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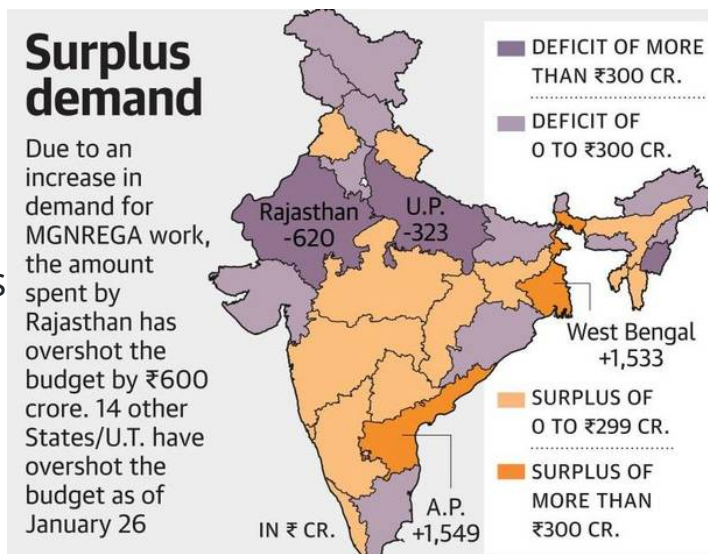
Fund Crunch in MGNREGA

Why in News

According to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme's financial statement as on 26th January, 2020, the **centre is on the verge of running out of funds for the scheme.**

More than 96% of the allocated money has already been spent or is needed to pay pending dues, with less than ₹2,500 crores left to sustain the scheme for the next two months.

Key Points



- **Budget Allocation:** The budget allocation for 2019 for MGNREGA scheme was ₹60,000 crores which is **lower than** the amount spent in 2018.

- **Current Status:**
 - Many **state governments have not paid the wages to workers as the Centre has not released funds**. It is contrary to the spirit of the Act and violates the principle of rights-based implementation of the MGNREGA scheme.
 - The **Central Employment Guarantee Council** has not met in two years despite it being mandatory to hold a meeting every six months.
 - Central Employment Guarantee Council is a forum constituted under Section 10(3) (d) of the MGNREGA Act, 2005.
 - It is responsible for a central monitoring and evaluation system for the scheme, besides advising the government on its implementation.
- **State-wise Scenario:** Rajasthan has the highest negative net balance of ₹620 crores, followed by ₹323 crores in Uttar Pradesh.
 - Some States still have funds remaining only because they are actively suppressing demand and turning workers away. State governments do not want to be liable to pay interest for delayed wages, so they suppress demand.
 - The actual situation may be worse as States do not always enter pending payments into the information system.
- **Urgency for Funds:**
 - January, February and March are months with little agricultural activity when rural workers need employment.
 - There is a high demand for work in 2019 as the rural economy is in distress and informal employment has also collapsed. A number of economists have recommended that putting money into the hands of rural consumers via MGNREGA is a key to kickstarting the economy.
 - The scheme is running out of money and will enter in 2020-21 with pending liabilities.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005

- The Act aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members (at least 18 years of age) volunteer to do unskilled work.
- The central government bears the full cost of unskilled labour, and 75% of the cost of material (the rest is borne by the states).
- It is a demand-driven, social security and labour law that aims to enforce the **'right to work'**.
- Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), Government of India in association with state governments, monitors the implementation of the scheme.

Source: TH

Nagardhan Excavations and Vakataka Dynasty

Why in News

Recently, archaeological excavations were carried out at **Nagardhan village** in Ramtek Taluk near **Nagpur, Maharashtra**.

- The area surrounding the Nagardhan Fort in the village has the archaeological remains.
 - The Nagardhan Fort was constructed during the **Gond Raja period** and later renovated and re-used by the **Bhosales of Nagpur** during the late 18th and 19th centuries.
- The excavations have provided evidence on the life, religious affiliations and trade practices of the **Vakataka dynasty**.
 - Nagardhan is understood to have served as a capital of the Vakataka kingdom.

Vakataka Dynasty

- It originated in the **central Deccan in the mid-3rd century CE** and its empire is believed to have extended from **Malwa and Gujarat in the north** to the **Tungabhadra in the south** and from the **Arabian Sea in the west** to the **Bay of Bengal in the east**.
- The Vakataka rulers followed the Shaiva sect of Hinduism.
- **Animal rearing** was one of the main occupations of the people. **Remains of domestic animals** like **cattle, goat, sheep, pig, cat, horse and fowl** were traced in an earlier study.
- The Vakataka rulers forged several **matrimonial alliances** with other dynasties of their times. One of the key alliances was with **Prabhavatigupta of the Gupta dynasty (Vaishnavites)**, which was then **ruling north India**.
 - Prabhavatigupta was the chief queen of the **Vakataka king Rudrasena II** and took over as queen after the sudden death of her husband. She ruled for about 10 years until her **son Pravarasena II** succeeded.
- **Queen Prabhavatigupta and Vaishnavism**
 - The researchers believe that the practice of worshipping Narasimha in Maharashtra emerged from Ramtek, and that Queen Prabhavatigupta had a pivotal role in propagation of Vaishnava practices in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.
 - Some of the temples identified as Keval Narasihma, Rudra Narasimha and the one dedicated to Varaha could be traced to Ramtek, and showcase strong affinity to the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. None of these religious structures was, however, present here until the Queen took the throne.

Findings and their Significance

- It is the **first time clay sealings** have been excavated from Nagardhan.
 - The **oval-shaped** sealing belongs to the period when **Prabhavatigupta** was the queen of the Vakataka dynasty.
 - It bears her name in the **Brahmi script**, along with the **depiction of a conch**. The presence of the conch is a sign of the **Vaishnava affiliation** that the Guptas held.
 - The sealings were introduced and issued under Prabhavatigupta's rule which shows her importance and stature as a woman.

The Vakataka rulers followed the Shaiva sect of Hinduism while the Guptas followed Vaishnava sect. Queen's powerful personality allowed her to follow the sect of her choice.
- The sealing was traced on top of a **mega wall** which could have been part of a royal structure at the capital city.
- The **copperplate issued by Queen Prabhavatigupta** starts with a **genealogy of the Guptas**, mentioning the Queen's grandfather **Samudragupta** and her father **Chandragupta II**.
- Vakatakas **traded with Iran and beyond, through the Mediterranean Sea** and the sealings are believed to be used as **official royal permission** issued from the capital.

Source: IE

India's Neutrino Observatory Opposed by Gram Sabhas

Why in News

Villagers in different parts of Tamil Nadu used Gram Sabhas to pass resolutions against the India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) and hydrocarbon exploration which, they feared, would be detrimental to their respective regions.

- INO is being constructed in the **Bodi West Hills** (Theni district) of Tamil Nadu.
- The site is near the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border and is close to the **Mathikettan Shola National Park**.
- **Vaigai river** passes through the Theni district.

Concerns

- The region was recovering from the **Gaja cyclone** and the rural
- economy was in a very bad state.

- The project may have **harmful effects on the fertility of the land** in the region and **adversely affect the agricultural community**, farm labourers and others dependent on the profession.
- Further, it can result in the migration of farm labourers.
- Villagers also alleged that they were **not involved in the decision-making process**.
- Massive scale of construction underground and controlled blasts, the vibrations from the explosions can badly affect the ecologically fragile **Western Ghats**.
- Other concerns voiced range from **radiation, structural damage to the mountain** to the **emission of hazardous chemicals**.

Environmental clearance

- **Environmental clearance was given** after going through the geotechnical investigation report on studies carried out for INO set aside the concerns related to radioactivity or leaching of water, besides having the impact of blasting on inhabitation in the vicinity.
- According to the report of the **geotechnical investigation report** The operation of INO will have **no release of radioactive or toxic substances**.
- Earlier in 2019, the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has upheld the environmental clearance granted in March 2018 to the project.
- However, the project could not be implemented until the approval of the **National Board of Wildlife** is also received.

Gram Sabha

- The term Gram Sabha is defined in the Constitution under **Article 243(b)**.
- It is the **primary and permanent body** of the Panchayati Raj system.
- The power to **annul a decision** of the Gram Sabha rests with the **Gram Sabha only**.
- **Composition:**
 - Persons, those who are **above 18** years, living in the village whose names are included in the **electoral rolls** for the Panchayat at the village level.
- **Powers and functions**
 - The constitution empowered the **State Legislatures to define the powers and functions** of the Gram Sabhas through laws passed by them.

India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO)

- The **INO** is aimed at building a world-class underground laboratory with a rock cover to conduct basic research on the neutrino.
- The INO will study atmospheric neutrinos only. Solar neutrinos have much lower energy than the detector can detect.

- The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research is the nodal institution. The observatory is to be built jointly with the Department of Atomic Energy and the Department of Science and Technology.
- It is not a weapons laboratory and will have no strategic or defence applications.

Source: TH

A-SAT and ADTCR

Why in News

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) displayed its **Anti-Satellite (A-SAT) missile** and the Air Defence Tactical Control Radar (ADTCR) during the 71st Republic Day parade.

A-SAT Missile

- **About the Missile**
 - It is an interceptor missile that destroys or jams satellites in space.
 - There are two types of A-SATs:
 - **Kinetic A-SATs**, like ballistic missiles, physically strike an object in order to destroy it.
 - **Non-Kinetic A-SATs** are the ones that use non-physical means to disable or destroy space objects, which include frequency jamming, blinding lasers or cyber-attacks.
 - The theoretical maximum range of A-SATs is limited which means satellites above 20,000 km are out of range.
- **India's Test of A-SAT Missile**
 - On 27th March, 2019, **India successfully conducted a Kinetic Anti-Satellite (A-SAT) missile test** from Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Island launch complex (Odisha).
 - The A-SAT missile was developed by the DRDO under **Mission Shakti**.
Mission Shakti seeks to defend India's space assets and thus aims at strengthening India's overall security.
 - **India became the fourth country** to acquire such technology after USA, Russia, and China.
 - The A-SAT technology has a '**hit to kill**' feature which is developed for the first time in India. It enables to destroy an enemy satellite by directly colliding with it with pinpoint accuracy.

Air Defence Tactical Control Radar

- Air Defence Tactical Control Radar (ADTCR) is used for volumetric surveillance, detection, tracking and friend/foe identification of aerial targets of different types and transmission of prioritised target data to multiple command posts and weapon systems.
- It is also capable of **detecting very small targets and low flying targets.**

Source: TH

Incidence of NCDs in MP


Why in News

Recently, a screening drive was carried out by the **National Health Mission (NHM)** under the **Centre's Non-Communicable Disease Control Programmes** in **Madhya Pradesh.**

Under pressure

Over 20% of the population in Madhya Pradesh is suffering from hypertension

- Out of the **100 districts** facing the highest prevalence of hypertension in India, **15** are in Madhya Pradesh
- **6.8% boys** and **7% girls** in schools suffer from hypertension in Indore, which has the largest population in the State
- Around **22%** residents in the State had higher than average blood pressure (140 mm of Hg/90 mm of Hg)
- West Nimar region recorded the highest levels of hypertension at **29%**



Key Points

- **Non-communicable diseases** like hypertension, diabetes and cancer are posing a **bigger challenge in the non-tribal rural areas** of Madhya Pradesh owing to a rapidly **growing rate of incidence and the lack of awareness.**
 - Urban areas have more awareness which translates into patients undergoing treatment despite a high incidence and the burden is moderate.
 - However, the burden is increasing in rural areas due to low awareness.
- It needs to be noted that **despite the low awareness levels,** there was a **low incidence in the 89 tribal blocks** in the State, which **has the largest tribal population** in the country.

- Of the **country's 100 districts with the highest prevalence of hypertension, 15** were in Madhya Pradesh.

The **India Hypertension Control Initiative**, supported by the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, is catering to patients above 18 suffering from the diseases in various districts of the state.

Non-Communicable Disease Control Programmes

- It is a **group of various national programmes** which focus on different non-communicable diseases separately. For example- National Mental Health Programme, National Oral Health Programme, National Tobacco Control Programme, etc.
- The programmes **focus on identifying non-communicable diseases at the Primary Health Centre (PHC) level** itself and ensuring treatment up to the district-level and follow-ups with patients to continue medication.
- **Also, Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)** workers go door-to-door to draft family profiles and screen them for the non-communicable diseases instead of patients visiting a health centre.

India Hypertension Control Initiative

- It is a collaborative project of **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)**, State Governments, **WHO** and **'Resolve to Save Lives'- initiative of Vital Strategies**.
- It was **launched in November 2017** in 25 selected districts in Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Telangana, and Maharashtra. It was expanded to cover **100 districts** across all states in **2019**.
- The primary goal of this project is to **reduce morbidity and mortality due to cardiovascular diseases (CVDs)**, the leading cause of death in India, by improving the control of high blood pressure, which is a leading risk factor for CVDs among adults in India.
- **It aims to:**
 - **Create patient-centred services** to improve patient support.
 - **Reduce reliance on bigger hospitals** and an increase in the utilization of 'Health and wellness centres' and primary health centres.
 - **Provide for regular monitoring of health facilities** and prompt feedback to program managers to bridge gaps if any in a timely manner.

Source: TH

Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan

Why in News

The **Ministry of Human Resource Development** has approached the **Prime Minister's Office (PMO)** to take notice of the alleged corruption in the implementation of the **Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA)**.

The alleged acts of corruption in the implementation of RUSA were discovered in July, 2019 after **Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)** director pointed out serious irregularities in the utilisation of funds.

Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan

- RUSA is the **centrally sponsored scheme** launched in **October 2013** that aims at **providing strategic funding to higher education institutions** throughout the country.
- The scheme is being **operated in mission mode** for **funding state universities and colleges** to achieve the **aims of equity, access and excellence**.
- Funding is provided by the central ministry through the State governments and Union Territories (UTs), which in coordination with the Central Project Appraisal Board monitors the academic, administrative and financial advancements taken under the scheme.

Since 2016-17, the government has spent an average of Rs 1,500 crore every year on RUSA.

Objectives

- Improve the overall quality of state institutions by conforming to the prescribed norms and standards.
- Adoption of accreditation (certification of competency) as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- Promoting autonomy in state universities and improving governance in institutions.
- Ensure reforms in the affiliation, academic and examination system.
- Ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and ensure capacity building at all levels of employment.
- Create an enabling atmosphere for research in the higher education system.
- Correct regional imbalances in access to higher education by setting up institutions in unserved and underserved areas.
- Improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities to the disadvantaged.

Source: IE

Oslo Peace Accords

Why in News

Palestine has threatened to withdraw from key provisions of the **Oslo Accords** if the US announces its **Middle East Peace Plan**.

It is being said that the plan will turn Israel's temporary occupation of Palestinian territory into a permanent occupation.

Oslo Accords

- Oslo Accords are a **series of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians** signed in the **1990s**.
- **Oslo I (1993)** is formally known as the **Declaration of Principles (DOP)**. The pact established a timetable for the Middle East peace process. It planned for an interim Palestinian government in Gaza and Jericho in the West Bank.
- **Oslo II** is officially called the **Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza (1995)**, expanded on Oslo I.
 - It included provisions for the **complete withdrawal of Israeli troops** from six West Bank cities and about 450 towns.
 - Additionally, the pact set a timetable for elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council.
 - The interim pact was only supposed **to last five years** while a permanent agreement was finalised but it has tacitly been rolled over for more than two decades.
- The question of Jerusalem was left undecided under the Oslo Accords.

Source: TH

Padma Awards 2020

Why in News

The Padma Awards are **announced annually on the eve of Republic Day (26th January)**.

- Instituted in the year **1954**, it is **one of the highest civilian honours of India**.
- The Award seeks to recognize achievements in all fields of activities or disciplines where **an element of public service is involved**.

- The Awards are given in three categories:
 - **Padma Vibhushan** (for exceptional and distinguished service),
 - **Padma Bhushan** (distinguished service of higher-order) and
 - **Padma Shri** (distinguished service).
- The Awards are **given in various disciplines/ fields of activities**, viz.- art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc.
- The Awards are conferred on the recommendations made by the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year.
- The awards are **presented by the President of India** usually in the month of March/April every year.
- The **award does not amount to a title** and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix to the awardees' name.
- The **total number of awards** to be given in a year (excluding posthumous awards and to NRI/foreigners/OCIs) should **not be more than 120**.
 - In **2020**, the President has approved conferment of **141 Padma Awards** including 4 duo cases (in a duo case, the Award is counted as one).
 - The list comprises of 7 Padma Vibhushan, 16 Padma Bhushan and 118 Padma Shri Awards.

Note: Bharat Ratna is the highest civilian award of the country.

- It is awarded in recognition of exceptional service/performance of the highest order in any field of human endeavour.
- It is treated on a different footing from Padma Award. The recommendations for Bharat Ratna are made by the Prime Minister to the President of India.
- The number of Bharat Ratna Awards is restricted to a **maximum of three** in a particular year.

Source: PIB

Bharat Parv 2020

Why in News

The **annual event Bharat Parv** is being celebrated from 26th to 31st January, 2020 in **New Delhi**.

- **Objective:** To encourage Indians to visit different tourist places of India and to inculcate the spirit of 'Dekho Apna Desh'.

- **Theme for the Year 2020: 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'** and 'Celebrating 150 Years of Mahatma'.
- It is organised by the **Ministry of Tourism**.
- It includes highlights of the Republic Day Parade Tableaux, performances by the Armed Forces Bands, theme pavilions of different States and Central Ministries and cultural performances from different regions of the country.

Source: PIB
