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Sustainable Action For Transforming Human Capital

Why in news?

NITI Aayog's #SATH - Sustainable Action For Transforming Human Capital, is transforming the #education sector in #Jharkhand, #MadhyaPradesh & #Odisha by hand-holding them in improving their social sector indicators, through technical support.

About SATH:

- Furthering the agenda for cooperative federalism, NITI Aayog has launched SATH, a program providing 'Sustainable Action for Transforming Human capital' with the State Governments. The vision of the program is to initiate transformation in the education and health sectors. The program addresses the need expressed by many states for technical support from NITI .
- SATH aims to identify and build three future 'role model' states for health systems. NITI will work in close collaboration with their state machinery to design a robust roadmap of intervention, develop a program governance structure, set up monitoring and tracking mechanisms, hand-hold state institutions through the execution stage and provide support on a range of institutional measures to achieve the end objectives.
- The program will be implemented by NITI along with McKinsey & Company and IPE Global consortium, who were selected through a competitive bidding process.
- To select the three model states, NITI defined a three-stage process - expression of interest, presentations by the states and assessment of

commitment to health sector reforms.

- NITI invited all states and UTs to participate in the program. Sixteen states expressed prima facie interest, of which fourteen made their presentations. Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chandigarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh presented their project proposal to a Committee headed by Member of NITI Aayog, Shri Bibek Debroy and comprising of CEO, Amitabh Kant as well as a representative from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
 - Of these fourteen states, five have been shortlisted. Subsequently, three will be selected on the basis of further evaluations and objective assessment of criteria affecting the potential for impact and likelihood of success.
 - Metrics such as MMR, IMR, incidence of malaria and others have been considered for determining potential impact while density of doctors and nurses, compliance to IPHS norms are some of the metrics used to determine likelihood of success. The program will be launched in the three selected states after the signing of MoUs.
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SC directs political parties to provide complete information on Electoral Bonds

Why in news?

Rejecting the government's plea to steer clear of the electoral bonds scheme for political funding, the Supreme Court passed an interim order directing political parties to provide complete information to the Election Commission in sealed covers on every single donor and contribution received till date.

SC Order:

- A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, said the issue of electoral bonds and their lack of transparency raised “**weighty issues with tremendous bearing on the sanctity of the electoral process in the country.**”

- It said the challenge to the scheme would require in-depth hearing and there was very little time for that now as the bonds would stop being issued by May 15 as per a Ministry of Finance schedule.
- The court said its interim order was meant to ensure that the balance was not tilted in anybody's favour for the time being.
- It ordered the parties to forthwith provide the EC with detailed particulars of the donors as against each bond; the amount of each such bond and the full particulars of the credit received against each bond, namely, the particulars of the bank account to which the amount has been credited and the date of each such credit.
- Details of further transactions made through the bonds till May 15 the last date of their issuance should be filed before May 30, 2019.
- The sealed covers will remain in the custody of the Election Commission of India, and it will abide by such orders as may be passed by the court.
- The directions come a day after the **government claimed that voters need not know from where funds come to parties.**
- The EC also submitted in the court that the lion's share of contributions through the bonds had gone to the ruling party.

Govt. justifies scheme:

- The government, however, justified the scheme as an **experiment to eradicate the evil of black money.**
- It claimed that the impact would be known only after the Lok Sabha election. It should, meanwhile, be given a free hand to execute its policy and the court should not pass any order for the present, the government submitted.

EC Stand:

- The Centre's position was starkly in contrast to the stand of the EC.
- The EC had expressed reservations about transparency in political funding.
- It submitted that the **electoral bonds legalised the anonymity of political donors and the parties receiving contributions**
- According to the ECI, the **right to vote also meant the right to make an informed choice.**
- The Commission said knowing the candidate was only "half the exercise." The voters should also know the source of funding of

political parties who prop up these candidates.

- In its interim order, the apex court further directed the government to delete five extra days from the Ministry of Finance's schedule of days fixed for issuance of electoral bonds.
 - It noted that a February 28, 2019 note of the Ministry allowed electoral bonds to be issued on 55 days this year instead of the usual 50 days.
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Industrial growth declines to 20-month low, inflation up

Why in news?

Industrial growth declines to 20-month low, inflation, industrial growth slowed in February to 0.1%, driven by an across-the-board slowdown, especially in key sectors like manufacturing, mining, capital goods, and infrastructure, according to latest official data.

Findings of the report:

- Separate data showed that retail inflation quickened in March to **2.86% from 2.57%** in February, driven in large part by the food and fuel sectors.
- Growth in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) slowed in February from 1.44% in January.
- Within the Index, the mining and quarrying sector saw growth slowing to 2% from 3.92% over the same period.
- The manufacturing sector saw a contraction of 0.31% in February from 1.05% in January.
- **The IIP data broadly indicates the slowing down of the economy, which was reflected in the quarterly GDP data.**
- The outlook should be thought of in terms of stimulating investment demand in the economy through monetary and fiscal measures.
- On the monetary side, steps have been taken through **two successive rate cuts** by the Reserve Bank of India.
- On the fiscal side, however, the prospects were limited because both direct and indirect tax revenue collections have shown a shortfall

compared to the revised estimates.

- So, in order to meet the **3.4% fiscal deficit target**, it appears the government has gone in for curtailing expenditure in general, and capital expenditure in specific.

Capital goods contract:

- The capital goods sector continued its contraction in February, contracting 8.84% compared with a contraction of 3.42% in the previous month.
- Growth in the infrastructure sector slowed to 2.38% from 6.8%.
- The electricity sector was the only sector that saw an acceleration in growth, coming in at 1.18% in February compared with a growth of 0.94%.
- The consumer non-durables sector also saw growth quickening, to 4.3% from 3.33% over the same period.

CPI inflation:

- **Retail inflation, as measured by the consumer price index (CPI)**, quickened in March to a five-month high due to a speeding up of inflation in the food and fuel sectors.
- Inflation in the food and beverages segment of the CPI quickened to 0.66% in March compared with a contraction of 0.07% in February.
- **Inflation is still well below the average threshold of 4%** and food prices have just turned positive, and vegetable prices are much less negative than the trend.

Display information on 7 common antibiotics

Why in news?

Alerted by the Union Health Ministry's **pharmaceutical watchdog**, the National Co-ordination Centre of the Pharmacovigilance Programme of India (PvPI), on adverse reactions that were being reported from some commonly-used antibiotics, the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)** has now asked manufacturers to ensure that

this information be made available to the general public.

CDSCO Directions:

- CDSCO has written to drug manufacturers, to mention in leaflets inserted into drug packets or on promotional literature, information about the adverse reactions of these medicines.
- All of the seven formulations, **antibiotics** Cefotaxime, Ofloxacin and Cefixime; Tranexamic Acid, used to control bleeding; antipsychotic drug Quetiapine; anti-rheumatoid drug Sulfasalazine and the anti-epileptic medicine Sodium Valproate have been instructed to warn patients of the “new” side effects. The letter was sent out by CDSCO on April 9.
- CDSCO were alerted to this adverse reaction last year and, after talks with the Ministry and the PvPI, the decision was taken to write to all State authorities to ask manufactures to include this information on the packaging itself.
- The idea is to ensuant doctors and users are aware of the adverse reactions.

Additional reaction:

- All zonal and sub-zonal officers have been instructed to direct the manufacturers of these formulations to mention the additional reaction in the package insert or promotional literature of the drug,” notes the letter sent the State Drug Controllers.
- The Union Health Ministry was alerted about the adverse reactions last year in August.
- Antibiotic Cefixime is used to treat a wide variety of bacterial infections and is known to have adverse reactions, including pain, diarrhoea, nausea and headaches.

PM Narendra Modi to get Russia’s highest civilian award

Why in news?

Russia announced that President Vladimir Putin will confer its highest civilian award, the “**Order of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First**,” on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his work on bilateral ties.

Privileged strategic partnership:

- The order was presented to the Prime Minister of India for his distinguished contribution to the development of a privileged strategic partnership between Russia and India and friendly ties between the Russian and Indian peoples,” a statement from Mr. Putin’s office read.
- Thanking Mr. Putin for the honour, Mr. Modi said cooperation between India and Russia had led to “to extraordinary outcomes for our citizens.”
- President Putin remains a source of great strength for the India-Russia friendship. Under his visionary leadership, bilateral and multilateral cooperation between our nations has scaled new heights, he added.

About the Award:

- The Order of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First is awarded to prominent government and public figures, prominent representatives of science, culture, art and various sectors of the economy for “exceptional services that contribute to the prosperity, greatness and glory of Russia,” according to the official website.
- It was first awarded by former **Russian Tsar ‘Peter the Great’ in 1698** and subsequently discontinued.
- **In 1998, former President Boris Yeltsin reinstated the honour by a presidential decree.**
- Previous recipients include Chinese President Xi Jinping, and presidents of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Timing suspect:

- According to former diplomats the timing of the Russian award is unusual, as it was announced after the general elections began in India on April 11.
- Last week, while the campaign period was in full swing, the United

Arab Emirates announced the Sheikh Zayed award for Mr. Modi as well, which had also raised eyebrows as any statement by a foreign government during the election period is seen as an interference in domestic processes.

- Prime Minister Imran Khan's comments earlier this week that India-Pakistan ties would fare better if the incumbent ruling party were to win the elections, rather than if the Opposition party did, were also seen in a similar vein.
 - According to established practice, an international award such as this one is only announced once the recipient's government indicates its acceptance.
 - When asked about the timing, a Russian embassy official said that the decision to confer the award had been made earlier, but all the "necessary documents and procedures were finalised only now."
 - A government official said the MEA does not look at "the timing, but only the credentials of the individual" when awarding foreigners and in the same way it cannot dictate to other governments when the award should be announced.
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Turmoil in Sudan

Why in news?

Following a nation-wide protest, the Sudanese Army has removed President Omar al-Bashir and installed a Military Council headed by Awad Ibn Ouf to rule the country till elections are held.

Background:

- When anti-government protests in Sudan spread across the country demanding the resignation of President Omar al-Bashir, the dictator who ruled the **Northeast African country** for three decades with an iron fist dismissed them with disdain.
- Mr. Bashir initially used force to quell the protests, killing dozens, but the public anger only grew over the weeks.
- Amid the demonstrations growing stronger, the Sudanese Army

stepped in, removing Mr. Bashir from power and taking control of the government.

- As soon as Mr. Bashir was ousted, Defence Minister Awad Ibn Ouf was sworn in as the head of the Military Council that will rule the country for two years till elections are held.

The rise of Bashir:

- Mr. Bashir, a colonel in the Sudanese Army who **captured power in 1989 through a bloodless coup**, has largely been seen as a survivor.
- Immediately after assuming power in Sudan, he suspended political parties, curtailed independent media, carried out a purge against his political rivals, introduced an Islamic legal code and eventually anointed himself as the absolute ruler of the country with vast powers.
- In the initial years, he aligned himself with Hassan al-Turabi, a controversial Islamist politician, and launched a top-down Islamisation campaign in the northern parts of the country.
- This period also saw jihadists from around the world travelling to Sudan, mainly attracted by the ideas of Mr. Turabi.
- Osama bin Laden who set up a camp in Khartoum, was among those who made investments in Sudan.
- The **U.S. listed Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1993** and later imposed sanctions on the country.
- In 1998, after the terror attacks on American embassies in East Africa, a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum was destroyed by a U.S. missile strike because of its alleged links to al-Qaeda (an account that has been disputed by many analysts).
- When Mr. Turabi started challenging him, Mr. Bashir expelled him from the ruling National Congress party and later arrested him.

Separation of South Sudan:

- When it became clear that he could not end the two decades-long insurgencies in southern Sudan by force and amid mounting international pressure, Mr. Bashir entered a peace agreement with the Sudan People's Liberation Army, providing the South autonomy for six years which was to be followed by a referendum.
- The **southerners would eventually break with Sudan and form**

their own country.

- In **Darfur**, an impoverished region in western Sudan, when people protested demanding rights, Mr. Bashir unleashed militias against them in 2003 that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.
- The **Darfur conflict led to his conviction at the International Criminal Court for genocide.**

Escape from Difficult Times:

- But despite these internal challenges and his international isolation, Mr. Bashir survived all these years as Sudan's President and the Army and the militias stood by him.
- The discovery of oil in Sudan in the late 1990s also helped him establish himself as an economic moderniser.
- He weathered the storms even in 2010 and 2011 when Arab countries in North Africa and West Asia were shaken by popular protests.
- In recent years, he warmed up to the West, presented himself as a bulwark against terrorists in Africa and got international sanctions removed.
- But still, he couldn't quell the mounting public anger amid steady an economy that was rocked by the country's split.

Recent Issues:

- Economic woesAfter South Sudan seceded with three-fourths of the country's oil fields in July 2011, Sudan fell into an economic downturn.
- On the contrary, South Sudan is now one of the fastest growing economies.
- The fall in the energy prices from 2014 also hit Sudan hard. Inflation soared to 73% by late 2018 in a country where more than 40% of the population is living in poverty.
- The rapid rise in inflation has brought down the living standards of the middle class, who were at the forefront of the anti-Bashir protests.
- The country also plunged into fuel and cash shortage, prompting long queues in front of banks and fuel stations.

Protests:

- The protest began in late December against soaring prices of bread,

but soon snowballed into a nation-wide protest against Mr. Bashir's rule.

- When **Abdelaziz Bouteflika**, who ruled Algeria for 20 years, stepped down on April 3 amid popular protests, it was a shot in the arm of Sudanese protesters.
- In events that were reminiscent of the **Arab Spring protests of early 2011**, the Sudanese demonstrators, energised by the fall of Mr. Bouteflika, doubled down on their demand and took a march to the gates of Mr. Bashir's home in the headquarters of the Army, setting the alarm bells ringing across the military establishment.

What's next?

- Like in Algeria where Mr. Bouteflika was removed by the Army, in Sudan also the old regime remains powerful, even without Mr. Bashir at its helm.
- At a critical moment, the establishment has stepped in to remove the President so that the system he built could survive.
- It's more like the **"Egyptian revolution" of 2011** in which President Hosni Mubarak lost power but the military retained its influence in all structures of the regime.
- The Sudanese Army has been blunt. It has said that it would be in charge for two years before elections are held.
- Some protesters have rejected the Army's intervention, saying that they want to topple the regime, not just the President.
- It remains to be seen whether they will turn the protests now against the Army or Gen. ibn Ouf, the new ruler, would stabilise the political and economic crises.

Tea Board to discuss industry road map

Why in news?

The Tea Board is planning to hold a conference to discuss the roadmap for increasing exports and domestic consumption, and improving Indian tea quality.

A 12-point agenda has been drawn up for the conclave, according to Tea Board sources. The meeting will discuss ways to enhance the quality of Indian tea, restrict marketing of low-quality products, and the steps needed to be taken to bring good tea to the market.

Organic tea manufacture:

- The Tea Board wants the industry to take steps to increase manufacture of more organic tea.
- It is also calling for a paradigm shift to move the industry from bulk tea production to value-added tea, while exploring ways to increase sales, export and marketing of good quality tea.
- The Union Commerce Ministry is keen that India brands its speciality tea well, and the meeting will discuss the manner in which the Tea Board could support such an initiative.
- It will also try to gauge the support expected by the industry at the farm and manufacturing levels.
- A significant agenda of the meeting would be discussing steps needed to manufacture tea compliant with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) regulations and well in conformity with international standards.
- Industry sources welcomed the initiative saying that this would pave the way for drawing the contours of the industry through a broad-based consultative process.
- Large and small tea growers, as well as tea traders are likely to participate in the symposium due to be held here later this month.



East Coast Rail Link

Why in news?

Malaysia will resume work on the multi-billion-dollar East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) after months of negotiations with the China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) and the Chinese government brought the cost down by a third.

About the Project:

- The cost of the first two phases of the line was reduced from 65.5 billion Malaysian ringgits (\$15.9bn) to 44 billion (\$10.6bn), the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.
- Malaysia said it welcomed the signing of a supplemental agreement between Malaysia Rail Link and the CCC, the main contractor, which would pave the way for **construction on the 688km railway** to resume.
- This reduction will surely benefit Malaysia, and lighten the burden on the country's financial position," it added.
- Further details are scheduled to be announced later. The **electrified railway is designed to connect Malaysia's capital with the towns on the peninsula's east and northeast** and, backed by loans from China, was touted as an economic "game changer" by former Prime Minister Najib Razak.

Criticism:

- Critics said it benefited China more than Malaysia.
- China is building a deep-sea port on Malaysia's east coast and the railway is a **key link in its Belt and Road Initiative**.
- Najib was overthrown in a general election nearly a year ago amid public anger at allegations of wrong-doing at state fund, 1MDB.
- The ECRL project was stopped by the new administration shortly afterwards because it was too expensive.
- Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said he was worried that the cost of construction would leave the country indebted for a generation.

NASA's 'twins study' highlights effects of spaceflight on body

Why in news?

A NASA study of a U.S. astronaut who spent a year in space while his twin brother remained on the earth is providing insights into the effects of spaceflight on the human body, researchers said.

Findings of the Study:

- U.S. astronaut Scott Kelly spent a year on the **International Space Station** while his identical twin Mark Kelly, also a former NASA astronaut, stayed on the ground.
- The researchers who carried out the “**NASA Twins Study**” found that most of the changes to Mr. Scott’s body during his time in space returned to normal within months of his return to the earth although not all of them.
- The findings, published in the journal Science, were encouraging to scientists and engineers envisioning interplanetary travel such as an eventual trip to Mars, a mission that could last two to three years.

Comprehensive study:

- The study is the most comprehensive review of the response of the human body to spaceflight ever conducted.
 - It will guide future **biomedical space research** and allow us to have a safer journey to and from Mars.
 - There are thousands of gene and molecular changes that occur as someone goes in space. Virtually all of those returned to normal (in Scott) by six months.
 - Main findings in Mr. Scott were that the carotid artery wall became thicker early in flight and remained so throughout the mission.
 - Mr. Scott lost 7% of his body mass during his time on the ISS, possibly due to poorer nutrition in space and a lack of exercise.
 - In one test, flu vaccination delivered a similar immune response in them.
 - Cognitive tests before, during and after the flight found that Mr. Scott’s cognitive performance declined post-flight in terms of speed and accuracy.
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