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RCEP Ministerial Meeting

Union Minister for Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation led the Indian delegation to the 7th Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Inter-Sessional Ministerial Meeting in Singapore on 12-13 November 2018.

- The RCEP Ministerial meeting failed to reach a consensus on chapters related to e-commerce, competition, and investment, but progress was made on several other issues like economic and technical cooperation, small and medium enterprises etc.
- It was decided to push the year-end target for a “substantial conclusion” of the talks by a year due to differences on key issues.
- Government think-tank NITI Aayog has warned against India joining RCEP and said that it will be “disastrous” for India.

What is RCEP?

- The RCEP is a **mega-regional free trade agreement** which aims to cover goods, services, investments, economic and technical cooperation, competition and intellectual property rights.
- It is being negotiated amongst 16 countries, comprising **10 ASEAN countries** plus **six ASEAN FTA partners- India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.**
- RCEP negotiations seek **regional economic integration**, leading to the creation of the largest regional trading block.
- RCEP will account for 25% of global GDP, 30% of global trade and 26% of foreign direct investment (FDI) flows and 45% of the global population.

India and RCEP

- **Concerns**

- The **presence of China in RCEP** is a matter of concern for India as India had a \$63 billion trade deficit with China in 2017-18.

Granting greater market access to China under RCEP can harm India's labor-intensive domestic industry, steel sector in particular, as China has been dumping iron and steel products in India.

- Since the start of the RCEP negotiations, **India wanted greater liberalization in the services sector**, especially for easy movement of its professionals to RCEP-member countries.

Most members have resisted a deal in the services sector, sensing a threat from China and India.

- India is also wary of measures that may lead to its **losing the right to produce cheap generic drugs** due to the enforcement of a strict IPR regime related to patent term extension and data exclusivity.

- **Opportunities**

- RCEP is important for India as it **means access to the Asia Pacific region** which will be important for its future economic and strategic status in the region.

- Joining RCEP will give a **boost to India's Act East Policy** which builds on the Look East Policy for a closer partnership with the Asian region.

- RCEP will allow India to **expand its trading association with countries like Australia and New Zealand**, with which it has no formal trading partnership due to its absence in the APEC and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

Way Forward

The RCEP, once formalized, has the potential to emerge as the most effective and the largest free-trade bloc in the world. India certainly cannot afford to be excluded from new regional trade chains and hence, its participation in RCEP is imperative. However, legitimate concerns of Indian trade and commerce have to be addressed with a progressive look.

Scheme to Promote Young Entrepreneurs in Cooperatives

Union Agriculture Ministry launched National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC's) youth-friendly scheme '**Yuva Sahakar-Cooperative Enterprise Support and Innovation Scheme**' for attracting youth to cooperative business ventures.

- The Yuva Sahakar-Cooperative Enterprise Support and Innovation Scheme will encourage cooperatives to venture into new and innovative areas.

- NCDC has created a **dedicated Rs 1000 crore 'Cooperative Start-up and Innovation Fund (CSIF)'**. It would have more incentives (funding of up to 80% as against 70% for others) for cooperatives of North Eastern region, Aspirational Districts and cooperatives with women or SC or ST or Persons with Disabilities (PWD) members.
- The scheme **envisages 2% less** than the applicable rate of interest on term loan for the project cost up to Rs 3 crore including **2 years moratorium on payment of principal**.
- All types of cooperatives in **operation for at least one year** are eligible.

National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)

- NCDC is a **statutory corporation** set up under **National Cooperative Development Corporation Act , 1962**.
- The objectives of NCDC are planning and promoting programmes for production, processing, marketing, storage, export and import of agricultural produce, foodstuffs, industrial goods, livestock and certain other notified commodities and services on cooperative principles.
- NCDC functions through its Head Office at **New Delhi** and multiple Regional Offices.
- The NCDC has the **unique distinction** of being the **sole statutory organisation** functioning as an apex financial and developmental institution **exclusively devoted to cooperative sector**.
- NCDC is a major financial institution for cooperatives, and has recently started **Mission Sahakar 22**, which **aims to double farmers' income by 2022**.

More about Cooperatives

- The **United Nations General Assembly** had declared the **year 2012** as the **International Year of Cooperatives**. This recognized the contribution that Cooperatives make to social and economic development through poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration.
- The role of Cooperatives has acquired new dimension in the changing scenario of globalization and liberalization. The Government of India enacted the **Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act in 2002** and **National Policy for Cooperatives was also formulated in 2002** to provide support for promotion and development of cooperatives as **autonomous, independent and democratic organizations** so that they can play their due role in the socio-economic development of the country.
- The Policy further aimed at **reduction of regional imbalances** and strengthening of cooperative education, training and human resource development for professionalisation of cooperative management.

Provisions of Indian Constitution related to Cooperatives

- The **Constitution (97th Amendment) Act, 2011** added a **new Part IXB** right after Part IXA (Municipals) regarding the cooperatives working in India.
 - The word **“cooperatives”** was added after **“unions and associations”** in **Art. 19(1) (c)** under Part III of the Constitution. This enables all the citizens to form cooperatives by giving it the **status of fundamental right of citizens**.
 - A new **Article 43B** was added in the **Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV)** regarding the “promotion of cooperative societies”
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Dispute Over Restoration of Konark Sun Temple

The 13th century Sun Temple at Konark (Odisha) has entered into controversy over allegations that the stone carvings on the outer surface are being replaced with plain blocks of stones causing irreplaceable loss to the uniqueness of the temple.

- As per a regional news report, it is alleged that 40% of the artistic stone carvings of the existing Konark Sun Temple have been replaced by ASI with plain stones.
- It is alleged that the stones used in restoration do not match the quality of the original stone blocks, which are still available nearby.
- UNESCO guidelines on restoration of World Heritage Sites mandate that when an original stone carving is lost, it cannot be replicated. The understanding is that as monuments deteriorate, if one keeps on replicating then nothing original will remain.
- However, ASI has denied the allegations of replacement of artistic stone works at the world heritage monument.

About Sun Temple at Konark

- The Sun temple at Konark was constructed by the **Eastern Ganga ruler Narasimha Deva I** in about 1250 A.D.
- The name of Konark temple is an amalgamation of two words-Kona meaning corner and Arka meaning the Sun. That is to say that the Sun god worshipped in Ark Kshetra is called Konark.

Architecture of the Temple

- The temple was also known as '**BLACK PAGODA**' due to its dark colour and used as a navigational landmark by sailors to Odisha.
- It is carefully **oriented towards the east so that the first rays of sunrise strikes** the principal entrance. The temple is built from **Khondalite rocks**.
- A masterpiece of creative genius in both conception and realisation, the **temple represents a chariot of the Sun God**, with **twelve pairs of wheels drawn by seven horses** evoking its movement across the heavens.

- The original temple had **Vimana** (the structure over the Garbhagriha or inner sanctum) which was supposedly 229 feet (70 m) tall. But it has fallen off.
- The **audience hall (Jagamohana)**, which is about 128 feet (30 m) tall, still stands and is the principal structure in the surviving ruins.
- Among the structures, which have survived to the current day, are the **dance hall (Nata Mandira)** and **dining hall (Bhoga Mandapa)**.
- The sanctum sanctorum and the Jagamohana together stand on a lofty platform, richly ornamented by friezes of elephants, decorative ornaments interspersed with figures sculptures, often of a highly sensuous character.

Significance of the Temple

- The Sun Temple is directly associated with the **idea and belief of the personification of the Sun God**, which is represented in the **Vedas and classical texts**.
- Directly and materially linked to the Brahman beliefs, Konark is the invaluable link in the history of the diffusion of the **cult of Surya**, which **originating in Kashmir during the 8th century**, finally reached the shores of Eastern India.
- It is embellished with sophisticated and refined iconographical depictions of contemporary life and activities.
- The plinth of the temple between the wheels is entirely decorated with reliefs of fantastic lions, musicians and dancers, and erotic groups.
- The Sun Temple is the culmination of Kalinga temple architecture, with all its defining elements in complete and perfect form.
- It was declared a **UNESCO world heritage site in 1984**.

Other Important Sun Temples in India

- Modhera Surya temple, Gujarat
- Martand Sun temple, Kashmir
- Katarmal Sun Temple, Uttarakhand
- Dakshinarkaa temple Gaya, Bihar
- Bhramanya temple, Unao, Madhya Pradesh
- Surya Prahaar temple, Assam
- Suryanar Kovil Temple at Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu
- Suryanarayana temple at Arasavalli, Andhra Pradesh

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- ASI is the premier organization for the archaeological research, scientific analysis, excavation of archaeological sites, conservation and preservation of protected monuments.
- It is an attached office under the Department of Culture (**Ministry of Culture**).

- ASI was founded in **1861** by **Alexander Cunningham** who became its first Director-General.
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GSAT-29 Satellite Launched

The Indian Space and Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully launched **GSAT-29 (Geostationary Satellite)** communication satellite through Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III (GSLV Mk III).

GSLV Mk III successfully placed the satellite in **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO)** after three orbit-raising maneuvers, the satellite will be placed in the **Geostationary Orbit**.

Payloads on GSLV Mk III

- GSAT-29, weighing 3,423kg, is the **heaviest satellite to be put into orbit by ISRO's launch vehicle** and is designed for a mission life of 10 years.
- It is a multiband, multi-beam communication satellite which will serve as a testbed for several new and critical technologies.
- Its Payload also consists of Geo High-Resolution Camera and an Optical Communication Payload.

Significance

- GSAT-29 will help in providing **internet connectivity** in remote areas especially in **Jammu & Kashmir and North-Eastern regions of India**.
- Geo-High Resolution Camera will help in high-resolution imaging and help in **surveillance in the Indian Ocean**.
- Optical Communication payload will help in **data transmission at a very high rate** through the optical communication link.
- The successful launch signifies the **completion of the experimental phase of GSLV Mk III and it is now operational**.
- Future Mission of ISRO, **Chandrayaan-2 and Gaganyaan missions** (human space flight) will also be **launched by GSLV Mk III**.
- The success of GSLV Mk III marks an important milestone in the Indian space programme towards **achieving self-reliance** in launching heavier satellites.

Types of Orbits

In general, there are two types of orbits:

- Polar Synchronous

- Geosynchronous

Polar Orbit

- A polar orbit travels **north-south over the poles** and takes approximately **90 minutes for a full rotation**.
- These orbits have an **inclination near 90 degrees**. This allows the satellite to see virtually every part of the Earth as the Earth rotates underneath it.
- These satellites have many uses such as **monitoring crops, global security, measuring ozone concentrations in the stratosphere or measuring temperatures in the atmosphere**.
- Almost all the satellites that are in a polar orbit are at **lower altitudes**.
- An orbit is called **sun-synchronous** when the angle between the **line joining the center of the Earth and the satellite and the Sun is constant throughout the orbit**.
- These orbits are also referred to as **“Low Earth Orbit (LEO)”** which enables the onboard camera to take images of the earth under the same sun-illumination conditions during each of the repeated visits, thus making the satellite useful for earth resources monitoring.
- **It passes over any given point on Earth’s surface at the same local solar time.**

Geosynchronous Orbit

- Geosynchronous satellites are launched into orbit in the same direction the Earth is spinning and can have any inclination.
- When the satellite is in orbit at a specific altitude (approximately 36,000km above the Earth's surface), **it will exactly match the rotation of the Earth**.
- While, **Geostationary orbits** fall in the same category as geosynchronous orbits, but with that one special quality of being **parked over the equator**.
- In the case of geostationary satellites, the Earth’s force of gravity is exactly enough to provide acceleration required for circular motion.
- **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit(GTO):** To attain geostationary or geosynchronous earth orbits, a spacecraft is first launched into a Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit.
- From the **GTO the spacecraft uses its engines to shift to geostationary or geosynchronous orbit**.

Cyclone Gaja

A deep depression in the bay of bengal has intensified into a cyclonic storm and is likely to hit the coasts of Tamil Nadu.

- There is **long sea travel** ahead for Gaja, along with that **sea surface temperatures** are also warm and **low vertical wind shear**.
- Besides this, **Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO)** is also in the favourable zone. All these factors would be responsible in providing more strength to the system.
- The **cyclone Gaja means elephant in Sanskrit language** and has been **named by Sri Lanka**. It will be the second cyclone to hit the coastal area in a month after Cyclone Titli wreaked havoc in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.

Madden-Julian Oscillation

- The Madden-Julian Oscillation is a major fluctuation in tropical circulation and rainfall that moves eastward along the equator, and circles the entire globe in a span of 30–60 days on an average.
- The MJO, therefore is not static and is a moving system of wind, cloud and pressure that brings rain as it circles around the equator.
- The phenomenon takes its name from the two scientists who identified it in 1971 — Roland Madden and Paul Julian.
- In the active phase, MJO results in more than average rainfall for that time of the year, while in the suppressed phase, the area receives less than average rainfall.
- The effect of the MJO is witnessed mainly in the tropical region, in the band between 30 degrees North and 30 degrees South of the equator, even though the mid-latitude regions in both hemispheres also feel its impact.

Important Facts for Prelims (15th November 2018)

Hima Das : Unicef India's First Youth Ambassador

- The **United Nations Children's Fund — India (Unicef—India)** has appointed **Asian Games gold-medalist sprinter Hima Das** as the **country's first ever youth ambassador**.
 - The name of the woman **athlete from Assam** was announced by the world organisation on the Children's Day celebrated on November 14 commemorating the country's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's birthday.
 - Hima Das clinched a **gold medal in Women's 4x400 metre relay** event at the **2018 Asian Games**. She also won a **silver** in the **Women's 400m Race event**.
 - She is nicknamed '**Dhing Express**' after her **village in Assam**.
 - UNICEF India works with central government to ensure that each child born in this country gets the **best start in life, thrives and develops to his or her full potential**.
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