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Asian Rhino Range Countries Meeting

Recently, **2nd meeting of Asian Rhino Range Countries** took place in New Delhi.

- **2nd Asian Rhino Range Countries** meeting in New Delhi was organized by the Union Ministry of the Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), and International Union for Conservation of Nature(IUCN), Asian Rhino Specialist Group along with World Wildlife Fund-India (WWF), International Rhino Foundation and Aaranyak, an NGO.
- 1st Asian Rhino Range States meeting was held at Bandar Lampung, Indonesia in October 2013.
- **Asian Rhino Range Countries include Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nepal.**

Outcome of Meeting

- The **New Delhi Declaration was adopted** at the second meeting of the Asian rhino range countries.
- **New Delhi Declaration**
 - New Delhi Declaration underscored **trans-boundary collaboration among India, Nepal, and Bhutan for the conservation and protection of the greater one-horned rhino.**
 - Emphasis was also laid on expanding rhino domains within a country or between rhino range countries.
 - **Making the best use of all available individuals and technologies to accelerate natural and conservation breeding of the critically endangered Sumatran rhino.**
 - **Emulating India**
 - Part of the plan has been to **replicate or develop upon the Kaziranga rhino conservation success story for Sumatran as well as the Javan**

rhino.

- Kaziranga had less than 10 rhinos when it was declared a protected area for the animal in 1905. Assam's Kaziranga National Park has around 2,938 rhinos in India.
- The Asian rhino range countries have also agreed to **review the population of three Asian rhino species (greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatra) in every four years** to secure its future.
- It has also agreed to strengthen protection regimes, intelligence gathering and real-time sharing of intelligence information on rhino crime and its horn trade to secure the rhino population within and between range countries. There were discussions on rhino trade in Asia in the meeting.
- It has said the possible opening of international trade of rhino horn and other derivatives will have a detrimental impact on rhino populations in the Asian rhino range countries.
- The countries have also decided to initiate research on various habitat parameters, including invasive species threatening the suitable habitats of Asian rhinos and take optimally manage the habitats.
- The meeting also decided to identify connectivity and corridors across international boundaries and keep them functional, safe and secure for free movement of Asian rhinos and other wildlife.

Status of Rhinoceros

- **There are three species of rhino in Asia—greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran.** Javan and Sumatran Rhino are critically endangered but the greater one-horned (or Indian) rhino vulnerable.
- **Once ranging from China to Bangladesh, the Javan and Sumatran rhinos are nearing extinction.**
- There are no rhinos in Bhutan, but some from the Manas National Park in adjoining Assam or Buxa Tiger Reserve in West Bengal are known to cross over occasionally.
- **Indonesia and Malaysia are the other Asian countries where the last of the rhinos live.**
- The current global population of the Indian one-horned rhinoceros is 3,584. Assam's Kaziranga National Park has the bulk of 2,938 rhinos in India while Nepal 646.
- The Sumatran rhino, the smallest of all rhino species and the only Asian rhino with two horns, became extinct in the wild in Malaysia.

National Rhino Conservation Strategy

- Recently, the government of India has also launched the **National Rhino Conservation Strategy for India.**
- **It called for active engagement between India and Nepal to protect the species.**
- The plan said the single population of rhinos in Sukla-Phanta (Nepal), Valmiki Tiger

Reserve (India) and Chitwan National Park (Nepal) and Dudhwa (India) is separated by the political boundary between the two countries.

- **Instead of managing the two populations separately in the two countries, it needs to be managed with the same protocol.**
- The strategy would pave the path for long-term conservation of rhinos.
- The plan calls for expanding distribution range as the occurrence of 90% of the rhino in one protected area is a cause of concern and conservation of existing and potential rhino habitats need to be made a national priority.
- It also calls for strengthening protection, having dedicated research and monitoring and strict enforcement.

New Mineral Policy, 2019

The Union Cabinet has approved **the National Mineral Policy, 2019 (NMP 2019)**.

The new mineral policy **focuses on transparency, better regulations & enforcement, balanced growth & sustainability.**

Objective

The aim of National Mineral Policy 2019 is to have a **more effective, meaningful and implementable policy** that brings in further **transparency, better regulation, and enforcement, balanced social and economic growth** as well as **sustainable mining practices.**

Details

- The National Mineral Policy 2019 includes provisions which will give a boost to the mining sector such as
 - **encouraging the private sector** to take up exploration,
 - auctioning in virgin areas for composite RP cum PL cum ML (reconnaissance permit cum Prospective Licensing and Mining Lease) on a revenue share basis
 - encouragement of merger and acquisition of mining entities
 - **transfer of mining leases** and creation of **dedicated mineral corridors** to boost private sector mining areas.
 - The 2019 Policy proposes to **grant the status of the industry to mining activity** to boost the financing of mining for the private sector and for acquisitions of mineral assets in other countries by the private sector
 - It also mentions that Long term import-export policy for mineral will help the private sector in better planning and stability in business
 - The Policy also mentions rationalize reserved areas given to PSUs which have not

- been used and to put these areas to auction, which will give more opportunity to the private sector for participation
- The Policy also mentions making efforts to harmonize taxes, levies & royalty with world benchmarks to help the private sector
 - Among the changes introduced in the National Mineral Policy, 2019 include the focus on "make in India" initiative and Gender sensitivity in terms of the vision.
 - NMP 2019 aims to attract private investment through incentives while the efforts would be made to maintain a database of mineral resources
 - The new policy focusses on the use of coastal waterways and inland shipping for evacuation and transportation of minerals and encourages dedicated mineral corridors to facilitate the transportation of minerals.
 - The utilization of the **district mineral fund** for equitable development of project affected persons and areas.
 - NMP 2019 proposes a long term export-import policy for the mineral sector to provide stability and as an incentive for investing in large scale commercial mining activity.
 - The 2019 Policy also introduces the concept of Inter-Generational Equity that deals with the well-being not only of the present generation but also of the generations to come and also proposes to constitute an inter-ministerial body to institutionalize the mechanism for ensuring sustainable development in mining.

Benefits

- The New National Mineral Policy will ensure more effective regulation.
 - It will lead to sustainable mining sector development in future while addressing the issues of project affected persons especially those residing in tribal areas.
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National Policy on Software Products - 2019

Recently the Union Cabinet has approved the **National Policy on Software Products (NPSP) - 2019** to develop India as a **Software Product Nation**.

Objective

- The Government has approved the NPSP-2019 to create a robust software product ecosystem, which aims to develop India as the **global software product hub**.
- Further, the Policy aims to align with other Government initiatives such as **Start-up India, Make in India and Digital India, Skill India etc** so as to help the industry grow at **Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 40% to reach \$70-80 billion by 2025**, while creating **employment opportunities for 3.5 million people**.

Salient Features

- The Policy will lead to the formulation of several schemes, initiatives, projects and measures to achieve the vision of NPSP-2019.
 - The policy has the following **five missions**:
 - To promote the creation of a sustainable Indian software product industry, driven by intellectual property (IP), leading to a ten-fold increase in India share of the Global Software product market by 2025.
 - To nurture 10,000 technology startups in software product industry, including 1000 such technology startups in Tier-II and Tier-III towns & cities and generating direct and in-direct employment for 3.5 million people by 2025.
 - To create a talent pool for software product industry through (i) up-skilling of 1,000,000 IT professionals, (ii) motivating 100,000 school and college students and (iii) generating 10,000 specialized professionals that can provide leadership.
 - To build a cluster-based innovation driven ecosystem by developing 20 sectoral and strategically located software product development clusters having integrated ICT infrastructure, marketing, incubation, R&D/testbeds and mentoring support.
 - In order to evolve and monitor scheme & programmes for the implementation of this policy, National Software Products Mission will be set up with participation from Government, Academia and Industry.
 - An outlay of Rs.1500 crore is involved to implement the programmes/ schemes envisaged under this policy over the period of 7 years.
The amount is divided into Software Product Development Fund (SPDF) and Research & Innovation fund.
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National Small Savings Fund

The Union Government may **borrow more funds** from the **National Small Savings Fund (NSSF)** than budgeted for financial year 2019-20 to cover its fiscal deficit requirements.

- It can be noted that the government in past few years has **increased its reliance** on the borrowings from the NSSF.
Although the **target of 21% for FY-20 is marginally down from 22.4% in FY19, it is significantly higher than 3% in FY15.**
- The move will **ease pressure on the benchmark 10-year Government securities yield** and keep the cost of government borrowings through extra budgetary resources (EBR) via public sector undertakings (PSUs) low.
However, it is to be noted that the **cost of borrowings from NSSF is higher than that for market borrowings.**
- The states, who were the prime borrowers from this fund earlier, are now relying more on market borrowings (state development loans) to meet their funding needs as per the **recommendations of the 14th Finance commission.**

The exclusion of States and Union Territories except Arunachal Pradesh, Kerala, Delhi (UT) and Madhya Pradesh from National Small Savings from April 2016 has **created more room for borrowings by the centre and PSUs.**

National Small Savings Fund

- National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) in the **Public Account of India was established in 1999.**
- The Fund is administered by the **Government of India, Ministry of Finance (Department of Economic Affairs) under National Small Savings Fund (Custody and Investment) Rules, 2001**, framed by the President under **Article 283(1) of the Constitution.**
- The objective of NSSF is to de-link small savings transactions from the Consolidated Fund of India and ensure their operation in a transparent and self-sustaining manner.
- Since NSSF operates in the public account, its transactions do not impact the fiscal deficit of the Centre directly.
- Small savings instruments can be classified under **three heads:**
 - **Postal deposits** (comprising savings account, recurring deposits, time deposits of varying maturities and monthly income scheme),
 - **Savings certificates like:** National Small Savings Certificate(NSC) and Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP)
 - **Social security schemes like:** Public Provident Fund (PPF) and Senior Citizens' Savings Scheme(SCSS)

Important Fact For Prelims (1st March 2019)

Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize Ceremony

- Winners of Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize for the years 2016, 2017, and 2018 were awarded in New Delhi on the occasion of National Science Day, 28th February.
- Out of total 34 winners, there was only one woman awardee Aditi Sen who got felicitated for her work in "quantum information and communication, including the formulation of a computable entanglement measure and a novel density-matrix recursion method".
- Ganesan Venkatasubramanian was awarded for his work towards the psychiatric disorder Schizophrenia is among the winners.

Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize

- The award is named after the Founder-Director of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) India, the late Dr (Sir) Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar and is known as the

'Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (SSB) Prize for Science and Technology'.

- The Prize is given each year by CSIR in the fields namely, Biological Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Earth, Atmosphere, Engineering Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, Medical Sciences, and Physical Sciences.
- It is the most coveted national recognition bestowed upon young scientists and engineers to honour their research and developmental work in India.
- Any citizen of India engaged in research in any field of science and technology up to the age of 45 years is eligible for the prize. Overseas citizen of India (OCI) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) working in India are also eligible.
- The prize is awarded on the basis of contributions made through work done in India only during the five years preceding the year of the prize.
- The prize comprises a citation, a plaque, and a cash award of Rs. 5 lakh. In addition, recipients also get Rs. 15,000 per month up to the age of 65 years.

Scheme for developing Knitwear Sector

- The Union Minister of Textiles has launched a comprehensive scheme for development of Knitting and Knitwear Sector under PowerTex India.
- The Ministry has approved a combined Standing Finance Component (SFC) of PowerTex India Scheme and Knitwear Scheme with an outlay of Rs. 487.07 crores. Out of this, Rs. 47.72 crore is for Knitwear for the period of 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- The main components of scheme are as follow:
 - Creation of new service centers on Public Private Partnership (PPP) model by industries and associations in the knitting and knitwear clusters.
 - Modernization and upgradation of existing power loom service Centers (PSCs) and institutions run by Textile Research Associations (TRAs) and Export Promotion Councils (EPCs) Association in knitting and knitwear clusters.
 - Facilitation, IT, awareness, studies, surveys, market development and publicity for knitting and knitwear units.

PowerTex India

- PowerTex India was launched in 2017 by the Ministry of Textile.
- It is a three-year all-inclusive scheme focused on the development of country's Powerloom Sector.
- The scheme embraces branding, subsidies, new markets, new research and development in power loom textiles, and also welfare schemes for the powerloom workers.

Key components include:

- In-situ Upgradation of Plain Powerlooms
- Group Workshed Scheme (GWS)

- Yarn Bank Scheme
- Common Facility Centre (CFC)
- Pradhan Mantri Credit Scheme for Powerloom Weavers
- Solar Energy Scheme for Powerlooms
- Facilitation, IT, Awareness, Market Development and Publicity for Powerloom Schemes
- Tex Venture Capital Fund
- Grant-in-Aid and Modernisation & Upgradation of Powerloom Service Centres (PSCs).

SC Stays its Eviction Order

- The Supreme Court has stayed its order directing the eviction of lakhs of Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers whose claims for forest land rights have been rejected under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006.
- The Bench accepted the Central Government's appeal which said that there is need to further delve into whether due process was followed by gram sabhas and States' authorities under the FRA before the claims for forest rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDST) and other traditional forest dwellers (OTFD) were finally rejected.
- The SC has now given the States four months' time to file affidavits responding to **concerns raised by the Centre.**
- Apart from this, the SC also raised concern over absence of any mechanism in place in the States or in the Centre to review the rejection orders.

Panel on Offshore Rupee Market

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has formed a eight- member task force on the offshore rupee market.
- It will be headed by former Deputy Governor Usha Thorat and would submit its report by the end of June 2019.

Terms of Reference (TOR)

- Assess the causes behind the development of the offshore Rupee market.
- Study the effects of the offshore markets on the Rupee exchange rate and market liquidity in the domestic market.
- Recommend measures to address concerns, if any, arising out of offshore Rupee trading.
- Propose measures to generate incentives for non-residents to access the domestic market.
- Examine the role, if any, International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs) can play in

addressing these concerns.

- Any other relevant issue(s) the Task Force considers relevant to the context.

Hanoi Summit 2019

- Recently, the United States (US) and North Korea held a summit in **Hanoi, Vietnam**
 - This was the **second summit** between the US and North Korea after the Singapore Summit in June 2018.
 - The talks between the US and North Korea ended **abruptly without any conclusion and no declaration was signed.**
 - Reason for failure of talks was that North Korea had demanded complete relief from economic sanctions in exchange for only partial denuclearization. But, the US wants North Korea to give up all its weapons.
 - During the **Singapore Summit in 2018, the US and North Korea have signed an agreement committing to the complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.**
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