NEWS TODAY

STANDING COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT ON CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS TABLED REPORT ON FERTILIZERS

Observations	Recommendations
Increasing subsidy burden as all major fertilizers **covered under subsidy.**	• **Fertilizer subsidy scheme (Urea and Nutrient based subsidy scheme) needs to be reviewed** in consultation with all stakeholders to remove deficiencies.
30% of **urea,** 100% **muriate of potash,** 60% **Diammonium phosphate imported** due to **local shortage** in states.	• **Increase fertilizers production** (especially urea) through facilitating investments for public, cooperative and private fertilizers manufacturers.
Budget allocation and price fluctuations due to international developments.	• Centre should introduce **purchase policy reforms** and enter into **long term contracts for import of fertilizers and raw materials** to offset the effects of international price rise.
Irregularities in fertilizers sale such as diversion, black marketing, hoarding, sub-standard quality etc.	• Develop a **central monitoring mechanism** to conduct random checks. • Creating a **separate tariff code for urea used for non-agricultural purposes.**
Lack of soil testing.	• Department should take **optimum measures to facilitate soil testing at district and block levels.**
GST anomaly: GST for **fertilizers is at 5% and GST on raw materials** like sulphuric acid and ammonia are at **18%.**	• Lower the GST on raw materials.

COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL (CAG) SUBMITTED PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF NATIONAL SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (NSAP) FOR 2017-21

- **NSAP** has been implemented by **Ministry of Rural Development** since 1995.
- It aims to provide **social assistance to BPL households** in the case of the **old age, disabled, widows, etc. (refer infographics).**
  - **4.65 crore** people availed benefits during 2017-21.
- **Article 151 of the Constitution** mandates the CAG to present **audit reports to the President.**
- **Key findings**
  - **Beneficiaries:**
    - **Identification** of beneficiaries is **based on BPL list** even after finalisation of **SECC data.**
    - Scheme **aims for universal coverage,** but being implemented in **demand-driven mode.**
  - **Financial Management:**
    - **Rs 2.83 crore were diverted** for campaigning in respect to other ministry schemes.
    - In many states expenditure **incurred on inadmissible items like payment of honorarium, wages, etc.**
  - **Implementation**
    - **Delays in identification and sanction of pension to eligible beneficiaries.**
    - **Scheme is not fully DBT compliant,** leading to over-payments, short-payments, etc.
  - **Monitoring the Scheme**
    - **No State Level Monitoring Committee** in 30 States/UTs.
    - **Absence of periodic review, social audit and related remedial action** in many states.
- **Recommendations:** Robust **social audit and grievance redressal** mechanisms, **fixing of responsibility** for irregular pension payments, etc.

Sub Schemes of NSAP

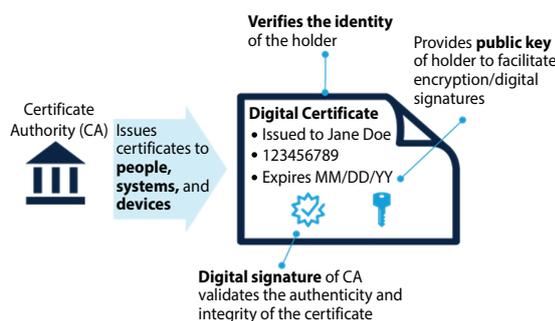| |
|---|
| **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)** |
| **Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS)** |
| **Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)** |
| **National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)-** financial grant to family in case of **accidental death of primary breadwinner** |
| **Annapurna scheme-** food security to senior citizens not covered under IGNOAP |

MINISTRY OF STATISTICS AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (MOSPI) UNVEILS THE REVISED DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY ON OFFICIAL STATISTICS (NPOS)

- This policy provides for **laying down a road-map towards modernized data collection and timely dissemination of information.**
  - It reinforces the **United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UNFPOS) adopted by India in 2016.**
    - UNFPOS **lists 10 guiding principles of official statistics** while asking for a high level of **independence of national statistical systems.**
- **Need for the revised policy**
  - **Lack of reliable and timely** social and economic **statistics.**
  - **Lack of a common standard** for official statistics.
  - **To strengthen digital capabilities utilising Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, etc.** for releasing official statistics.
- **Key highlights of draft:**
  - **Creation of Integrated Data System led by MoSPI:** To enable **interoperability** among different data-producing systems at National and State/UT level.
    - **An online web resource** would be created for this.
  - **Optimizing the use of Administrative Statistics:** To reduce Government costs, eliminate survey errors, etc.
  - **Focusing on core official statistics:** Core statistics are **critical to the economy,** hence, are required to be **robust and timely.**
    - A list of core statistics had been prepared in eight domains: National **Income, Production & Services sectors, Budgetary Transactions, etc.**

MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (MEITY) LAUNCHED INDIAN WEB BROWSER DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE (IWBDC)

- IWBDC is an **open challenge competition** that seeks to empower technology enthusiasts, and developers to **create an indigenous web browser.**
  - This web browser will have its own trust store with an inbuilt Controller of Certifying Authorities (CCA) India root certificate.
  - Browser envisions the ability to **digitally sign documents using a crypto token,** bolstering secure transactions.
- A browser's **trust store or root store** contains a **list of certification authorities** whose certificates can be trusted.
  - Top browsers like **Chrome and Firefox do not include CCA** in their root stores.
  - Due to this, for **digital certificates or Security Sockets Layer (SSL)** certificates, **India has depended on SSL certificates issued by Roots of Foreign entities.**
- CCA was appointed **under Information Technology (IT) Act 2000 of MeitY.**
  - CCA issues certificate **only to Certifying Authorities (CAs). CAs issue Digital Signature Certificates** to end-entities. Digital Signatures are valid under IT Act 2000.
  - For identifying and verifying CAs, CCA established **Root Certifying Authority of India (RCAI)** under IT Act.
- **Digital signature** is an **e-signature backed by a digital certificate,** providing proof of an individual's identity.
  - **SSL certificates** are digital certificates that authenticate a website's identity and enable an encrypted connection.

Certificate Authority (CA) Issues certificates to **people, systems,** and **devices**

Verifies the identity of the holder

Provides **public key** of holder to facilitate encryption/digital signatures

Digital Certificate
- Issued to Jane Doe
- 123456789
- Expires MM/DD/YY

Digital signature of CA validates the authenticity and integrity of the certificate

About India's Official statistics system

- **Up-to date, and comprehensive** official Statistics helps formulate, monitor and assess **economic and social policies.**
- At the national level, the **MoSPI is the nodal agency.**
- **National Statistical Commission** was constituted in 2006 as an **apex advisory body on statistical matters.**

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN TABLED THE 'HEALTH FACILITIES FOR TRIBAL WOMEN' REPORT

- As per NFHS 5 (2019-2020) data, Committee has found **tribal women suffer from malnutrition, a high infant mortality rate (41.6%), and communicable diseases** like malaria, tuberculosis etc.
- **Observations**
  - **Lack of a separate database on tribal health conditions** like Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR).
    - MMR refers to **number of maternal deaths during a given period per 1,00,000 live births** during same period.
  - **Prevalence of Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) is higher** in tribal groups due to absence of effective treatment.
  - **Early marriage in tribal women** causes early pregnancy and other general health risks.
  - **Lack of facilities of pre and post-natal care.**
- **Recommendations**
  - Ministry of Tribal Affairs should work with MoHFW to **generate central health data for tribals with separate classifications** like girl children, women of various age groups etc.
  - **Linking of Swasthya portal to various government databases** such as POSHAN tracker.
  - **Financial assistance** should be imparted and **establish special wing** in hospitals to treat SCD.
  - Devise **special action plan to retain tribal girl child in school** and developing **alternate learning program for 'out of school' girl child.**

Related news

- **Ministry of Railway** has initiated **Janjatiya Gaurav Corridor** to push **rail infrastructure & promote rail connectivity in tribal dominated regions.**
- It is guided by factors like **economic viability, closing last mile gaps, alternative routes and social economic considerations.**

AMENDMENT TO NEW DRUGS AND CLINICAL TRIAL RULES (2023) WILL REPLACE THE USE OF ANIMALS IN RESEARCH

- According to reports, the recent amendment authorises **researchers to use non-animal and human-relevant methods for drug testing like**
  - **3D organoids (mini-organ):** A **millimetre-sized** three-dimensional **cellular structures that mimic specific organs of the body.**
  - **Organs-on-chip:** Microengineered biomimetic system which **reflects structural and functional characteristics of human tissue.**
  - **Advanced computational methods:** Like Bioprinting and Inkjet-based bioprinting.
    - **Bioprinting** creates three-dimensional structures **consisting of biomaterials, cells, and biomolecules.**
    - Inkjet-based bioprinting is a type of bioprinting based on **conventional inkjet printing process with desktop inkjet printers.**
- **European Union, US, Canada, and South Korea** have also proposed similar initiative to facilitate transition towards **technologies that don't use animals in research.**
- So far, **generally rodents and a non-rodent** (canines and primates) were used as the **first** step in **drug testing.** But it results in a **high failure** of the drug development process.
  - **Lab grown animal species may not fully capture the human response** to a drug.
    - Also, it results in ethical issues like **violation of Right to life of animals.**
  - **Humans are more complex creatures.** Their drug responses often vary from person to person based on factors such as age, sex, etc.

ALSO IN NEWS

Raisina Dialogue	- Raisina Dialogue is an **annual conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics** addressing issues facing the global community.
	  - It takes its **name from Raisina Hill, the seat of Indian government.**
	  - It has been **held annually in New Delhi** since 2016 by **Observer Research Foundation (ORF),** an independent think-tank, in **collaboration with Ministry of External Affairs.**
	- **8th Edition** was held in March **2023** with **theme "Provocation, Uncertainty, Turbulence: Lighthouse in the Tempest".**

Revised timeline for Initial Public Offering (IPO)	- **SEBI has halved the time for IPO listing of companies** from six days to three days. i.e from T+6 to T+3.
	  - **IPO** refers to the **selling of securities to the public in the primary market.**
	  - It acts as the **largest source of funds for the company.**
	- It will enhance the **ease of doing business** for issuers and provide investors with **quicker access to capital and liquidity.**
	- The revised T+3 days timeline will **become mandatory from 1 December 2023 onwards.**

CAG Report on Railway Finances 2023	- **Key findings**
	  - **High Operating Ratio (OR):** OR is 107% i.e., railways' **spent ₹107 to earn ₹100** during 2021-22 owing to higher appropriation to **fund pensions.**
	  - **Loss decreased:** However, entire profits from freight operations were used to cross-subsidise passenger fares.
	  - **Other:** Higher dependence on **Budget Support and Extra Budgetary Resources, continuation of cash transaction, etc.**
	- **Recommendations:** Utilize funds judiciously, foster greater responsibility and accountability, etc.

High Price Day Ahead Market and Surplus Power Portal (PUShP portal)	- PUShP portal was **launched by Ministry of Power to ensure greater availability of power during peak demand season.**
	  - **Power Distribution Companies (DISCOMS) will be able to indicate their surplus power** in block times / days / months on portal.
	  - Those DISCOMs who need power will be able to requisition the surplus power.
	  - This will **reduce the fixed cost burden on DISCOMs,** and **enable the available generation capacity to be utilise.**

Exercise Zayed Talwar	- It is a **naval exercise** between **India** and **UAE.** - This year, it will be conducted at **Port Rashid (man-made commercial port)** in Dubai.

MATSYA6000	• India has developed a **manned scientific submersible MATSYA6000.** ➤ It is a part of **Samudrayaan mission,** which is part of the larger **Deep Ocean Mission.** • It has been developed by **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai under Ministry of Earth Sciences.** ➤ It can carry **three humans up to a depth of 6,000 meters** in ocean for exploration of deep sea resources and biodiversity assessment. ➤ It has an **endurance of 12 hours** under normal operation and **96 hours in case of emergency** for human safety.
Belem Declaration	• Member countries of Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) signed the **Belém Declaration in the Brazilian city of Belém.** ➤ ACTO is an intergovernmental socio-environmental block formed by signing of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty. ➤ **Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela** are its members. • **Belém Declaration** calls for ensuring **participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making** • It also commits to launching the **Amazon Alliance to Combat Deforestation.** ➤ However, member countries could not **agree on the goal to protect the Amazon rainforest.**
Athidhi Portal	• It was launched by **State government of Kerala** to expedite the **registration process for migrant workers.**
Shanti Swaroop Bhatnagar (SSB) Awards	• SSB award was not announced for 2022 and nominations for 2023 year were also stopped. • SSB Awards are **awarded annually for outstanding research,** applied or fundamental, in **seven disciplines** i.e., ➤ Biological Sciences; Chemical Sciences; Earth, Atmosphere, Ocean and Planetary Sciences; Engineering Sciences; Mathematical Sciences; Medical Sciences; and Physical Sciences. • **Eligibility** ➤ **Any Citizen of India** engaged in research **up to age of 45 years,** ➤ **Overseas citizen of India (OCI) and Persons of Indian Origin** working in India. • Dr Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar **(Founder Director of Council of Scientific & Industrial Research)** was **awarded Padma Vibhushan** in 1954.

Places in news	**Mediterranean Sea**
	• **Boat carrying migrants sank** in Mediterranean Sea.
	• **Political Boundaries**
	➤ **Intercontinental sea** that **stretches from Atlantic Ocean** (west) **to Asia** (east) and **separates Europe from Africa.**
	➤ **Bordering Countries** include
	  ■ **Europe (West to East):** Spain, France, Monaco, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece and Cyprus.
	  ■ **Asia (north to south):** Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Israel.
	  ■ **Africa (east to west):** Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.
	➤ **Bordering Cities:** Athens, Haifa, Tel Aviv, Beirut, Venice, Rome.
	• **Geographical features**
	➤ Connected to **Atlantic Ocean by Strait of Gibraltar** and **Red Sea** by Suez Canal.
	➤ **Sea of Marmara (part of Mediterranean Sea,)** connected to **Black Sea via Bosphorus Strait, and Aegean Sea via Dardanelles Strait.**
	➤ **Climate:** Wet winters and hot, dry summers.
	➤ **Largest island:** Sicily.
	➤ **Marginal Seas within Mediterranean:** Aegean Sea, Ionian Sea, Adriatic Sea, Sea of Marmara.