



Daily Current Affairs

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Setu Bharatam

Why in news?

Recently The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways said that all Level Crossings on National Highways to be replaced by Overbridges and Underbridges.

Highlights:

- The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has envisaged a plan for replacement of all the level crossing on National Highways by Road Over Bridges (ROBs) or Road Under Bridges (RUBs) and replacement/widening/strengthening of weak and
- narrow bridges under a scheme Setu Bharatam to ensure safe and smooth flow of traffic and to reduced road fatalities by 50% by 2020.
- A total of 174 ROBs/RUBs are identified under Setu Bharatam scheme, and out of these 93 ROBs have already sanctioned for Rs 7,121 crore. Works of 57 ROBs have already been awarded.

Four Information Commissioners take oath of office in Central Information Commission

Why in news?

Recently Four Information Commissioners were administered the oath of office of the Information Commissioner, Central Information Commission(CIC) by the Chief Information Commissioner.

About Central Information Commission:

- The Central Information Commission was established by the Central Government in 2005. It was constituted through an Official Gazette Notification under the provisions of the Right to Information Act (2005). Hence, it is not a constitutional body.
- The Central Information Commission is a high-powered independent body which inter alia looks into the complaints made to it and decide the appeals.
- It entertains complaints and appeals pertaining to offices, financial institutions, public sector undertakings, etc., under the Central Government and the Union Territories.

COMPOSITION

- The Commission consists of a Chief Information Commissioner and not more than ten Information Commissioners. They are appointed by the President on the recommendation of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.
- They should be persons of eminence in public life with wide knowledge and experience in law, science and technology, social service, management, journalism, mass media or administration and governance.

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS:

The powers and functions of the Central Information Commission are:

1. It is the duty of the Commission to receive and inquire into a complaint from any person:

(a) who has not been able to submit an information request because of non-appointment of a Public Information Officer;

(b) who has been refused information that was requested;

(c) who has not received response to his information request within the specified time limits;

(d) who thinks the fees charged are unreasonable;

(e) who thinks information given is incomplete, misleading or false;
and

(f) any other matter relating to obtaining information.

2. The Commission can order inquiry into any matter if there are reasonable grounds (suo-moto power).

3. While inquiring, the Commission has the powers of a civil court in respect of the following matters:

(a) summoning and enforcing attendance of persons and compelling them to give oral or written evidence on oath and to produce documents or things;

(b) requiring the discovery and inspection of documents;

(c) receiving evidence on affidavit;

(d) requisitioning any public record from any court or office;

(e) issuing summons for examination of witnesses or documents; and

(f) any other matter which may be prescribed.

4. During the inquiry of a complaint, the Commission may examine any record which is under the control of the public authority and no such record may be withheld from it on any grounds. In other words, all public records must be given to the Commission during inquiry for examination.

5. The Commission has the power to secure compliance of its decisions from the public authority. This includes:

(a) providing access to information in a particular form;

(b) directing the public authority to appoint a Public Information Officer where none exists;

(c) publishing information or categories of information;

(d) making necessary changes to the practices relating to management, maintenance and destruction of records;

(e) enhancing training provision for officials on the right to

information;

(f) seeking an annual report from the public authority on compliance with this Act;

(g) requiring the public authority to compensate for any loss or other detriment suffered by the applicant;

(h) imposing penalties under this Act; and

(i) rejecting the application.

6. The Commission submits an annual report to the Central Government on the implementation of the provisions of this Act. The Central Government places this report before each House of Parliament.

7. When a public authority does not conform to the provisions of this Act, the Commission may recommend (to the authority) steps which ought to be taken for promoting such conformity.

Agri Export Zones

Why in news?

Recently Minister of State of Commerce and Industry, has given information about Agri Export Zones.

Highlights:

- The concept of Agri Export Zone (AEZ) was introduced in 2001, through EXIM Policy 1997-2001, to take a comprehensive look at a particular produce/product located in a contiguous area for the purpose of developing and sourcing the raw materials, their processing/packaging, leading to final exports.
- The concept hinged primarily on convergence of existing Central and State Government schemes to take care of financial interventions required at various stages of value chain; partnership among various stakeholders viz. Central Government, State Government, farmer,

processor, exporter etc.; and focus on targeted products and areas to identify required policy interventions.

- All these activities did take place in certain respects in the notified Agri Export Zones.
- The entire effort is centred around the cluster approach of identifying the potential products, the geographical region in which these products are grown and adopting an end-to-end approach of integrating the entire process right from the stage of production till it reaches the market.

Measures to promote exports from Agri Export Zone

i. Financial Assistance

- Both Central as well as State Government and their agencies are providing a variety of financial assistance to various agri export related activities.
- These extend from providing financial assistance for Training and Extension, R&D, Quality Upgradation, Infrastructure and Marketing etc.
- Central government Agencies like APEDA, NHB, Deptt. of Food Processing Industries, Ministry of Agriculture provide assistance, a number of State Governments have also extended similar facilities.
- All these facilities are dovetailed and extended to promote agri exports from the proposed Zones in a coordinated manner.
- Some additional features like providing grants from Market Access Initiative fund could also be considered.

ii. Fiscal Incentives

- The benefits under Export Promotion Capital Goods Scheme, which were hitherto available only to direct exporters, have now been extended to service exporters in the Agri Export zones.
- Even service provided to ultimate exporters will be eligible for import of capital goods at a concessional duty for setting up of common facilities.
- They shall fulfil their export obligation through receipt of foreign exchange from ultimate exporters who shall make the payments from their EEFC account.
- Exporters of value added agri products will be eligible for sourcing

duty free fuel for generation of power, provided the cost component of power in the ultimate product is 10% or more and the input-output norms are fixed by the advance licencing committee of the DGFT.

- In view of the power intensive nature of most of the value addition, almost all the exporters of value added agriculture produce will become eligible for such facility.
- Similarly, input-output norms can also be fixed for sourcing other inputs, like fertilizer, pesticides etc. duty free for cultivation purpose.

Benefits:

i) Strengthening of backward linkages with a market oriented approach.

ii) Product acceptability and its competitiveness abroad as well as in the domestic market.

iii) Value addition to basic agricultural produce.

iv) Bring down cost of production through economy of scale.

v) Better price for agricultural produce.

vi) Improvement in product quality and packaging.

vii) Promote trade related research and development.

viii) Increase employment opportunities.

RCEP Agreement

Why in news?

Recently Minister of State of Commerce and Industry explained benefits of RCEP agreement in Lok Sabha.

About RCEP Agreement:

- The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is

a proposed Free Trade Agreement between ten ASEAN member states and their six Free Trade Agreement (FTA) partners namely India, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and Republic of Korea.

- In 2017, prospective RCEP member states accounted for a population of 3.4 billion people with a total Gross Domestic Product (GDP, PPP) of \$49.5 trillion, approximately 39 percent of the world's GDP, with the combined GDPs of China and India making up more than half that amount.
- RCEP is the world's largest economic bloc, covering nearly half of the global economy.
- According to estimates by PwC, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP, PPP) of RCEP member states is likely to amount to nearly \$250 trillion by 2050, or a quarter of a quadrillion dollars, with the combined GDPs of China and India making up more than 75% of the amount. RCEP's share of the global economy could account for half of the estimated \$0.5 quadrillion global GDP (PPP) by 2050.

Benefits of RCEP Agreement:

- RCEP is expected to provide market access for India's goods and services exports and encourage greater investments and technology into India.
- It would also facilitate India's MSMEs to effectively integrate into the regional value and supply chains.
- On the other hand, India is not a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) which is a grouping of twenty-one countries in the Asia Pacific region with an aim to deepen and strengthen economic and technological cooperation amongst APEC member countries.
- The RCEP will form a platform to influence its strategic and economic status in the Asia-Pacific region, as when compared to TPP and TTIP, India's trade share with the RCEP group of countries as a percentage of its total trade has increased over the past decade and half, underlining the importance of its trade with key countries in this group.
- The RCEP would help India streamline the rules and regulations of doing trade, thus reducing the trade costs.
- India's goal of greater economic integration with countries East and South East will become smooth through better access to a vast

regional market ranging from Japan to Australia. The RCEP can be a stepping stone to India's "Act East Policy" as India is not a party to two important regional economic blocs: the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

- RCEP will facilitate India's integration into sophisticated "regional production networks" that make Asia the world's factory.
 - The RCEP is to collaborate trade-related rules, investment and competition regimes of India with those of other countries of the group. Using domestic policy reforms on these areas, Indian companies can plug into regional and global value chains and would be able to project the true potential of the Indian economy. There would be a boost to inward and outward foreign direct investment, particularly export-oriented FDI.
 - India already in areas such as information and communication technology, IT - enabled services, professional services, healthcare, and education services enjoys a comparative advantage. In addition, the RCEP will create opportunities for Indian companies to access new markets.
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