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PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU

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Successful Test Firing of AAD Endo-Atmospheric Interceptor Missile

- DRDO conducted the successful launch of the interceptor missile Advanced Area Defence (AAD) from Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha.

- The endo-atmospheric missile, capable of intercepting incoming targets at an altitude of 15 to 25 kms successfully destroyed the incoming missile. All the mission objectives were successfully met.

- The weapon system radars tracked the target and provided the initial guidance to the interceptor which could precisely home on to the target and destroyed it in endo-atmospheric layer.

- The complete event including the engagement and destruction was tracked by a number of electro-optical tracking systems using infrared imagery.

- Radars and telemetry stations tracked the target and the interceptor till the destruction of the target. The launch has proved the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) prowess of the country.

⮞ Mujiris project

- The Biennale, which is today known as the People's Biennale, has become an integral part of the cultural calendar of our country. It has rejuvenated Kerala's longstanding contribution to visual arts and culture, and cemented Kochi's status as a cosmopolitan city brimming with potential and ideas.
- Contemporary art is one of the most significant ways of expressing thoughts, emotions, concerns

and ideas that are current, that are relevant to us in the time we live in.

- The fact that Kerala, this land of history and tradition, now hosts the largest show of contemporary art in the region, and that too a show that was seeded by government, speaks to the unique ways of this state and its people.

- Kerala has always been known for its secular approach towards art and culture. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale is a proud symbol of this approach and the sense of oneness and inclusivity that exists here.

- The Kochi Biennale Foundation has made a wonderful innovation in attempting to use art to link the historic legacy of present-day Kochi with the rich cultural influences of its predecessor Muziris, a financial and trade centre that was

believed to have been vanished in floods in 1314 A.D. The event's resounding success can be gauged from the fact that it has so far attracted more than a million visitors.

➲Maiden Anti-Ship Missile launch by Kalvari

- The Indian Navy, successfully conducted the maiden firing of an Anti-Ship missile from the first of the indigenously built Kalvari class submarines, during a test firing in the Arabian Sea.

- The missile successfully hit a surface target at extended ranges during the trial firing, held this morning. This missile launch is a significant milestone, not only for the Kalvari, which is the first in a series of Scorpeane class submarines

being built in India, but also in enhancing the Indian Navy's sub-surface warfare capability.

- All six Kalvari class submarines being built in India will be equipped with this anti-ship missile, which has a proven record in combat. These missiles will provide the submarines the ability to neutralize surface threats at extended ranges.

➲"OPERATION THUNDERBIRD" and "OPERATION SAVE KURMA"

- In a major success in the fight against wildlife crime, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, coordinated "OPERATION THUNDER BIRD" in India, from January 30-February 19, 2017. Operation Thunderbird is the code-name for

INTERPOL's multi-national and multi-species enforcement operation.

- The operation brought about a unanimous approach by the state enforcement agencies in the fight against wildlife crime in the country.

- Preceding this operation, WCCB had convened a species specific operation on turtles, code named OPERATION SAVE KURMA" The operation brought about an awareness among the enforcement agencies to focus on the existing trade routes and major trade hubs in the country, which will be specifically focused in future.

➲ Gandhian Model of Decentralized, Distributed and Diversified Innovation Based.

- the global economy continues to remain weak. The industrial growth is becoming more jobless in nature, even in emerging economies. In such a scenario, the Gandhian model of decentralized, distributed and diversified innovation-based enterprises is perhaps the best way forward to solve the problems.

- Gandhiji had always wanted to blend modern science and technology with community knowledge and institutions. His message has become extremely relevant in today's context.

- to further enrich the eco-system around inclusive innovations, we need all public and private systems around grassroots innovations to become

empathetic enablers. And we need to do it, not just for India, but for the whole world.

- The emergence of an inclusive innovation eco-system uniquely suited to India requires several more steps than what has already been taken by the government and civil society.

- it is important to imbibe in children a spirit of scientific inquiry. We must encourage them to pursue their curiosity and creativity. We must help them discover the fascination of creating something new.

- India is poised to take the fruits of development through initiatives like *Start-up India*, *Digital India* and *Swachh India* to all corners of the country. Ideas of innovators will make a true difference only if all of us in different roles and institutions join hands in creating *samvedan-*

sheelta and *srijan-sheelta* (compassion and creativity) in the country.

➲ Goods and Services Tax GST) Council approves the Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) Bill and the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) Bill.

- Some of the main features of the two Bills, as finalized by the GST Council, are as follows:

i. A State-wise single registration for a taxpayer forfiling returns, paying taxes,and to fulfil other compliance requirements. Most of the compliance requirements would be fulfilled online, thus leaving very little room for physical interface between the taxpayer and the tax official.

ii.A taxpayer has to file one single return state-wise to report all his supplies, whether made within or outside the State or exported out of the country and pay the applicable taxes on them. Such taxescan be Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST), State Goods and Services Tax (SGST), Union Territory Goods and Services Tax (UTGST) and Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST).

iii. A business entity with an annual turnover of upto Rs. 20 lakhs would not be required to take registration in the GST regime, unless he voluntarily chooses to do so to be a part of the input tax credit (ITC) chain. The annual turnover threshold in the Special Category States (as enumerated in Article 279A of the Constitution such as Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Assam and the other

States of the North-East) for not taking registration is Rs. 10 lakhs.

iv. A business entity with turnover upto Rs. 50 lakhs can avail the benefit of a composition scheme under which it has to pay a much lower rate of tax and has to fulfil very minimal compliance requirements. The Composition Scheme is available for all traders, select manufacturing sectors and for restaurants in the services sector.

v. In order to prevent cascading of taxes, ITC would be admissible on all goods and services used in the course or furtherance of business, except on a few items listed in the Law.

vi. In order to ensure that ITC can be used seamlessly for payment of taxes under the Central and the State Law, it has been provided that the ITC entitlement arising out of taxes paid under the Central Law can be

cross-utilised for payment of taxes under the laws of the States or Union Territories. For example, a taxpayer can use the ITC accruing to him due to payment of IGST to discharge his tax liability of CGST / SGST / UTGST. Conversely, a taxpayer can use the ITC accruing to him on account of payment of CGST / SGST / UTGST, for payment of IGST. Such payments are to be made in a pre-defined order.

vii. In the Services sector, the existing mechanism of Input Service Distributor (ISD) under the Service Tax law has been retained to allow the flow of ITC in respect of input serviceswithin a legal entity.

viii.To prevent lock-in of capital of exporters, a provision has been made to refund, within seven days of filing the application for refund by an exporter, ninety percent of the claimed amount on a provisional basis.

ix. In order to ensure a single administrative interface for taxpayers, a provision has been made to authorise officers of the tax administrations of the Centre and the States to exercise the powers conferred under all Acts.

x.An agriculturist, to the extent of supply of produce out of cultivation of land, would not be liable to take registration in the GST regime.

xi. To provide certainty in tax matters, a provision has been made for an Advance Ruling Authority.

xii.Exhaustive provisions for Appellate mechanism have been made.

xiii. Detailed transitional provisions have been provided to ensure migration of existing taxpayers and seamless transfer of unutilised ITC in the GST regime.

xiv. An anti-profiteering provision has been incorporated to ensure that the reduction of tax incidence is passed on to the consumers.

xv. In order to mitigate any financial hardship being suffered by a taxpayer, Commissioner has been empowered to allow payment of taxes in instalments.

➲Koteshwar Hydro Electric Project in Uttarakhand

- The project is being implemented by Tehri Hydro Development Corporation (THDC) India Limited.

- In addition to additional generating capacity of 400 MW of peaking power it will regulate releases from Tehri Reservoir for irrigation and drinking water supply.

- The Project has already been commissioned fully in March, 2012. Only balance works are to be done which are not linked with operation of the Plant

but essential for safety and completion of the project.

➲INS Viraat Decommissioned

- a glorious era of INS Viraat being the flag ship of the Indian Navy came to an end. INS Viraat, the second Centaur-Class aircraft carrier in service which has spent 30 years in the Indian Navy and 27 years in the Royal Navy, was decommissioned on the day, in a solemn yet grand ceremony at Naval Dockyard, Mumbai.

- INS Viraat holds the world record as mentioned in the Guinness Book of records for being the longest serving warship of the world. The indigenous Advance Light Helicopters 'Dhruv' and the Russian twin rotor Kamov-31 have also operated from the ship.

- Viraat played a major role in Operation Jupiter in 1989 during the Sri Lankan Peacekeeping operation, after which she was affiliated with the Garhwal Rifles and Scouts of the Indian Army in 1990.

- She also saw action during Op Parakram in 2001-2002, post the terrorist attack on Parliament. The ship was instrumental in honing the art of flying operations from a carrier deck in the Navy, which also resulted in seamless induction of INS Vikramaditya and its integration with the fleet.

➲The United Nations Entity of Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)

- The proposal seeks to provide technical support to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in strengthening

capacities of governance institutions including Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to better leverage opportunities created for gender equality through legislation, policies and program.

- Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) and UN-Women have worked in collaboration with each other to promote participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), to focus on building capacities of Elected Women Representatives to empower them and enhance their effectiveness.

- The proposed MoU will facilitate the achievement of time-bound results in the implementation of specific activities identified jointly by MoPR and UN Women within the broader framework for cooperation under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

➲Need to make people aware about the negative impact of Arsenic

- The need to make people aware about the negative impact of Arsenic in Ganga basin area. Addressing a workshop on Arsenic problem in ground water and its remediation in Ganga Basin

- An exhaustive work plan to meet the challenges posed by presence of arsenic in ground water on the basis of the outcome of this workshop.

- There is an urgent need to start a nationwide movement to make people aware about the arsenic problem.

- Everyone right from an individual to government including social organizations and NGOs has to join hand to make this movement a success.

- High value of arsenic in groundwater is geogenic in nature, but as a large population is dependent on groundwater resources for drinking purposes in Ganga basin and is under the risk of health hazards,
- It becomes emergent to go for mitigation measures as well as alternate sources of water so that locals can be protected from negative impact of arsenic in groundwater.
- Arsenic in ground water is a geogenic contaminant i.e. caused by natural geologic processes. Arsenic-containing groundwater in Ganga River basin is hosted by the sediments deposited by the rivers during the late Quaternary or Holocene age (<12 thousand years).
- Incidence of high arsenic in groundwater reported from various parts of the country, particularly in

the Ganga- plains is a serious threat to the health of human being.

- Over the last three decades numerous measures have been initiated which includes alternate arrangement for supply of arsenic free water to the affected populace and providing arsenic removal plants.

- Arsenic occurrences in ground water in these areas are highly sporadic in nature and all the sources in these areas are not necessarily contaminated.

- Technological options to combat arsenic menace, in groundwater, to ensure supply of arsenic free water, in the affected areas can be in-situ remediation of arsenic from aquifer system, ex-situ remediation of arsenic from tapped groundwater by arsenic removal technologies, use of surface

water source as an alternative to the contaminated groundwater source, tapping alternate safe aquifers for supply of arsenic free groundwater or combination of above techniques.

➱ Gender biases have no place in modern India where inclusive development is a key objective

- Government is equally concerned at the rising rate of violent crimes against women. It is inexcusable that women in India do not feel as secure and safe as they should.

- Gender biases have no place in modern India where inclusive development is a key objective.

- A greater emphasis on early sensitization of children and youth in schools and institutions of higher learning would help inculcate due respect for the female gender.

- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign has been launched in response to the falling Child Sex Ratio in many parts of our country. It is designed to also motivate girl children in every part of our country to enroll in primary education.

➲**Ministry of Railways and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) signed Letters of Intent(LOI) on Environment Initiatives**

- Indian Railways and UNEP signed and exchanged Letters of Intent for exploring the opportunity and Developing a Joint cooperation mechanism in the field of Environment& Sustainability

- The focussed areas identified for joint activities would be to;

a.Collaborate in Formulating Specific Roadmap for achieving 20% reduction in Water consumption at Railway establishments.

b.Collaborate in the development of a Draft action plan for establishing waste management centres at major stations on Indian Railways.

c.Collaborate in the development of a Draft action plan for Indian Railways on sustainable public procurement for green technology.

- The priority in Railways is to reduce the carbon footprints which will help public at large. After this partnership, opportunities are large to work for environment conservation in collaboration with UNEP.

- Railway is already taking several green initiatives and is going to produce 1000MW solar energy. This joint co-operation will help Indian Railways in its green objectives.
- Indian Railways is an iconic organization which provides environment friendly transport. The focus of this partnership is on three main areas: waste management which is important for community, reduction in water consumption which is core of environment issues and sustainable public procurement.
- Indian Railways is a major procurement agency. The focus should be to move towards a greener state. Indian Railways under the reformist leadership of Minister of Railways will sure move towards greener and efficient transport system.

- Indian Railways, the lifeline of the country, with carrying 23 million passengers every day is the largest passenger carrying system in the world.

- It is also the largest consumer of water as well as electricity and major contributor to green environment due to reduced GHG emissions. Indian Railways have been taking a number of steps towards Water Management, Energy Conservation, Solid Waste Management and Green buildings. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is the leading organization within the United Nations system in the field of environment and has as a major area of focus of its global mandate, the conservation, protection, enhancement and support of nature and natural resources worldwide.

➲Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2016 passed in the Parliament

- The Lok Sabha has passed the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2016 today. The Bill had already been passed by the Rajya Sabha during the Winter Session. With this, the Bill stands passed in the Parliament.

The Bill seeks to amend the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 to provide for the following:-

(i) Maternity leave available to the working women to be increased from 12 weeks to 26 weeks for the first two children.

(ii) Maternity leave for children beyond the first two will continue to be 12 weeks.

(iii) Maternity leave of 12 weeks to be available to mothers adopting a child below the age of three months as well as to the "commissioning mothers". The commissioning mother has been defined as biological mother who uses her egg to create an embryo planted in any other woman.

(iv) Every establishment with more than 50 employees to provide for crèche facilities for working mothers and such mothers will be permitted to make four visits during working hours to look after and feed the child in the crèche.

(v) The employer may permit a woman to work from home if it is possible to do so.

(vi)Every establishment will be required to make these benefits available to the women from the time of her appointment.

➲ <mark>**Sagar Parikrama Project**</mark>

- Project 'Sagar Parikarma' was launched in 2007. The objective of the project was solo-circumnavigation of the Globe in a sailboat.

- 'Sagar Parikarma II' was undertaken with a solo 'non-stop' circumnavigation by another Naval Officer.

- The objectives of Sagar Parikarma I & II were:

(i) To inspire the youths of India to develop an understanding of the sea and a sense of adventure and spirit.

(ii) To instill in the young officers of the Navy a sense of national pride and achievement through a successful solo-circumnavigation voyage.

- Action against black money is an on-going process. Such actions include policy-level initiatives, effective enforcement action on the ground, putting in place robust legislative and administrative frameworks, systems and processes with due focus on capacity building and integration and mining of information through increasing use of information technology.

- Recent major steps in this regard include –

(i) Constitution of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Black Money under Chairmanship and Vice-Chairmanship of two former Judges of Hon'ble Supreme Court,

(ii) Enactment of a comprehensive law – 'The Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and

Imposition of Tax Act, 2015' to specifically deal with black money stashed away abroad,

(iii) Constitution of Multi-Agency Group (MAG) consisting of officers of Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) for investigation of recent revelations in Panama paper leaks,

(iv) Proactively engaging with foreign governments with a view to facilitate and enhance the exchange of information under Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs)/Tax Information Exchange Agreements (TIEAs)/Multilateral Conventions,

(v) Proactively furthering global efforts to combat tax evasion/black money, inter alia, by joining the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement in respect of Automatic Exchange of Information

(AEOI) and having information sharing arrangement with USA under its Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA),

(vi) Renegotiation of DTAAs with other countries to bring the Article on Exchange of Information to International Standards and expanding India's treaty network by signing new DTAAs and TIEAs with many jurisdictions to facilitate the exchange of information and to bring transparency,

(vii)   Enabling attachment and confiscation of property equivalent in value held within the country where the property/proceeds of crime is taken or held outside the country by amending the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002 through the Finance Act, 2015,

(viii)   Enactment of the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016 to amend the

Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, 1988 with a view to, inter alia, enable confiscation of Benami property and prosecution of benamidar and the beneficial owner,

(ix) Initiation of the information technology based 'Project Insight' for strengthening the non-intrusive, information driven approach for improving tax compliance, and

(x) Launching of 'Operation Clean Money' on 31st January 2017 for collection, collation and analysis of information on cash transactions, extensive use of information technology and data analytics tools for identification of high risk cases, expeditious e-verification of suspect cases and enforcement actions in appropriate cases, which include searches, surveys, enquiries, assessment of income, levy of taxes, penalties, etc. and filing of prosecution

complaints in criminal courts, wherever applicable.

➥ <mark>**Indian Railways Initiatives To Improve Sanitation /cleanliness**</mark>

- Regular intensive campaigns/drives have been organised over the Indian Railways with the sole objective towards significant and sustainable improvements in cleanliness standards of Trains and Railway premises, including Railway stations.

- Some of the major initiatives taken by Indian Railways towards improvement of sanitation/cleanliness are as follows:

(i) Pace of fitment of bio-toilets in coaches has been increased. More than 25000 bio-toilets were fitted in the last two years and target for this year is 30,000. Fitment of Bio-toilets in coaches will prevent

discharge of human waste during train journeys directly onto the track.

(ii) The facility of On-Board Cleaning has been extended to more than 800 trains which is being monitored through a closed loop 'APP' based passenger feedback system.

(iii) Railways are resorting to SMS-based, web-based and APP-based complaint redressal system. Daily IVRS-based passenger feedback is randomly being taken from about 1 lakh passengers.

(iv) To assess the impact of cleanliness efforts at major stations, a third party survey on cleanliness indicators has been done at 407 stations in 2016 involving feedback from 1.3 lac passengers.

(v) Additional toilets at Railway Stations, including Pay & Use toilets, have been provided.

(vi) Enforcement of Indian Railways (Penalties for activities affecting cleanliness at railway premises) Rules, 2012 has been intensified.

(vii)   Use of CCTVs extended for monitoring of cleanliness activities at major stations.

(viii)   Weekly intensive cleanliness drives have been undertaken at various Railway stations, by Zonal Railways.

(ix) Various theme-based drives have been undertaken from time to time with focus on cleanliness in different areas of Railways.

➲ **Strengthening Disaster Management**

- National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) defines the roles and responsibilities of various stake holders

including Central Ministries/ Departments, State Governments, UT Administrations, District Authorities and local self Governments.

- NDMP enjoins all stakeholders to develop detailed plans in accordance with roles and responsibilities. Implementation of the plan is a continuous process.

- Primary responsibility of disaster management rests with the States. The Central Government conducts regular mock drill, community training and awareness programme to prepare the civilian populations for disasters.

- The details of leveraging various technologies to enhance the efficiency of the disaster risk management efforts by the NDMA are as under:

(a)   National Disaster Management Services (NDMS) :

National Disaster Management Services (NDMS)

was conceived by NDMA during the Financial Year 2015-16 for setting up of Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) Network connecting MHA, NDMA, NDRF, 36 State/ UT HQrs and 81 vulnerable districts (total 120 locations). The NDMS Pilot Project envisages holding of workshops & imparting of training for the Capacity Building of disaster managers on usage of Communication equipments covered in the project.

- Uses of these Maps and Atlases:
1. Land Use Zoning and better habitat planning
2. Useful for leaders and policy makers, engineers, architects, disaster management professionals etc.
3. Formulation of Public & Financial Policies dealing with DM and Emergency Planning
4. An aid for setting up techno-legal framework.
5. Useful for Insurance Agencies

6. At the sub-district level shall be useful in preparing DPRs to be taken up under the Smart Cities Projects and various projects under the Housing for All (Urban) Mission of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana etc.

7. The concerned authorities may identify the districts requiring priority action in future planning, formulating integrated mitigating policies covering awareness, education and training, preventive and preparedness measures, improvement in warning systems.

(c) Geographical Information System (GIS) :

Leveraging the technology of GIS, NDMA have taken up a project for disaster risk management Objective of the project is to integrate data obtained from various stakeholders on GIS platform to increase disaster preparedness, mitigation, damage assessment, response and relief management efforts

➥ <mark>**Third Generation Nuclear Reactors**</mark>

- Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) has designed Advanced Heavy Water Reactor (AHWR) for utilisation of Thorium.

- This reactor has several passive safety systems and runs on coolant flow by natural circulation. It meets all the post Fukushima requirements and can withstand severe accidents without exposing radiation in the environment.

- It meets all the safety features of 3rd generation reactors. AHWR design has been reviewed by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) and Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) has accorded pre-licensing approval.

- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully launched 104 satellites, in a single launch, onboard India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle 'PSLV-C37 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota.

- These satellites include - (i) India's Cartosat-2 Series Satellite (weighing 714 kg) as primary payload, (ii) two Indian Nano-Satellites viz., INS-1A & 1B (together weighing 18.1 kg) and (iii) 101 foreign nano-satellites (together weighing 645.9 kg) from six countries as co-passengers.

- Out of the 104 satellites launched in this mission, 101 nano satellites were from foreign countries viz. Israel (1), Kazakhstan (1), The Netherlands (1), Switzerland (1), UAE (1) and USA (96).

- These nano satellites from foreign countries were launched under a commercial arrangement between Antrix Corporation Limited (Antrix), the commercial arm of ISRO and the foreign customer.
- After Chandrayaan-1 and India's first interplanetary mission 'Mars Orbiter Mission', the feasibility of future inter-planetary missions to Mars and Venus are under discussion and presently a study team is exploring various options and opportunities for such missions.

➲Reforms in Education Sector

- The Government is committed to provide equitable access to quality education to all, across all levels from primary to university level, for which reforms

are undertaken in the education sector as a continuous and ongoing process.

- The 42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976 brought about a fundamental change by transferring education from the State List to the Concurrent List recognizing the federal structure of our country and giving equal responsibility to both the Central and State Governments to promote education.

- Recognizing the centrality of states both in policy formulation and effective implementation of education reforms, the Ministry of HRD has been regularly convening meetings of the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE), which is a composite body and is also the highest advisory body on education.

- All the schemes implemented by the Government of India are in consultation with the States which meet regularly through the meetings of CABE. Similarly, all

reform initiatives are also through consensus evolved between the Centre and the States through the CABE.

- Presently, various initiatives, such as, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), ICT in Schools, Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Teacher Education (CSSTE), Shaala Siddhi, Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan are being implemented which envisage significant reforms in the elementary education and secondary education. In higher education also, Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), Global Initiative for Academics Network (GIAN), Impacting Research, Innovation & Technology (IMPRINT), Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme(TEQIP), Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers and

Teaching (PMMMNMTT), Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), National Digital Library, campus connect programme, Uchhatar Avishkar Abhiyan, Unnat Bharat Abhiyan are being implemented to improve the quality of higher education in the country. A number of initiatives are also undertaken by UGC and AICTE for quality improvement in higher and technical education. With a view to improving the competitiveness of the higher educational institutions, the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) has been launched.

➲ Cabinet approves four GST Bills

- The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the following four GST related bills:

1. The Central Goods and Services Tax Bill 2017 (The CGST Bill)

2. The Integrated Goods and Services Tax Bill 2017 (The IGST Bill)

3. The Union Territory Goods and Services Tax Bill 2017 (The UTGST Bill)

4. The Goods and Services Tax (Compensation to the States) Bill 2017 (The Compensation Bill)

- The above four Bills have been earlier approved by the GST Council after thorough, clause by clause, discussion over 12 meetings of the Council held in the last six months.

- The CGST Bill makes provisions for levy and collection of tax on **intra-state** supply of goods or services for both by the Central Government. On the other hand, IGST Bill makes provisions for levy and collection of tax on **inter-state** supply of goods or services or both by the Central Government.

- The UTGST Bill makes provisions for levy on collection of tax on **intra-UT** supply of goods and services in the Union Territories without legislature. Union Territory GST is akin to States Goods and Services Tax (SGST) which shall be levied and collected by the States/Union Territories on intra-state supply of goods or services or both.

- The Compensation Bill provides for **compensation** to the states for loss of revenue arising on account of implementation of the goods and services tax for a period of five years as per section 18 of the Constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) Act, 2016.

- **Background:**

- The Government is committed to early introduction of GST, one of the biggest reforms, in the country as early as possible. GST Council has decided 1st July as the date of commencement of GST. The Finance Minister in his Budget Speech has mentioned that country-wide outreach efforts will be made to explain the provisions of GST to Trade and Industry.

➲Graded Action Plan to reduce Urban Air Pollution

- "The Government has notified a Graded Response Action Plan for Delhi and NCR, which comprises measures such as prohibition on entry of trucks into Delhi; ban on construction activities, introduction of odd and even scheme for private vehicles, shutting of schools, closure of brick kilns, hot mix plants and stone crushers; shutting down of Badarpur power plant, ban on diesel generator sets, garbage burning in landfills and plying of visibly polluting vehicles etc.

- The nature, scope and rigor of measures to be taken is linked to levels of pollution viz. Severe + or Emergency, severe, Very poor, Moderate to poor and Moderate, after due consideration by authorities concerned. The actions are to be implemented in the

entire NCR. Besides, action related to stubble burning is to be implemented by Government of Punjab.

- Major strategies/steps to tackle increasing air pollution in Indian cities and urban areas include control and mitigation measures related to emissions from automobiles, industrial activities, notification of National Ambient Air Quality Standards; formulation of environmental regulations / statutes; setting up of monitoring network for assessment of ambient air quality; introduction of cleaner / alternate fuels like gaseous fuel (CNG, LPG etc.), ethanol blending; promotion of cleaner production processes; launching of National Air Quality Index; universalization of BS-IV by 2017.

➲ Measurement of Emissions

- "Emission Intensity is calculated by dividing 'Total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions' by 'Total Gross Domestic Product (GDP)' of a country.

- India has committed to reduce emissions intensity of its GDP in its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

- Goal of reducing Emissions intensity of GDP allows a country to reduce its emissions even while its GDP grows. The NDC was framed by adopting an inclusive process of consultations with key Ministries, State Governments, civil society organisations, think-tanks, and technical and academic institutions. Each country has chosen its own metric for climate action. Many other developing countries also use Emission Intensity of GDP for the purpose.

- Each Mission under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) is independently anchored by respective Ministries in-charge of implementing the Mission.

- Following the Paris Agreement, the Missions continue to contribute to the declared goal of reduction of emissions intensity of GDP as also other sustainable development goals outlined in the NDC."

➲Preservation of Biodiversity and Resources

- "Some important steps taken by the Government for preservation of biodiversity and resources inter alia include:

  1. survey, inventorization, taxonomic validation and threat assessment of floral and faunal resources;

  2. assessment of the forest cover to develop an accurate database for planning and monitoring;

establishment of a Protected Area Network of National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation and Community Reserves;

3. designating Biosphere Reserves for conservation of representative ecosystems; undertaking of species oriented programmers, such as Project Tiger and Project Elephant;

4. Complemented with ex-situ conservation efforts. In addition, Biological Diversity Act 2002 has also been enacted with the aim to conserve biological resources of the country and regulation of access to these resources to ensure equitable sharing of benefits arising out of their use, under which a National Biodiversity Authority and State Biodiversity Boards in all States have been set up for implementing the provisions of the Act.

➲Making Medical Education accessible to all

- In case of Government medical colleges, the respective State Governments are responsible for fixation of fees. However, in the case of private unaided medical colleges, the fee structure is decided by a Committee set up by the respective State Governments under the Chairmanship of a retired High Court Judge in pursuance of the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

- It is for the Committee to decide whether the fee hike proposed by an Institute is justified and the fee fixed by the Committee is binding on the Institute.

- The following three Centrally Sponsored Schemes are being run by Central Governmentto make medical education accessible to all:

i.Strengthening/upgradation of State Government

Medical Colleges for starting new PG courses/Increase of PG seats with fund sharing between the Central and State Government.

ii. Establishment of New Medical Colleges by upgrading district/referral hospitals preferably in underserved districts of the country with fund sharing between the Central Government and States.

iii. Strengthening/ upgradation of existing State Government/Central Government Medical Colleges to increase MBBS seats with fund sharing between the Central Government and States.

➲ National Framework for Malaria Elimination

The aims of the National Framework for Malaria Elimination in India 2016-2030 are:

1. To Eliminate malaria (zero indigenous cases) throughout the entire country by 2030; and

2. Maintain malaria-free status in areas where malaria transmission has been interrupted and prevent re-introduction of malaria.

Objectives:

1.Eliminate malaria from all 26 States including 15 low (Category 1) and 11 moderate (Category 2) transmission States/Union Territories (UTs) by 2022;

2.Reduce the incidence of malaria to less than 1 case per 1000 population per year in all States and UTs and their districts by 2024;

3.Interrupt indigenous transmission of malaria throughout the entire country, including all 10 high transmission States and Union Territories (Category 3) by 2027; and

4. Prevent the re-establishment of local transmission of malaria in areas where it has been eliminated and

maintain national malaria-free status by 2030 and beyond.

➲Forecast of Natural Disasters by ISRO

- ISRO is working on systems to forecast the natural disasters that could be used as input by States/ disaster management agencies.

- ISRO is carrying out studies to facilitate best use of the satellite derived information to develop methodologies for forecasting the natural disasters. Some of such methodologies developed include:

i.Cyclone formation, track and Intensity: ISRO has developed methodologies for forecasting the cyclone formation, it's track and intensity using satellite based observation. The methodology developed has been transferred to India meteorological Department (IMD) who is mandated for cyclone forecast.

ii. <u>Flood Early Warning System:</u> The North Eastern Space Applications Centre (NESAC) of ISRO has developed the Flood Early Warning System (FLEWS) as a Research & Development (R&D) project in Assam State in association with Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA). The FLEWS model is being used in all 25 flood prone districts of Assam. Another model for forecasting floods in Godavari floodplains in Andhra Pradesh is developed by National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) of ISRO. The methodology is being used by Central Water Commission (CWC). ISRO is developing similar systems for Krishna, Brahmani-Baitarani, Ghagra, Gandak, and Kosi rivers.

iii.<u>Heavy Rainfall/ cloud burst alerts:</u> Space Applications Centre (SAC) of ISRO has developed a

model, for heavy rainfall / cloud burst alerts, which is being experimentally carried out for Indian region. The information is made available on ISRO's MOSDAC (Meteorological & Oceanographic Satellite Data Archival Centre) website.

iv. <u>Rainfall triggered landslide alerts for the Uttarakhand Region:</u> An experimental early warning system for rainfall triggered landslides is developed for use along the pilgrimage route corridors leading to Gangotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath as well as along the Pithoragarh-Malpa route in Uttarakhand. The forewarning is generated based on the statistical relation between the terrain (geological, morphological) and temporal (primarily long term rainfall events) factors.

v. <u>Extreme weather events:</u> ISRO has developed experimental methodologies for early warning extreme weather events such as heat wave using numerical weather predictions. The information derived is being made available on the MOSDAC website.

➲ <mark>**Manglev Transport Method**</mark>

- Indian Railways (IR) have floated an Expression of Interest (EoI) for designing, building, commissioning, operation, running and maintenance of levitation based train system on Public Private Partnership (PPP) basis. The salient features of the levitation based transportation system are as under:-

  1. It is planned to be built on either elevated columns or underground.

2. Very high speeds can be achieved in such a ground based transport system.

3. The Specially designed vehicle carrying passengers / goods shall float above track or ground magnets by using principle of magnet attraction / repulsion.

4. Riding comfort of such vehicles is expected to be very good.

5. The levitation based trains shall be powered by electricity.

6. The project is envisaged to be implemented on PPP basis.

➲ Implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

- The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the designated scheme for implementation of the Right of the Child to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, with the aim of universalizing elementary education.

- National University of Educational and Planning and Administration (NUEPA) annually collects information in the form of Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) on various educational indicators. SSA has made significant progress in achieving near universal access and equity.

- As per UDISE 2015-16, enrolment in elementary schools has increased from 18.78 crore in 2009-10 to 19.67 crore children. There has been a significant

reduction in the number of out of school children in the 6-14 years age group

➲ **<u>Measures to provide 24x7 Affordable and Environment Friendly 'Power For All' by 2019</u>**

- Ministry of Power has taken several measures to provide 24X7 affordable and environment friendly 'Power for All' by 2019. This was stated by Shri Piyush Goyal, Minister of State (IC) for Power, Coal & New and Renewable Energy and Mines in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha today. The measures inter-alia, include the following:-

i. Electrification of 18,452 un-electrified villages (as on 1/4/2015): As on 20/03/2017, 12,661 villages have been electrified.

ii. Preparation of state specific action plans for 24X7 Power for All, covering adequacy of generation, transmission capacity and distribution system: 24X7 Power for All documents have been signed with 35 States/UTs.

iii. Launching of scheme called Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) for rural areas: The scheme provides for (a) separation of agriculture and non-agriculture feeders; (b) strengthening and augmentation of sub-transmission and distribution infrastructure in rural areas including metering at distribution transformers, feeders and consumers end; and (c) rural electrification.

iv.Launching of Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS) for urban areas: The scheme provides

for (a) strengthening of sub-transmission and distribution networks in urban areas; (b) metering of distribution transformers/feeders/consumers in urban areas; and (c) IT enablement of distribution sector and strengthening of distribution network.

v. Operationalization of Power System Development Fund (PSDF): PSDF shall be utilized for the project proposed by distribution utilities for (a) creating necessary transmission system of strategic importance; (b) installation of shunt capacitors etc. for improvement of voltage profile in the grid; (c) installation of standard and special protection schemes; and (d) Renovation and Modernisation of transmission and distribution systems for relieving congestion; etc.

vi. Launching of Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY): The scheme has been launched for operational and financial turnaround of Discoms.

vii. Measures initiated for reducing the generation cost of coal based power projects:

(a) Increasing supply of domestic coal;
(b) Coal usage flexibility
(c)Rationalization of coal linkages

➲ Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana

- Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY) aims for integrated development of selected villages having more than 50% Scheduled Caste (SC) population through implementation of existing scheme of Central and State Governments in a convergent manner and

by utilization of gap filling funds provided as Central Assistance.

- The scheme was launched in 2009-10 on a pilot basis, for the integrated development of 1000 villages in 5 States viz. Himachal Pradesh (Northern Region), Bihar (Eastern Region), Rajasthan (Western Region), Tamil Nadu (Southern Region) and Assam (North-Eastern Region) and further extended in 2015 to another 1500 villages in Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Haryana. Works and programmes taken up under PMAGY in the identified States include inter alia, construction of village roads, community halls/meeting places, community toilets, drainage works, installation of hand pumps, solar powered street lights, drinking water scheme etc.

- As per scheme, details for a village to be declared as Adarsh village a minimum of three of the targets listed below have to be achieved by the end of the third year of implementation of PMAGY:-

1. As far as possible, elimination of poverty, but reduction in its incidence by at least 50% within three years.

2. Universal adult literacy

3. 100% enrolment and retention of children at the elementary stage (I-VIII).

4. Reduction of infant mortality rate (per thousand live births) to 30 and maternal mortality rate (per lakh) to 100, by 2012.

5. Village should fulfill the Nirmal Gram Puraskar norms of the Deptt. Of Drinking Water Supply, M/o

Rural Development, ie, these villages should be 100 % open defecation free

6. Access to safe drinking water facility to all villagers on a sustainable basis.

7. 100% institutional deliveries for pregnant women

8. Full immunization of children

9. Achieving all weather road connectivity to the village

10. 100% registration of deaths and births in the village

11. No child marriages, and child labour

12. No public consumption of liquor and other intoxicating substances

13. 100% allotment of Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana(PMGAY) houses to all eligible families

➲Ratification of Kyoto Protocol

- "The Government of India has decided to ratify the Second Commitment Period (2013- 2020) of the Kyoto Protocol. Developing countries like India have no mandatory mitigation obligations or targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

- The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) under the Kyoto Protocol enables developed countries to invest in "Clean" projects in developing countries to gain emissions credits (Certified Emission Reduction-CER). Indian Industry has benefited from trading in CERs in the international market. Of late, due to lack of demand internationally, prices of CERs have been very low leading to low activities under this

mechanism."

➲ Extreme Changes in Climate

- "As per the fifth Assessment report (AR5) of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published in 2014, globally averaged combined land and ocean surface temperature has risen by 0.85 0C (0.65 to 1.06) over the period 1880 to 2012. Many extreme weather and climate events like heat waves, heavy precipitation and tropical cyclones have been observed since about 1950.

- According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), in line with rising temperatures across the globe, all India mean temperatures have risen nearly 0.60 C over the last 110 years.

- Further IMD studies have highlighted that extreme events like heat waves have risen in the last 30 years.

Similarly, trends in extreme rainfall events in last century showed significant positive trend over the west coast and north western parts of peninsula.

- The Government has launched the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in June 2008 to deal with the climate change and related issues.

- NAPCC comprises of eight Missions in specific areas of solar energy, enhanced energy efficiency, habitat, water, sustaining Himalayan ecosystems, forestry, agriculture and strategic knowledge for climate change, which addresses the issues relating to mitigation of greenhouse gases and adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change on environment, forests, habitat, water resources and agriculture.

➲ National Biodiversity Congress

- "A conference on "Mainstreaming Biodiversity for Sustainable Development" was held at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, as part of the National Biodiversity Congress on February 23-24.

- The issues discussed in the conference included: mainstreaming biodiversity for nutritional security and well being, sustainable utilization and benefit sharing, landscape approaches to biodiversity conservation, empowering Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs), conservation of indigenous breeds and varieties, Peoples Biodiversity Registers, control of invasive species etc.

- The major outcomes were prioritizing the major threats to biodiversity, and mainstreaming biodiversity for nutritional security and well-being.

The conference has brought out about 40 recommendations.

- An open forum conducted on February 22, 2017 during the National Biodiversity Congress discussed about local actions being taken for conservation of biodiversity, wherein several practical regional efforts for biodiversity conservation were identified.

➲ Early Warning for Tsunami and Earthquake

- The Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC), which is based at & operated by Indian National Center for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad has all necessary infrastructure and capabilities to give tsunami advisories to India as well as to Indian Ocean countries.

- ITEWC has been designated as one of the Regional Tsunami Service Providers for the entire Indian

Ocean Region by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(UNESCO)

- The ITEWC consists of national and international observational network of seismic stations, sea level gauge stations and tsunami buoys around the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Data from approximately 400 seismometers is being received in real-time and processed automatically to detect an earthquake of magnitude 4.0 and above anywhere on the globe.

- As soon as the earthquake is detected, warning centre transmits the first bulletin based on seismic data describing the location of earthquake, its magnitude, depth and other characters of the event. After issuing the first bulletin, seismic data are further analysed to improve the accuracy of earthquake

parameters(magnitude, depth and location). The processing of seismic data is optimized to detect and characterize large earthquakes within earliest possible time.

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