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1. Defence Ministry signs contract for 11 next generation OPVs (March 31, 2023)

Defence Ministry signs contract for 11 next generation OPVs

The **Defense Ministry** on 30 March **signed contracts** with **Indian shipyards worth Rs 19,600 crore for the acquisition of 11 next-generation offshore patrol vessels (OPVs) and six next-generation missile vessels.**

An overview of the news

- The contract for the acquisition of **11 OPVs under the Buy (Indian-IDDM) category** was signed with **Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) and Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) of Kolkata** for a total of **Rs 9,781 crore.**
- Out of 11 next generation offshore patrol vessels, 7 vessels will be built by **GSL and 4 vessels by GRSE.**
- These ships will be **indigenously designed, developed and manufactured.** Delivery of the vessels will begin in **September 2026.**
- The acquisition of these ships will enable the Indian Navy to maintain its combat capability and meet various operational requirements.
- Indian Navy's **anti-piracy, counter-infiltration, anti-poaching, anti-trafficking, non-combatant evacuation operations, search and rescue (SAR), security of offshore assets** etc. will be strengthened.
- A contract was signed with **Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL)** for the acquisition of **six Next Generation Missile Ships (NGMVs)** at a cost of **Rs 9,805 crore.** The deliveries of these ships will commence from **March 2027.**

2. Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan appointed as Vice-President of UAE (March 30, 2023)

Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan appointed as Vice-President of UAE

The President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), **Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, has appointed **Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, his brother, as the **Vice President of the country.**

An overview of the news

- The appointment is approved by the **UAE Federal Supreme Council.**
- The incumbent Vice president **Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, will also continue in the same role.

- Sheikh Mansour has been active in UAE politics since 2004, when he was appointed as **Minister of Presidential Affairs**.
- He has overseen the **Presidential Court** and the **Ministry of Presidential Affairs**, as well as presiding over several government institutions, including the **Ministerial Development Council and the Emirates Investment Authority**.
- He is also the chairman of the **Abu Dhabi Fund for Development** and a **member of the Abu Dhabi Supreme Petroleum Council**.
- He has served on the boards of several investment institutions, including the **National Archives, the Abu Dhabi Development Fund, the Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority Board, and the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department**.

About UAE

- Official Language : **Arabic**
- Capital of UAE : **Abu Dhabi**
- Currency : **Emirati Dirham**
- President of UAE : **Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan**
- Prime Minister: **Sheikh Mohammed ibn Rashid Al Maktoum**

3. Japan to provide USD 1.24 billion line of credit to Bangladesh for road, railway and port projects (March 30, 2023)

Japan to provide USD 1.24 billion line of credit to Bangladesh for road, railway and port projects

Japan will provide an **Official Development Assistance (ODA) loan of USD 1.24 billion to Bangladesh** for **infrastructure and connectivity projects** and the second tranche of the 43rd Japanese Yen loan package was signed at the exchange of notes between the two countries.

An Overview of the News

- The loan package includes three projects: **Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Highway Improvement Project, construction of a dual gauge rail line between Joydebpur-Eshwardi section, and Matarbari Port Development Project, Phase 2**.
- The first tranche of loan was almost the same amount, making the total package around **US\$ 2.48 billion**.
- Japan has been the largest bilateral donor to Bangladesh since 2012, assisting various mega-infrastructure projects.

About Official Development Assistance (ODA)

- It is financial aid provided by developed countries to developing countries **to support economic growth and reduce poverty.**
- It can be given in the form of **grants or loans, and is provided by governments, international organisations and non-governmental organisations.**
- It can be used for a variety of purposes, including **building infrastructure, promoting economic development, and providing emergency relief.**
- The **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** monitors and reports on ODA flows between its member countries.
- ODA is important for supporting economic growth and reducing poverty in developing countries.

About Japan

Prime Minister- **Fumio Kishida**

Capital- **Tokyo**

Currency - **Yen**

Ambassador- **Iwama Kiminori**

About Bangladesh

Prime Minister- **Sheikh Hasina**

Bangladesh currency - **Bangladeshi taka**

Capital- **Dhaka.**

4. Saudi Arabia's cabinet approves joining Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a dialogue partner (March 30, 2023)

On March 29, 2023, **Saudi Arabia agreed to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a dialogue partner.** The cabinet approved the decision in a meeting chaired by **King Salman bin Abdul Aziz.**

An Overview of the News

- As a dialogue partner, **Saudi Arabia** will participate in **SCO meetings and activities**, but **will not be a full member of the organisation.** This status allows increased cooperation between **Saudi Arabia and SCO members** on issues such as security, economic development and cultural exchange.
- The decision to join the SCO has been taken by Saudi Arabia to diversify its **economy and reduce dependence on oil exports.** The country has announced several

initiatives aimed at boosting economic growth and attracting foreign investment, including its **Vision 2030 plan**.

- **King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud** has been a strong advocate of increasing Saudi Arabia's relations with other countries. During his reign, he has worked to strengthen ties with countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa, with a focus on promoting economic development and cultural exchange.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

- It is a **regional intergovernmental organisation established in 2001**.
- The organisation consists of **eight member states, including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, and Pakistan**.
- The **primary objective** of the SCO is to promote regional cooperation among its members in various fields such as security, economy, culture and education.
- The main objective of the SCO is to **enhance regional security through joint efforts to combat terrorism, separatism, extremism, drug trafficking and transnational organised crime**.
- The SCO holds annual summits and meetings of heads of state, as well as regular meetings of its various working groups and committees.

5. First G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group meeting begins in Gujarat (March 30, 2023)

First G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group meeting begins in Gujarat

The **first G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group meeting** was held under **India's G20 chairmanship in Gandhinagar, Gujarat**, India from 30 March.

An Overview of the News

- The meeting was inaugurated by **Dr PK Mishra**, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and **Devsingh Chauhan**, Minister of State for Communications.
- Five priority areas have been identified for the meeting, including **an early warning system for all, resilient infrastructure and reform of the national system for financing disaster risk reduction**.
- The meeting serves as a call to the **global community to come together and work towards** a stronger future against the devastation caused by disasters.
- Around **100 delegates from G20 member states**, invited countries and nine international organisations participated in the three-day event.
- Two side programs have been planned on "**Early Warning System**" and "**Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**".
- The event also provides an opportunity to the delegates to experience the cultural heritage of Gujarat.

About the G20

- It is an **international forum** of the **world's leading economies established in 1999**.
- Its primary objective is **to promote international financial stability and sustainable economic growth**.
- The G20 serves as a forum to discuss and coordinate policies related to a **wide range of economic and financial issues** such as **trade, investment, employment, energy and climate change**.

Member Secretary of National Disaster Management Authority - **Kamal Kishore**

6. Launch of 'Captive Employment' initiative under Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Kaushalya Yojana (March 30, 2023)

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) on 28 March.

Union Minister for Rural Development Giriraj Singh initiates '**Captive Employment**' initiative under **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)** on 28 March.

An overview of the news

- **19 captive employers** have been included in the unique initiative.
- 19 captive employers **signed MoU with the Ministry of Rural Development** to train and place over **31,000 rural youth** in subsidiary companies under the DDU-GKY scheme.
- Captive employers will train rural poor youth and provide employment to the trained youth in their company or subsidiary.
- **10 candidates being trained** under the DDU-GKY program and undergoing on-the-job training were handed over the appointment letters during the event.
- Two candidates were awarded with **appreciation letters** for their performance during their current tenure of employment.

About Captive Employment

- It aims to create a **dynamic and demand-driven skilling ecosystem** that caters to the needs of industry partners ensuring **sustainable placements for rural poor youth**.
- The initiative is an initiative for the DDU-GKY scheme, which assures placement after training the candidates for **at least six months** with a minimum **CTC of Rs 10,000**.

Captive Employer

- A captive employer is any employer or industry which offers employment to candidates in its own company or its subsidiaries and provides suitable in-house training facilities.

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Kaushalya Yojana

- DDU-GKY is a **placement linked skilling program** of the **Ministry of Rural Development** under the aegis of **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)**.
- It was **launched on 25 September 2014**.
- It is funded by the **Ministry of Rural Development (MoRG)**, Government of India.
- The scheme is **currently being implemented in 27 States and 4 Union Territories** with emphasis on placement for rural poor youth.
- Under this, demand based skill training is provided to rural poor youth in the **age group of 15 to 35 years**.
- The **upper age limit for female candidates is 45 years**.
- It is mandatory that **one-third of the total candidates to be trained under this scheme should be women**.
- The emphasis is on career progression rather than just training.

7. Central government abolishes basic customs duty on treatment of rare diseases (March 30, 2023)

The central government on March 30 exempted basic customs duty on all drugs and food for special medical purposes

The **central government** on March 30 **exempted basic customs duty on all drugs and food for special medical purposes** imported for personal use for **treatment of rare diseases**.

An overview of the news

- The **import duty exemption** will be applicable **from April 1, 2023**.
- The exempted drugs and food items are listed under the **National Rare Disease Policy 2021**.
- To avail this exemption, the individual importer has to submit a certificate from the **Central or State Director Health Services or Civil Surgeon of the district**.
- The government has fully exempted **pembrolizumab (Keytruda)**, used in the treatment of various cancers, from basic customs duty.

- Medicines generally attract a **basic customs duty of 10 per cent**, while certain categories of life saving drugs/vaccines attract a **concessional rate of 5 per cent or nil**.

What are Rare Diseases?

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** defines a rare disease as one with a **frequency of less than 6.5-10 per 10,000 people**.
- According to one estimate, there are **7,000 known rare diseases** with an **estimated 300 million patients** in the world.
- About 95%** of these patients have no approved treatment and **less than 1 in 10 patients** receive disease-specific treatment.

8. Government identified 1275 railway stations under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (March 30, 2023)

Government identified 1275 railway stations under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme

The **government has identified 1275 railway stations** under the **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme** for the **development of railway stations in India**.

An overview of the news

- Railway Minister **Ashwini Vaishnav** gave this information in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha on March 29.
- The scheme envisages development of stations on a sustained basis with a long term approach.

Amrit Bharat Station Scheme

- Amrit Bharat Station Scheme was introduced by the **Ministry of Railways** in **December 2022**
- The objective** of the scheme is to prepare a **master plan for railway stations** and implement the master plan in a phased manner to enhance facilities.

Facilities Planned under this Scheme

- Provision for creation of Roof Plaza in future
- Free Wi-Fi, 5G Mobile Tower
- Widening of roads, removal of unwanted structures, properly designed signage, dedicated walkways, well planned parking areas, access to better lighting etc.
- High level platforms at all stations with a length of 600 meters

• Special facilities for the disabled.

9. New India Literacy Program (March 30, 2023)

New India Literacy Program

The government has recently launched a **new centrally sponsored scheme** named '**New India Literacy Programme**' with a financial outlay of over **Rs 1000 crore** for implementation during the **financial years 2022-23 to 2026-27**.

An overview of the news

- The scheme aims to cover **five crore illiterates in the age group of 15 years and above**.
- Beneficiaries under this scheme are identified through door to door survey on mobile app by the surveyors in the States and Union Territories.
- Illiterate can also avail the benefits of the scheme through direct registration from any place through mobile app.

About New India Literacy Program

- The program has been launched for the period **FY 2022-2027** to align with the **National Education Policy 2020** and cover all aspects of **adult education**.
- The scheme has been approved with a financial outlay of **Rs 1037.90 crore**, which includes central share of **Rs 700.00 crore and state share of Rs 337.90 crore**.
- The **center and state share for all states is in the ratio of 60:40** while for **North Eastern Region (NER) and Himalayan states** the share between center and state is in the **ratio of 90:10**.
- The scheme will cover non-literates in the **age group of 15 years and above in all the States/UTs of the country**.
- It aims to cover **1 crore learners per year** (total target of 5 crore) using "**Online Teaching, Learning and Assessment System (OTLAS)**" in collaboration with **National Informatics Centre, NCERT and NIOS**.

Five components of the scheme

- Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
- Critical Life Skills
- Vocational Skills Development
- Basic Education
- Continuing Education

Objectives of the Scheme

- To impart **basic literacy and numeracy**.
- Promoting important life skills such as financial literacy, digital literacy, commercial skills, health care and awareness, child care and education and family welfare.

10. Competition (Amendment) Bill 2022 passed by Lok Sabha (March 29, 2023)

Competition (Amendment) Bill 2022 passed by Lok Sabha

On March 29, 2023, the **Lok Sabha passed the Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2022**. The Bill aims **to reduce the time limit for CCI to pass orders on such transactions from 210 days to 150 days**.

An Overview of the News

- The Bill proposes a **framework for settlement and commitment to more quickly resolve investigations** into anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position.
- Certain offences under the Competition Act, such as **failure to comply with CCI orders and directions of the Director General relating to anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position, will be decriminalised under the Bill**. The nature of punishment for these offences will change from fine to civil punishment.
- The Competition (Amendment) Bill 2022 was introduced in the Lok Sabha in **August 2022** and was referred to the Standing Committee in the same month. The Standing Committee submitted its report in December 2022.

About Competition Act of 2002

- It is a law enacted by the Parliament of India **to promote fair competition and prevent anti-competitive practices in the Indian market**.
- It aims to create a level playing field for businesses, protect the interests of consumers and encourage innovation and efficiency.
- The Act establishes the **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** as the primary regulatory body to enforce competition laws and prevent abuse of dominant positions by companies.
- The CCI has the power to investigate and impose penalties on companies found to be indulging in anti-competitive practices such as price-fixing, bid-rigging, and abuse of dominant market positions.