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Economy

NITI Aayog releases 'Strategy for New India @75'

- The NITI Aayog on December 19, 2018 released 'Strategy for New India @75', its comprehensive national Strategy for New India which defines clear objectives for 2022-23. The Strategy was released by the Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.
- It is a detailed account across 41 crucial areas that recognises the progress already made, identifies binding constraints, and suggests the way forward for achieving the objectives.

Recommendations stated under Drivers

- Steadily accelerate the economy to achieve a GDP growth rate of about 8 percent on average during 2018-23. **This will raise the economy's size in real terms from USD 2.7trillion in 2017-18 to nearly USD 4 trillion by 2022-23.**
- In agriculture, shift the emphasis to converting farmers to 'agripreneurs' by further expanding e-National Agriculture Markets and replacing the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Act with the Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing Act.
- Give a strong push to 'Zero Budget Natural Farming' techniques that reduce costs, improve land quality and increase farmers' incomes.
- To ensure maximum employment creation, complete codification of labor laws; and upscale and expand apprenticeships.
- Launch a mission "Explore in India" by revamping minerals exploration and licensing policy.

Recommendations under Infrastructure

- Expedite the establishment of the **Rail Development Authority (RDA)**, which is already approved.
- Double the share of freight transported by coastal shipping and inland waterways.
- Develop an IT-enabled platform for integrating different modes of transport and promoting multi-modal and digitised mobility.
- **Deliver all government services at the state, district, and gram panchayat level digitally by 2022-23.** With the completion of the **Bharat Net programme in 2019, all 2.5 lakh gram panchayats will be digitally connected.**
- The three themes in this section revolve around the dimensions of health, education and mainstreaming of traditionally marginalised sections of the population.

Recommendations under Inclusion

- Successfully implementing the Ayushman Bharat programme including **the establishment of 150000 health and wellness centres across the country, and rolling out the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Abhiyaan (PM-JAY).**
- Create a focal point for public health at the central level with state counterparts.

- Upgrade the quality of the school education system and skills, including the creation of a new innovation ecosystem at the ground level by establishing **at least 10,000 Atal Tinkering Labs by 2020**.
- Conceptualise an electronic national educational registry for tracking each child's learning outcomes.

Assam govt approves debt relief scheme for farmers

- **The Assam government** has approved **debt relief scheme for the farmers of the state**. The decision was taken in a cabinet meeting headed by Chief Minister Sarbanand Sonowal, held in Guwahati on December 17, 2018.
- The state cabinet decided to waive 25 percent of loan amount to the farmers. **However the maximum relief per farmer would be capped at 25 thousand rupees.**
- The cabinet also decided that a farmer could avail a Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loan at zero percent interest.
- The Cabinet also approved a farmers' incentive scheme, under which Rs 10000 would be given to farmers having bad debts for taking loan under KCC.

India and states

Railways to introduce first AC local train in north India in 2019

- **The first AC local train in north India will hit the tracks next year**, with the railways planning to launch the state-of-the-art train for passengers travelling short distances **from Delhi**.
- The **MEMU** (mainline electric multiple unit) train, having eight stainless-steel coaches, will cater to the **Uttar Pradesh cities within 200-300 km from Delhi**.
- The upgraded MEMU air-conditioned trains can run at a speed of 130 kmph instead of 100 kmph in the previous versions.
- **It has been manufactured at a cost of Rs 26 crore and has a capacity to carry 2,618 passengers as against 2,402 passengers** in the present one.
- All the eight coaches will have two toilets each, GPS-enabled information system, automated doors, CCTV surveillance systems and cushioned seats.

ISRO successfully launches GSAT-7A satellite

- The Indian space research Organisation ISRO on Wednesday successfully **launched geostationary communication satellite GSAT-7A onboard Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle GSLV-F11**.
- The exclusive advanced communication satellite separated from the rocket after 19 minutes of the launch.
- Speaking after the launch, Chairman ISRO K Sivan told that it was a grand success after the launch of GSLV MK 14 launching GSAT 29 and PSLV carrying HySIS satellite. He told that GSLV had safely injected the satellite into the super synchronous transfer orbit within the prescribed time limit.

- Congratulating ISRO team for completing 17 launches this year Mr Sivan assured that he was looking forward to 32 launches including Chandrayaan 2 next year.

Govt to open Eklavya School in areas having significant tribal population

- Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram has said that every block with **more than 50 per cent Schedule Tribe, ST population and at least 20 thousand tribal persons**, will have an **Eklavya Model Residential School by the year 2022**.
- Addressing a press conference in New Delhi yesterday, Mr Oram said, Eklavya schools will be on par with Navodaya Vidyalayas and will have special facilities for preserving local art and culture besides providing training in sports and skill development.
- The Minister said, as per census 2011, **there are 564 sub-districts having more than 50 per cent ST population and at least 20 thousand tribal persons**.
- He said, out of these sub-districts, **102 sub-districts have Eklavya Model Residential School**. He added, this upscaled initiative will focus on academic excellence and will lead to holistic development of tribal children.

India's International Aviation Safety Assessment rated highest

- **The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has retained the highest aviation safety ranking for India.**
- The US regulator, FAA carried out an audit in July 2018 to confirm **India's adherence to the standards laid down by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)**.
- Following the audit, the FAA formally communicated that India is adhering to the safety standards of the ICAO and India's International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA) rating remains **'Category 1'**.
- India is the fastest growing domestic aviation market in the world and registered double-digit growth for the 50th consecutive month in October. The latest development comes as a boost for the overall aviation sector.

Transport Ministry asks states to accept vehicle documents, driving licence in electronic format

- The Union Road Transport and Highways Ministry on December 18, 2018 asked **states to facilitate acceptance of driving licence and other documents such as vehicle registration certificates in electronic format by enforcement agencies**.
- The Ministry, while issuing a **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to states**, said that the vehicle owners can also show their documents including driving licence, RCs and insurance certificates through mobile apps like **Digilocker and mParivahan app**.
- The vehicle owners have been permitted to present their important documents such as the certificate of registration, insurance, fitness and permit, driving licence, the certificate for pollution under check and any other relevant documents in electronic format
- With this, the vehicle owners may now, not be required to carry the documents in hard formats.
- People can produce the documents or other information either through the **Digilocker app or the mParivahan app**.

Awards

Asma Jahangir posthumously awarded with 2018 UN Human Rights Prize

- Late human rights activist, **Asma Jahangir was on December 18, 2018 awarded with the UN Human Rights Prize 2018, posthumously.**
- Her daughter Munizae Jahangir received the award on her behalf at the award ceremony that took place at the UN Headquarters in New York, as part of activities to celebrate **Human Rights Day.**
- Asma Jahangir passed away on February 11, 2018 due to cardiac arrest. She was known for her outspoken nature and unrelenting pursuit for human rights.
- This year, the award coincided with the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.**

World

New Zealand to phase out plastic shopping bags from 2019

- In **New Zealand**, regulations for mandatory phase-out of single-use plastic shopping bags **will take effect from July 1, 2019.**
- The retailers will no longer be able to sell or give away single-use plastic shopping bags from July next year after the cabinet agreed to the proposed regulations for a mandatory nationwide phase-out of these bags.
- Associate Minister for the Environment Eugenie Sage has said that plastic shopping bags are a hazard for nature, particularly marine wildlife. They can also introduce harmful microplastics into the food chain.

Belgium Prime Minister Charles Michel resigns over migration spat

- **Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel** has resigned amid pressure on his government over **his support for the UN global compact on migration.**
- The pressure increased after his biggest coalition partner, the right-wing N-VA party, quit the government over the issue.
- Michel lost the backing of the party over his support for the UN migration pact, a cause celebre for European anti-immigration parties.

Days

International Migrants Day observed with theme 'Migration with Dignity'

- The **International Migrants Day** was observed **on December 18, 2018** with the theme '**Migration with Dignity**'.
- On September 19, 2016 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a set of commitments during its first-ever summit on large movements of refugees and migrants to enhance the protection of refugees and migrants.
- These commitments are known as the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (NY Declaration).