

## CURRENT AFFAIRS

### **1. GOVERNMENT ABOLISHES CURBS ON EXPORT OF PULSES- TO HELP FARMERS GET GOOD PRICES**

The **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs** has abolished all restrictions on export of pulses to allow farmers to seek remunerative prices for their output.

#### **Advantages to farmers**

- dispose of their products at remunerative prices
- encourage them to expand the area of sowing



#### **Production of pulses in India**

- India produced 23 million tonnes of pulses in 2016-17 and the government has set a target to produce 22.90 million tonnes in 2017-18.
- The Centre has acquired 20 million tonnes at market rates or minimum support price.

#### **Review committee on export and import policy for pulses**

The Cabinet's economic panel decided that the export and import policy for pulses will be reviewed by a committee of top officials, which would also be empowered to consider changes in import duties and impose quantitative restrictions on trade based on domestic and international production and demand trends

The committee will be chaired by the **Secretary in the Department of Food & Public Distribution** and will include the Secretaries in the Ministries of Commerce, Agriculture, Revenue and Consumer Affairs.

#### **Implications**

- It is expected that pulses production will be sustained and import dependence on pulses will come down substantially.
- This is also likely to provide higher levels of protein to the population and work towards nutritional security.

## 2. INDIAN SCIENTISTS AMONG SIGNATORIES TO BY SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS FROM 184 COUNTRIES

More than 120 Indian scientists are among the 15,364 scientists from 184 countries to endorse the second warning that the world's scientists have issued to humanity: not mending currently unsustainable ways of living could augur **“widespread misery” and “catastrophic biodiversity loss”**.

This is the first time that so many scientists are signatory to such a letter.



### **Background:**

The first warning, issued in 1992 and signed by 1,575 scientists, urged governments to take immediate action to prevent environmental degradation.

### **Their findings, published in the interdisciplinary journal Bioscience, show**

1. Declines in freshwater availability and the catch in global marine fisheries.
2. Biodiversity is disappearing at an alarming pace: between 1970 and 2012, the world's vertebrate populations declined by 58%.
3. Forest loss has been tabulated at 129 million hectares between 1990 and 2015, and both human and livestock populations have increased.

However, there is also good news: **ozone depletors such as chlorofluorocarbons in the atmosphere have declined, proving that change is possible.**

### **Their recommendations to “transition to sustainability”**

- halting conversion of natural habitats such as forests and grasslands,
- reducing food waste through education and better infrastructure,
- promoting new green technologies, and revising economies to reduce inequalities in wealth.

### **India in the Scene**

In a country like India, there is a need for both immediate and long-term solutions ,In the short term, it’s critical to limit further habitat loss and the expansion of new roads, mines and mega-projects into the last wild places, and to enlist the help and engagement of local communities wherever possible.

### **3. CROP RESIDUE-COAL MIX TO NIX STUBBLE BURNING - 'FARMERS TO GET RS. 5,500 PER TONNE'**

The government has directed the state-run power producer NTPC to mix crop residue pellets with coal for power generation in its thermal power plants in a bid to curb crop burning in Punjab and Haryana, one of the reasons behind the pollution crisis in Delhi and its neighbourhood.

#### **BACKGROUND**

- Step would reduce crop residue burning in agriculture dominated States like Punjab, Haryana, etc. and hence reduce air pollution that is currently being experienced.
- This step would earn farmers Rs. 5,500 per tonne of crop residue. The statement comes a day after the Ministry of Petroleum brought forward the deadline for the rollout of the cleaner BS-VI grade fuel in Delhi to reduce emissions.

#### **UPCOMINGS**

Ministry is in talks with State governments to make it mandatory to source 10% of their fuel from straw or crop residue for all power plants in their respective jurisdictions.

### **4. ARMY BEGINS PROCESS TO BUY INDIGENOUS SHORT-RANGE UAVS - TO BE DEVELOPED, MANUFACTURED IN INDIA BY PRIVATE INDUSTRY**

The Army has issued the Request for Information (RFI) for 60 short range Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) to be developed and manufactured in India by the private industry based on proven technology.



The government of India invited responses to the request only from Indian vendors. The vendors are to include their capability to indigenously design, develop and absorb the technology sought and provide life time support

#### **Aerial surveillance**

As per the specifications given, the UAV would be used for aerial surveillance over a large area by day and night for a sustained period and should have an altitude ceiling of 20,000 feet and a range of 200 km with a minimum endurance of 10 hours. It needs to have a service life of 20 years.

## 5. DIAMOND PRODUCERS TARGET INDIAN MARKET-‘BEING THE NATURAL HOME OF THE PRECIOUS STONE, INDIA HAS A VAST GROWTH POTENTIAL’

The Diamond Producers Association (DPA), the international alliance of world’s seven leading diamond mining companies —ALROSA, De Beers, Dominion Diamond, Gem Diamonds, Lucara Diamond, Petra Diamonds and Rio Tinto — is eyeing the Indian market to boost diamond consumption in the country.

The association has opened an office in India, the second in the world after the U.S. to work closely with various stakeholders to promote diamond besides making Indians realise the importance of diamond in history and in their lives.



### Promotional campaigns

It has also allocated a significant marketing budget towards promotional campaigns on diamond. Out of its total global marketing budget of \$70 million, DPA would spend \$7 million in India in 2018 and its first advertisement campaign in India — ‘Real is Rare. Real is Diamond’ — will be rolled out this month.

### Diamond consumption

- India, with a population of more than 1.25 billion, is a very small market for diamond trade.
- It accounts for 7% of global diamond consumption, while the U.S. consumes 47% of all diamonds produced, followed by 16% by China. Despite this, the DPA believes that the Indian market has a vast potential for growth and can grow more than the GDP of the country every year.
- Currently, India consumes about \$1.5 billion worth cut and polished diamonds.

DPA, whose members together represent more than 75% of the world’s diamond production, is working closely with the Gem Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) to build trade relationships, best practices and a strong consumer connect through various market development initiatives

## 6. RESTRICTIONS EASED AS POLLUTION DIPS IN DELHI - BAN ON ENTRY OF TRUCKS, ENHANCED PARKING CHARGES ROLLED BACK

Delhi breathed relatively easy as air quality remained outside the 'severe plus' category for a third consecutive day prompting authorities to withdraw strict emission-control measures enacted last week. The air quality index (AQI) in Delhi was in the 'very poor category' at 363

The ban on the entry of trucks carrying non-essential goods into Delhi as well as the enhancement of parking charges by four times were reversed.

These were among the provisions of the **Graded Response Action Plan that the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority** had ordered when particulate matter levels had remained in the 'severe plus' or 'emergency' level for more than 48 hours .



## 7. UDE DESH KA AAM NAAGRIK : CIVIL AVIATION MINISTRY'S REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY SCHEME "UDAN"

### UDAN – market viable bidding process

- UDAN is an innovative scheme to develop the regional aviation market.
- It is a market-based mechanism in which airlines bid for seat subsidies.
- This first-of-its-kind scheme globally will create affordable yet economically viable and profitable flights on regional routes so that flying becomes affordable to the common man even in small towns.
- the objective of the scheme was "**Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik**". this scheme will ensure affordability, connectivity, growth and development.
- It would provide a win-win situation for all stakeholders – citizens would get the benefit of affordability, connectivity and more jobs.

**INDIA BOARDS UDAN**

World's cheapest domestic air travel scheme, UDAN, was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Shimla on April 27, 2017

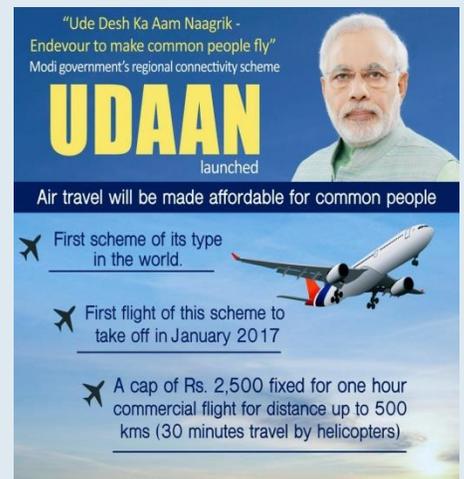
- Introduced by Civil Aviation Ministry under National Civil Aviation Policy unveiled in 2016
- UDAN is acronym for 'Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik'- meaning 'for every common man to fly'
- Three initial flights were launched in the routes Shimla-Delhi, Kadapa-Hyderabad and Nanded-Hyderabad
- Government aspires to connect unserved and underserved regions of the country through revival of existing airstrips and airports
- Airfare for a 1-hour journey of approximately 500 km on a fixed wing aircraft or for 30-minute journey on a helicopter would be capped at ₹ 2,500
- The seating capacity of aircraft under UDAN scheme will range from 19 to 78, and 50% of the seats in every flight will have a fare cap of ₹ 2,500 per seat per hour

**Advantages:**

- The Centre would be able to expand the regional air connectivity and market.
- The state governments would reap the benefit of development of remote areas, enhance trade and commerce and more tourism expansion.
- For incumbent airlines there was the promise of new routes and more passengers while for and start-up airlines there is the opportunity of new, scalable business.
- Airport operators will also see their business expanding as would original equipment manufacturers .

**UDAN**

- The scheme UDAN envisages providing connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports.
- The scheme would be in operation for a period of 10 years. UDAN has a unique market-based model to develop regional connectivity.
- Interested airline and helicopter operators can start operations on hitherto un-connected routes by submitting proposals to the Implementing Agency.
- The operators could seek a Viability Gap Funding (VGF) apart from getting various concessions.
- All such route proposals would then be offered for competitive bidding through a **reverse bidding mechanism** and the route would be awarded to the participant quoting the lowest VGF per Seat.



**What is reverse bidding?**

A reverse auction is a type of auction in which the roles of buyer and seller are reversed. In an ordinary auction (also known as a 'forward auction'), buyers compete to obtain goods or services by offering increasingly higher prices. In a reverse auction, the sellers compete to obtain business from the buyer and prices will typically decrease as the sellers underbid each other.

**Reverse bidding in UDAN:**

- The operator submitting the original proposal would have the Right of First Refusal on matching the lowest bid in case his original bid is within 10% of the lowest bid. The successful bidder would then have exclusive rights to operate the route for a period of three years.
- Such support would be withdrawn after a three year period, as by that time, the route is expected to become self-sustainable.

### Provisions under UDAN

- The selected airline operator would have to provide a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 40 UDAN Seats ( subsidized rates ) on the UDAN Flights for operations through fixed wing aircraft and a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 13 Seats on the Flights for operations through helicopters.
- On each such route, the minimum frequency would be three and maximum of seven departures per week.
- Route networks would also be encouraged under the scheme to achieve economies of scale and optimal usage of aircraft.

### Passenger fee

- The fare for a one hour journey of appx. 500 km on a fixed wing aircraft or for a 30 minute journey on a helicopter would now be capped at Rs. 2,500, with proportionate pricing for routes of different stage lengths / flight duration.

- **How this is achieved?**

This would be achieved through

- (1) a financial stimulus in the form of concessions from Central and State governments and airport operators and
- (2) a Viability Gap Funding to the interested airlines to kick-off operations from such airports so that the passenger fares are kept affordable.
- Central Government would provide concessions in the form of reduced excise duty, service tax, permission to trade ASKMs for Non-RCS (UDAN) Seats and flexibility of code sharing at the RCS (UDAN) airports.
- State governments will have to lower the VAT on ATF to 1% or less, besides providing security and fire services free of cost and electricity, water and other utilities at substantially concessional rates.
- Airport operators shall not impose Landing and Parking charge and Terminal Navigation Landing Charges in addition to discounts on Route Navigation Facility Charges.

### A Regional Connectivity Fund

- A Regional Connectivity Fund would be created to meet the viability gap funding requirements under the scheme.
- The RCF levy per departure will be applied to certain domestic flights.
- The partner State Governments (other than North Eastern States and Union Territories where contribution will be 10 %) would contribute a 20% share to this fund.
- For balanced regional growth, the allocations under the scheme would be equitably spread across the five geographical regions of the country viz. North, West, South, East and North-east.
- The States have a key role under the scheme. The selection of airports where UDAN operations would start would be done in consultation with State Government and after confirmation of their concessions.

- It may be recalled that revival of dysfunctional airports and starting operations on un-served airports has been a long standing demand of most States and this will be addressed through UDAN to a large extent.

#### **Advantages :**

The UDAN is likely to give a major fillip to tourism and employment generation in the hinterland. Through introduction of helicopters and small aircraft, it is also likely to significantly reduce travel timings in remote and hilly regions, as well as islands and other areas of the country.

#### **8. Myanmar troops accused of rape**

New York-based group Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused Myanmar's security forces of committing "widespread rape against women and girls as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing" during the past three months.

"Rape has been a prominent and devastating feature of the Burmese military's campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya," said Skye Wheeler, researcher at HRW who authored a report on the issue.

Recently Myanmar's Army had released a report denying all the allegations.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's National Human Rights Commission chief met UN Resident Coordinator to Bangladesh and pleaded that the officials responsible for the atrocities be brought to justice.

#### **9. CENTRE DOUBLES DOWN ON GST'S GAINS FOR CONSUMERS - Cabinet nod for National Anti-profiteering Authority; entity to ensure fair pricing**

##### **The National Anti-profiteering Authority**

- the Union Cabinet approved the creation of the National Anti-profiteering Authority to ensure that businesses pass on the benefits of GST to consumers.
- to ensure that the latest tax rate reductions approved by the GST Council on more than 200 items are implemented immediately by businesses.
- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the creation of the posts of Chairman and Technical Members of the National Anti-profiteering Authority (NAA) under GST, following up



immediately on yesterday's sharp reduction in the GST rates of a large number of items of mass consumption.

- This paves the way for the immediate establishment of this apex body, which is mandated to ensure that the benefits of the reduction in GST rates on goods or services are passed on to the ultimate consumers by way of a reduction in prices.

#### 10. The Bawariyas

- The Bawariyas are **natives of Rajasthan** and have now spread to Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and Uttarakhand. A large presence of this tribe can be found in **Muzzafarnagar's Jhinhana** area where nearly 24 villages are occupied by its members.
- **Only women and children** are found in their homes as men roam across the States to make "quick money."
- The tribe feels robbery, theft and dacoity are its traditional occupation. They have been committing these crimes for centuries and their modus operandi is similar as in the case of the recent gang rape. During nights, they waylay cars, steal in houses. Most important, they have a record of not sparing young women
- But it is almost impossible to believe that the Bawariyas have been criminals since their origin.
- The Census of India 1881 described them as a "**hunting community who derive their name from the word bawar or noose with which they snare wild animals.**"
- It also states that the Bawariyas are "much addicted to crime," thieving comes easily to them and their "skill in tracking wild animals is notorious."