defense expos, and improving quality standards.

Innovation in Defense

- **The Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) program** encourages startups, MSMEs, and innovators to develop cutting-edge defense technologies.
- Programs such as DRDO's Technology Development Fund provide grants and other support to encourage innovation in defense equipment.

Focus on Cybersecurity and Space Defense

- India is investing in cybersecurity and space defense capabilities through initiatives like the Defence Cyber Agency and Defence Space Agency.
- This includes developing counter-space capabilities and satellite defense, recognizing the importance of space and cyber domains in modern warfare.

Increasing Defense Exports

- India is promoting its defense exports by creating a framework to make Indian defense products globally competitive.
- Export of defense items like radar systems, patrol vessels, and other military equipment has grown significantly, contributing to India's defense revenue and global strategic presence.

Future Outlook and Challenges

- India aims to rank among the top defense manufacturers globally, but challenges remain, including technological limitations, infrastructure, and a need for increased R&D investments.
- Collaborations with Quad partners and enhanced defense diplomacy are strategic steps to foster growth and address regional security dynamics.