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PIB

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan (PM-SYM) Yojana

Why in news?

The Prime Minister launched the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan (PM-SYM) Yojana at Vastral in Gujarat.

Highlights:

- As many as 42 crore workers are estimated to be engaged in the unorganized sector of the country.
- The unorganised workers mostly engaged as home based workers, street vendors, mid-day meal workers, head loaders, brick kiln workers, cobblers, rag pickers, domestic workers, washer men, rickshaw pullers, landless labourers, own account workers, agricultural workers, construction workers, beedi workers, handloom workers, leather workers, audio-visual workers and similar other occupations whose monthly income is Rs 15,000/ per month or less and belong to the entry age group of 18-40 years are eligible for the scheme.
- They should not be covered under New Pension Scheme (NPS), Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme or Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO). Further, he/she should not be an income tax payer.

Salient Features of PM-SYM:

- **Minimum Assured Pension:** Each subscriber under the PM-SYM, shall receive minimum assured pension of Rs 3000/- per month after attaining the age of 60 years.
- **Family Pension:** During the receipt of pension, if the subscriber dies, the spouse of the beneficiary shall be entitled to receive 50% of the pension received by the beneficiary as family pension. Family pension is applicable only to spouse.
- If a beneficiary has given regular contribution and died due to any cause (before age of 60 years), his/her spouse will be entitled to join and continue the scheme subsequently by payment of regular contribution or exit the scheme as per provisions of exit and withdrawal.

Contribution by the Subscriber: The subscriber's contributions to PM-SYM shall be made through 'auto-debit' facility from his/ her savings bank account/ Jan- Dhan account. The subscriber is required to contribute the prescribed contribution amount from the age of joining PM-SYM till the age of 60 years.

Matching contribution by the Central Government: PM-SYM is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme on a 50:50 basis where prescribed age-specific contribution shall be made by the beneficiary and the matching contribution by the Central Government as per the chart. For example, if a person enters the scheme at an age of 29 years, he is required to contribute Rs 100/- per month till the age of 60 years. An equal amount of Rs 100/- will be contributed by the Central Government.

Enrolment Process under PM-SYM:

- The subscriber will be required to have a mobile phone, savings bank account and Aadhaar number. The eligible subscriber may visit the nearest CSCs and get enrolled for PM-SYM using Aadhaar number and savings bank account/ Jan-Dhan account number on self-certification basis.
- Later, facility will be provided where the subscriber can also visit the PM-SYM web portal or can download the mobile app and self-register using Aadhar number/ savings bank account/ Jan-Dhan account number on self-certification basis.

Enrollment agencies: The enrolment will be carried out by all the Community Service Centers (CSCs). The unorganised workers may visit their nearest CSCs along with their Aadhar Card and Savings Bank account passbook/Jandhan account and get registered themselves for the Scheme. Contribution amount for the first month shall be paid in cash for which they will be provided with a receipt.

Facilitation Centres: All the branch offices of LIC, the offices of ESIC/EPFO and all Labour offices of Central and State Governments will facilitate the unorganised workers about the Scheme, its benefits and the procedure to be followed, at their respective centers.

Fund Management: PM-SYM will be a Central Sector Scheme administered by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and implemented through Life Insurance Corporation of India and CSCs. LIC will be the Pension Fund Manager and responsible for Pension pay out. The amount collected under PM-SYM pension scheme shall be invested as per the investment pattern specified by Government of India.

Jewellery Park

Why in news?

The first-of-its-kind India Jewellery Park to come up at Navi Mumbai soon.

Highlights:

- Indian jewellery industry plays an important role in the economy of the country. It accounts for 7% of GDP and 14% of merchandise exports and provides direct employment to 5 million people.
- To enable it to innovate and cater to the global market, it is essential to provide a suitable ecosystem.
- Industry will achieve the export target of USD 75 billion by 2025, up from the current figure of USD 42 billion annually.

- Mumbai is the largest exporter of gem & jewellery, accounting for USD 28,320.94 million (69% of India's total exports of gems and jewellery).
- India Jewellery Park, the first-of-its-kind Jewellery Park, will transform the jewellery industry in the state of Maharashtra and India.
- Jewellery Park will generate additional 1 lakh jobs in the sector.
- India Jewellery Park, Mumbai is a project of Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC). GJEPC will be entrusted to construct the Park as a Special Purpose Vehicle.
- The project is planned with a total project investment of Rs.14,467 crore including land, building and raw materials, which will generate an annual turnover to the tune of Rs. 41,467.50 crore under current market conditions, a major part of which will be for exports.
- India Jewellery Park is expected to enhance manufacturing, investment, export growth and overall economic development of Maharashtra and India.

About GJEPC:

- The Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) was set up by the Ministry of Commerce and industry, Government of India in 1966.
 - It is the apex body of the gems & jewellery industry. Today, it represents over 6,800 exporters in the sector. With headquarters in Mumbai, the GJEPC has Regional Offices in New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Surat and Jaipur, all of which are major centres for the industry.
 - It thus has a wide reach and is able to have a close interaction with members to serve them in a direct and meaningful manner.
 - Over the past decades, the GJEPC has emerged as one of the most active EPCs, and has continuously strived to expand its reach and depth in its promotional activities as well as widen and increase services to its members.
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Exercise Al Nagah III

Why in news?

Exercise Al Nagah III, third in the series of bilateral joint exercise between India and Oman is scheduled to be held from 12 to 25 March 2019 at Jabel Al Akhdar Mountains in Oman.

Highlights:

- The exercise will see both the armies exchanging expertise and experience in tactics, weapon handling and firing, with an aim to enhance interoperability in counter terrorist operations in semi urban mountainous terrain.
 - India-Oman bilateral security ties have continued to develop since the beginning of India-Oman Joint Military Cooperation meetings in 2006.
 - Exercise Al Nagah III follows the first two joint exercises that were held in Oman in January 2015 and India in March 2017 respectively.
 - Similar exercises are also in vogue between the navies and air forces of both the nations thus underscoring the growing bilateral military and strategic partnership between the two important nations of Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
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Handloom Haat

Why in news?

Union Textiles Minister inaugurated the renovated Handloom Haat in New Delhi.

Highlights:

- The Haat at Janpath in New Delhi has been set up by Ministry of

Textiles to provide marketing opportunities to authentic handloom products from various States, PSUs and cooperative societies.

- Its main objective is to provide infrastructure support to handloom agencies to augment their sales of handloom products and to showcase the exquisite variety of handloom products produced all over the country.

VisionNxt

- Project related to trend innovation lab 'VisionNxt' initiative being set up by NIFT in the building will create an indigenous fashion forecasting service that endeavours to design seasonal directions for our country.
- The trend forecasting service would be aligned to our national and sub-national socio-cultural constructs and market requirements.
- The proposed service is based on the premise that fashion is a dynamic industry, depending on seasonal trends and forecast to predict its future direction.
- It will help handloom sector in production of handloom products as per market requirement in terms of trends, design and colour forecast.
- The project of Indian Textiles and Craft Repository Initiative of NIFT is supported by the DC Handlooms and the DC Handicrafts, Ministry of Textiles.
- The body of textile and craft knowledge generated through the Craft Cluster Initiative will be channelled into a national knowledge portal titled Indian Textile & Craft Repository.
- This repository will also house the virtual registers of the textiles and crafts resources, which are available in the Weaver Service Centres, the Crafts Museums, similar institutions and private collections.
- The repository will develop a virtual museum of textiles, and textile crafts, a designer archive, indigenous case studies, and also act as aggregator of online information on related research. Virtual museum will be set up having digitised resource of traditional archived pieces from museums, resource centres, weavers' service centres.
- It will also have contemporary pieces and collections from designers, fashion archives. This will help in easy sourcing of designs.

Aspirational Districts

Why in news?

Linking the Transformation of Aspirational Districts Programme with India's pursuit of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the NITI Aayog is organizing a conference on implementation of SDGs in Aspirational Districts.

Transformation of Aspirational Districts:

- India is on a high growth trajectory that is expected to lift millions out of poverty. However, presently the quality of life of many of its citizens is not consistent with this growth story, a fact reflected in UNDP's 2016 Human Development Index wherein we are ranked 131 out of 188 countries.
- A closer look at the data reveals high heterogeneity in the living standards in India. There are significant inter-state and inter-district variations.
- By uplifting the districts which have shown relatively lesser progress in achieving key social outcome, India can move ahead in the human development index.
- Launched in January 2018, the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' initiative aims to remove this heterogeneity through a mass movement to quickly and effectively transform these districts.

Core Strategy

The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a spirit of mass Movement. With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.

Selection of districts

The 112 districts were identified from 27 states, at least one from each state, in a transparent manner by a committee of Senior Officers to the Government of India, in consultation with State Officials using a composite index of key data sets that included deprivation enumerated under the Socio-Economic Caste Census, key health and education sector performance and state of basic infrastructure.

Institutional framework

- This programme is a policy priority of Government of India. NITI Aayog anchors the programme with support from Central Ministries and the State Governments. While NITI Aayog is steering the initiative in 30 districts, various central ministries oversee 50 districts besides the Ministry of Home Affairs, which focuses on 35 Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected districts.
- Officers at the level of Joint Secretary / Additional Secretary have been nominated to become the 'Central Prabhari Officers' of each district. States have appointed state-nodal and Prabhari officers. An Empowered Committee under the Convenorship of the CEO, NITI Aayog will help in the convergence of various government schemes and streamlining of efforts.

THE HINDU

Green crackers

Why in news?

The Supreme Court asked petitioners objecting to the use of chemicals like **barium nitrate** and **potassium nitrate** in the formulation of 'green crackers' to submit a reply detailing their stand on the issue.

"Green crackers" are so named because they "do not contain harmful chemicals" that would cause air pollution. Components in

firecrackers are replaced with others that are “less dangerous” and “less harmful” to the atmosphere.

SC direction:

- Bench gave the direction in response to a request made by advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, representing three toddlers who filed a writ petition against the toxic effects of firecrackers, urging that the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests examine the samples of green crackers which contain “conventional formulations” with **barium nitrate and potassium nitrate as oxidisers**.
- Mr. Sankaranarayanan had earlier submitted that these **two components are among the several toxic ingredients which the Supreme Court had previously red-flagged**.
- The usage of these chemicals in the improved/green crackers would be a violation of the Supreme Court’s orders against the use of noxious firecrackers.
- On October 23, the apex court had struck a balance between the interests of the firecracker industry and the **right to public health** by allowing licensed traders to manufacture and sell “**green**” and **reduced-emission or “improved” crackers** while banning those which are loud and toxic to man, animal and the environment.
- The latest turn of events come after participants at a meeting of the **CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI)** and fireworks’ manufacturers reached agreement on commencing bulk production of green crackers by March 30, the minutes of the meeting show.
- As per the minutes, an agreement was reached for manufacturers to submit product approval documents by March 7.
- The **Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation** could then provide approval for the improved formulation by March 21, and production of the green fireworks could start by March 30.

Generalized System of Preferences

Why in news?

U.S. President Donald Trump has announced that he intends to end **preferential trade terms** for India under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) programme.

About GSP:

- The GSP programme, which **sets zero tariffs for certain goods from a set of 121 developing countries** to foster their trade and economic development, accounts for some \$5.6 billion of India's exports to the U.S., making India the largest GSP beneficiary.
- **Chemicals, gems and jewellery, engineering and textiles** are among the Indian industrial sectors that benefit from the GSP.
- Mr. Trump's letter said that, I am taking this step because, after intensive engagement between the United States and the Government of India, I have determined that India has not assured the United States that it will provide equitable and reasonable access to the markets of India.
- From the U.S. perspective, a total of \$21 billion in imports entered the **U.S. duty-free** under the GSP in 2017, of a total of \$2.3 trillion in imports from all countries that year, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Review GSP eligibility:

- The United States Trade Representative (USTR) had said in October 2017 that it would review GSP eligibility based on the eligibility criteria, starting with a review of Asian and Pacific Island countries.
- A review of India's eligibility was launched last April. India has implemented a wide array of trade barriers that create serious negative effects on United States commerce. Despite intensive engagement, India has failed to take the necessary steps to meet the GSP criterion," the USTR said on its website.
- One of the discretionary criteria the President must (as per the GSP statute) take into account while determining GSP eligibility is whether the beneficiary **"will provide equitable and reasonable access** to its markets and basic commodity resources and the extent to which it

has assured the United States it will refrain from engaging in unreasonable export practices.”

Issues between two:

- India’s new e-commerce rules, which have impacted American companies like Amazon and Walmart (majority owner of Flipkart), price controls on medical devices (cardiac stents), tariffs on ICT products like smart watches and high-end mobile phones and lack of greater market access for the U.S. dairy industry are among the issues that have caused trade friction between the two countries.
- Mr Trump has repeatedly taken shots at India’s tariffs, which he views as unreasonable. He **called India “tariff king”** last October and as recently as last weekend, complained about Indian tariffs on Harley Davidson motorcycles, a long-standing pet-peeve of the U.S. President.
- India and the U.S. have been in focused trade talks since Washington imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium early last year, ostensibly on **grounds of national security**.
- India had made a list of products for retaliatory tariffs but has withheld taxing these, given ongoing negotiations.
- In diplomatic messaging in the U.S., Indian officials have been quick to bring up the declining trade surplus (over just over \$21 billion) that India has with the U.S.
- Trump is known to look at bilateral trade balances the U.S. has with other countries as a proxy for the “fairness” of trade with those countries.

Oil purchases:

- Oil is one of the new measures to increase India’s purchase of U.S. goods. Last month Indian Oil Corporation announced a \$1.5 billion deal to purchase oil from the U.S. until March 2020.
- India had imported over \$3 billion in U.S. oil in 2018, Indian government sources.

Notice Period:

- A mandatory 60 days must now pass after the notice has been given

to the beneficiary countries and to Congress during which time there is, at least technically, the possibility of negotiation. After the **60-day notice period**, a beneficiary country can be taken off of the GSP list by Presidential proclamation.

- Trump's letter to the two Congressional leaders also says, 'I will continue to assess whether the Government of India is providing equitable and reasonable access to its markets, in accordance with the GSP eligibility criteria.' It is not likely though that it will be re-negotiation of India's place under the system.
- Reversals are however possible, including over the longer term. Argentina, which lost GSP benefits under the Obama administration in 2012 for failing to pay arbitration awards in two disputes involving U.S. investors, saw them being reinstated by Presidential proclamation but not for all product categories effective January 2018.

Turkey to Lose GSP Benefits:

- A separate letter was sent to Congressional leaders by Mr. Trump saying he intended to withdraw Turkey from the list of GSP beneficiaries.
- However, the reasons were different: Mr. Trump said Turkey was no longer at a level of economic development that warranted preferential treatment.
- In particular, in the four and a half decades since Turkey's designation as a GSP beneficiary developing country, Turkey's economy has grown and diversified.

India-US Trade Tensions:

- The U.S. has ultimately acted on its threat to withdraw concessions granted to Indian imports under the Generalised System of Preferences.
- With President Trump indicating as much in a letter to the House of Representatives and Senate, Washington became the first to pull the trigger in a long trade stand-off between the two countries.
- India-U.S. trade tensions escalated last year when the U.S. took two consecutive decisions to increase import tariffs on steel and aluminium, and place India's eligibility for GSP benefits under review.
- Shortly after, India said it would impose retaliatory tariffs on imports from the U.S. and even notified the list of items on which these would

apply.

- Meanwhile, the U.S. stood fast on not exempting India from its tariff hikes, with Mr. Trump complaining about India's high import tariffs several times.
- The GSP review, however, stretched on, with the two countries holding frequent talks to address the concerns.
- India, for its part, postponed the deadline for the imposition of the retaliatory tariffs six times; the latest deadline is on April 1.
- Washington's decision to review India's GSP status stemmed from complaints from American medical and dairy industries, both of which said India was not providing "equitable and reasonable access to its market".
- India has said it had tried hard to cater to most of the U.S. demands and reach an understanding, but key points of difference, especially regarding India's cultural concerns to do with dairy products, could not be accommodated.
- Given this, and the fact that the U.S. has been expressing discontent over India's policies to do with data localisation and FDI rules in e-commerce, the decision to withdraw the GSP status should not come as a surprise.

India's Response:

- Following the U.S. announcement, the Commerce Ministry was quick to downplay the impact, saying the GSP benefits amounted to only \$190 million while India's total exports under GSP to the U.S. stood at \$5.6 billion.
- Indian officials have stressed that talks on the issue would still continue during the 60-day period after which the GSP decision would come into effect.
- The other option the government can exercise is to impose retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods.
- The government's efforts to downplay the impact of the withdrawal of GSP status and express readiness for more talks, however, suggest it is not keen to take a decisively strong stance.

Impacts:

- It bears emphasis that while the actual amounts at stake are relatively small, with even India's proposed tariffs on the U.S. amounting to just

\$900 million, the impact on small industries in the country could nevertheless be significant.

- Export bodies have already said that such industries would lose their market share in the U.S. without fiscal support to help them maintain their edge.

Way ahead:

- In its absence, orders meant for India could go to other GSP countries, signs of which are already evident.
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Fifteen of the 20 most polluted cities in the world are in India

Why in news?

Fifteen of the top 20 most polluted cities in the world are located in India, according to an analysis of air quality in several cities around the world.

Dubious Distinction:

- **Gurugram**, in Haryana, topped the list with an average annual particulate matter (PM 2.5) quality of 135 g/m³ (micrograms/cubic metre), in 2018.
- Delhi a frequent fixture on global pollution hotspots was only the 11th most noxious city behind Lahore, Pakistan (10th) and Hotan, China (8th).
- The other cities in India that made the list of 20 were Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Bhiwandi, Noida, Patna, Lucknow, Jodhpur, Muzaffarpur, Varanasi, Moradabad, Agra, Gaya and Jind.
- When ranked by country, **Bangladesh emerged as the most polluted followed by Pakistan and India respectively.**
- Of the cities analysed, 64% exceeded the **WHO's annual exposure guideline (10g/m³)** for fine particulate matter, also known as

PM2.5. India's annual guidelines range from 40-60 g/m³, depending on whether they are residential or industrial areas.

- Every single one of measured cities with data in the Middle East and Africa exceeded the WHO guideline, while 99% of cities in South Asia, 95% of cities in Southeast Asia and 89% of cities in East Asia breached this level.
- The ranking, a one of its kind studies that relies on ground-based sensors located in 3,000 cities from 73 countries was **compiled by IQAir Group**, a manufacturer of air-monitoring sensors as well as purifiers and environmentalist group Greenpeace.

Pollution hubs:

- Jakarta and Hanoi emerged as Southeast Asia's two most polluted cities and average concentrations in the cities in China fell by 12% from 2017 to 2018.
- Beijing ranks now as the 122nd most polluted city in the world in 2018 and China, the 12th most polluted country in the world.
- Of the countries analysed, **Iceland emerged as the one with the cleanest air.**

Why North India more polluted compared to South:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) recently released an updated list of most polluted cities globally. It turns out that if we rank cities on the basis of average annual PM2.5 concentration for the year 2018, 15 of the 20 most polluted cities are in India.
- The question that ensues is, why is the northern part of our country becoming the pollution capital of the world. Does the answer lie in the explosive growth in vehicular population or the incessant use of dirty fossil fuels by industries or in the unrestrained constructions with heaps of uncovered dust marring the landscape of our cities?
- While these are the major pieces of the pollution puzzle, the **inherent disadvantages of the Indo-Gangetic plain** stemming from its geographical location and soil composition cannot be ruled out.
- **Meteorology: Temperature inversions and stable wind conditions** are characteristic features of winters in North India. While calm wind conditions prevent the dissipation of pollutant emissions, the temperature inversion layer tends to trap pollution,

thereby increasing the observed pollutant concentrations.

- **Wind convergence zone:** The Indo-Gangetic plain is essentially landlocked. The Himalayas prevent polluted air from escaping to the north creating the so called “**valley effect**”. Other studies have pointed out that the formation of low-pressure troughs across this region causes winds to converge, resulting in trapping of local, as well as pollution from outside.
 - **Loose Alluvial Soil:** The Indus-Ganga belt is the world’s largest stretch of uninterrupted alluvium deposits. As fertile as alluvium is, it is composed of loose unconsolidated particles. Thus, dry alluvial soil significantly contributes to wind-blown dust.
 - **Seasonal variation of particulate matter composition:** The very few source apportionment studies that have been carried out for the cities situated in the Indo-Gangetic basin point out that the relative proportion of dust exceeds the contribution from anthropogenic sources. It would be worthwhile to note how the relative contribution of dust changes with seasonal variation. The IIT-Kanpur source apportionment study for Delhi reveals that while dust accounts for 40 per cent of total PM10 in summer, it accounts for only 13 per cent in winter. Widespread dust events are a common phenomenon in the northern part of the country during summers. There is no denying the fact that wind-blown dust contributes significantly to the pollution problem, but this should not divert our attention and efforts from devising solutions to curb anthropogenic emissions.
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Centre’s Stand on Immigrants

Why in news?

The Supreme Court sought a response from the Centre on a fresh plea seeking to quash a series of subordinate laws which allows the naturalisation of illegal immigrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians fleeing religious persecution from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Opposition to Citizenship Act:

- The petitioners have urged the court to declare the amendments made through the Passport (Entry into India) Amendment Rules, 2015; the Foreigners (Amendment) Order, 2015 and the order issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on December 26, 2016 under the Citizenship Act, allowing the naturalisation of illegal immigrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians, as “illegal and invalid”.
- They have contended that the leeway offered by the subordinate laws would further multiply the “uncontrolled influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh to Assam”.
- The illegal immigration has caused huge demographic changes in the north-eastern State, the petitioners claimed.
- Earlier, the court had decided to wait till Parliament took a call on the new Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on January 8.

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill:

- The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill proposed to amend the original Citizenship Act of 1955 vintage.
- It mandated that those who crossed the border to India from **Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan** and belong to “minority communities”, **namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians** would not be treated as illegal immigrants despite having entered India without valid travel documents.
- If the Bill is implemented, the immigrants from the minority communities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan would not face deportation.

Smart Fence

Why in news?

A digital ‘barrier’ has finally filled a 61 km gap on the 4,096.7 km **India-Bangladesh border** fence three decades after the project kick started.

CIBMS:

smart border fencing projects built under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) programme is the first of its kind in the country. The two projects each covering a **5.5 km border stretch along the International Border** have got hi-tech surveillance system that would create an invisible electronic barrier on land, water and even in air and underground and would help the BSF detect and foil infiltration bids in most difficult terrains. CIBMS is designed to guard stretches where physical surveillance is not possible either due to inhospitable terrain or riverine borders.

CIBMS uses a number of different devices for surveillance, communication and data storage. Sensors like Thermal Imager, UGS, Fiber Optical Sensors, Radar, Sonar have been mounted on different platforms like Aerostat, tower, poles etc. A comprehensive integration of such sensors and other technical systems of communication and data processing have been achieved in the CIBMS project. The signals reach the Unified Command and Control Centre where the BSF can monitor the border on real-time basis. The CIBMS enables round-the-clock surveillance on border and under different weather conditions be it in dust storm, fog or rain.



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About Fencing:

- Assam shares a 263 km border with Bangladesh. Much of the border was fenced, but a 61 km stretch in Dhubri district remained open owing to the terrain **dictated by the Brahmaputra**.
- Union Home Minister inaugurated an **electronic surveillance system** that is expected to diminish challenges faced by the Border Security Force in manning this stretch against cross-border crimes.
- Comprising **microwave communication, optical fibre cables, cameras, and an intrusion detection device, this system is called BOLD-QIT** (Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique) and was established under the **Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System**.
- This appears to be a better system than fencing which takes a long time and undergoes wear and tear. This should make the work of the border sentinels easier and more effective.
- The Centre had taken the cue from Israel and in 2017 decided to go for a technological solution for fool-proof sealing of the border.

Eyes and ears:

- A senior BSF officer said that, despite their best efforts, they faced an uphill task of manning the 61 km stretch against cross-border criminals.
- This stretch is where the vast Brahmaputra and its numerous channels with **chars (sandbars)** in between flow into Bangladesh.
- Infiltrators, cattle smugglers and others invariably took advantage of the difficulty in keeping vigil along this stretch, even on speedboats.
- This system has given BSF the eyes and ears where it is difficult for its personnel to see and hear.

India-Bangladesh border Fencing:

- Fencing of the India-Bangladesh border, a long-time demand in

Assam for checking illegal influx, started in the 1990s.

- Phase I, covering Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal, cost ₹854.35 crore. Phase II included Tripura and Mizoram, the last of the five States bordering Bangladesh, and cost ₹1,930.06 crore.
 - The third phase entailed overhauling the fence erected during Phase I and merging the work under Phase II in 2012. The work is yet to be completed.
 - After a pilot project in West Bengal, the government sanctioned a ₹1,327 crore project for floodlighting 2,840 km of the India-Bangladesh border.
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