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Cultural Exchange Programme between India and Mongolia

Why in News

Recently, the Minister of State for Culture discussed various issues under the **Cultural Exchange Programme** with his Mongolian counterpart.



Key Points

- **Highlights of the Meet:**

- Strengthening the **strategic partnership**- established in 2015.
- The **Cultural Exchange Program** between India and Mongolia stands renewed until 2023.
- **10 dedicated ICCR scholarships** for studying '**Tibetan Buddhism**' have been allocated for Mongolians to study in specialized institutes of CIBS, Leh and CUTS, Varanasi, starting from 2020-2021.
 - The **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** is an **autonomous organisation of the Government of India**, involved in **India's external cultural relations (cultural diplomacy)**, through cultural exchange with other countries and their peoples.
 - Tibetan Buddhism **combines the essential teachings of Mahayana Buddhism with Tantric and Shamanic**, and material from an ancient Tibetan religion called Bon.
- India reiterated its commitment for **digitization of Buddhist manuscripts in Gandan monastery and would consider Mongolia's request for assistance in setting up a museum-cum-library** there.
- The Ministry of Culture is likely to complete reprinting of about **100 sets of sacred Mongolian Kanjur** by 2022 for distribution in the main centers of Buddhism in Mongolia.
 - **Mongolian Kanjur** is a **Buddhist canonical text in 108 volumes** and is considered to be the most important religious text in Mongolia. It has been translated from Tibetan and is **written in classical mongolian**.
 - In the Mongolian language 'Kanjur' means 'Concise Orders'- the words of Lord Buddha in particular.
- Highlighted steps taken to **facilitate the visa and travel of Buddhist monks from Mongolia** within India.

- **India-Mongolia Relations:**
 - **Historical Relations:**

India and Mongolia have interacted through **Buddhism** throughout history.
 - **Diplomatic Relations:**
 - India was the first country outside the former Soviet bloc of nations to open diplomatic relations with Mongolia in 1955.
 - In 2015, Mongolia witnessed the first ever visit by the Prime Minister of India (a part of **India's Act East policy**).
 - **International Cooperation:**
 - Mongolia has publicly reiterated its **support for India's membership to the permanent seat of the expanded United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.
 - India has played an important role in **getting Mongolia membership to key international forums**, including the **United Nations (UN)**, despite strong opposition from China and Taiwan. India also championed the **inclusion of Mongolia in the Non-Aligned Movement**.
 - In a reciprocal gesture, **Mongolia co-sponsored a 1972 UN resolution** with India and Bhutan **for the recognition of the newly liberated Bangladesh**.
 - Other Forums of which both the countries are members: **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)**, **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**.
 - India is a member whereas Mongolia is an observer state at the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**.
 - **Economic Cooperation:**
 - India - Mongolia bilateral trade was USD 35.3 million in 2020, down from USD 38.3 million in 2019.
 - India has undertaken the '**Mongol refinery project**' under its Lines of Credit (LoC) programme.
 - **Cultural Cooperation:**
 - The **India-Mongolian Agreement on Cultural Cooperation**, signed in 1961, has governed the **Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP)** between the two countries.
 - The Agreement envisages co-operation in the fields of education by way of scholarships, exchange of experts, participation in conferences, etc.
 - **Defence Cooperation:**
 - Joint defence exercises code-named **Nomadic Elephant**.
 - India is also an active participant in an annual week-long joint training exercise called the **Khaan Quest**, hosted by Mongolia.
 - **Cooperation over Environmental Issues:**
 - Part of the **Bishkek Declaration (snow leopard)**.

Way Forward

- Mongolia's strategic position at the cross junction of Central Asia, Northeast Asia, far East, China and Russia attracts major powers towards it. India should consider Mongolia as a green zone of economic development that absorbs hi-tech features and production skills in a modernization process.
- To preserve and promote the common heritage of Indo-Mongolian culture is important. This should serve as the basis for nurturing and pursuing future common interests.

Source: PIB

India Resists Community Transmission Tag

Why in News

As per a latest report by the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, **India** continues to **label itself as a country with no Community Transmission (CT)** since the beginning of the **Covid-19 pandemic**.

Countries such as the **United States, Brazil, United Kingdom, France** have all labelled themselves as being in the '**community transmission**' stage whereas **Italy and Russia do not label** themselves as being in 'community transmission'.

Key Points

Community Transmission (CT):

- It is **one of the stages of the Pandemic**.
- Broadly, CT is **when new cases in the last 14 days can't be traced to those who have an international travel history**, when cases can't be linked to specific clusters.
- CT classification is now **divided into four levels**, from low incidence (CT1) to very high incidence (CT4).

Four Stages of a Pandemic

- **Stage 1-Imported Transmission:**

It is reported among the travellers entering the country via the borders and airports. This can be controlled through thermal screening and quarantine.

- **Stage 2-Local Transmission:**

It is defined as the transmission through direct contact with an infected person within the country.

- **Stage 3-Community Transmission:**

It signifies that a virus is circulating in the community and can affect people with no history of travel to affected areas or of contact with an infected person.

- **Stage 4- Epidemic:**

Stage 4 is when the disease actually becomes an epidemic in a country, such as it (Covid-19) was in China, with large numbers of infections and a growing number of deaths with no end in sight. It is then considered to be endemic or now prevalent in the region.

- **India's Current Classification:**

- India **opts for the lower, less serious classification called 'cluster of cases'**.
- It says '**Cases detected in the past 14 days are predominantly limited to well-defined clusters** that are not directly linked to imported cases'.
- It is assumed that there are a number of unidentified cases in the area. This **implies a low risk of infection** to others in the wider community if exposure to these clusters is avoided.

- **Implications for India for not classifying itself as being in CT:**

- India's refusal to describe itself as being in community transmission shows an **"ostrich in the sand" approach** since being in CT — far from being stigmatic or an indicator of failure **shows how authorities addressed a pandemic**.
- If **cases were still a cluster**, it would mean that the government ought to be **prioritising testing, contact tracing and isolating** to prevent further infection spread. While on the other hand **being in CT, it meant prioritising treatment and observing advisories** to stay protected.
- **Community transmission means that the health system has now lost track of the trajectory of the virus** and infections are happening without the source of the infection being known.

Once the government accepts community transmission, **pandemic control strategy will move on to the next phase**, which is the mitigation phase, when the focus will be to ensure that only those people get to the hospital who really need medical care. This would ensure lives are saved. **Keeping track of infections or containing them would then no longer be the primary strategy.**

Source:TH

National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage

Why in News

The Union Cabinet has approved a **Rs. 18,100-crore Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme** for manufacturers of **Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC)** battery storage, to reduce imports.

The scheme is called the **National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell Battery Storage (NPACC)**. It is under the **Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises**.

Key Points

- **PLI Scheme:**
 - It aims to **give companies incentives on incremental sales from products manufactured in domestic units**.
 - It invites foreign companies to set units in India, however, it also aims to encourage local companies to set up or expand existing manufacturing units.
 - The PLI Scheme **has also been approved for sectors** such as automobiles, pharmaceuticals, IT hardware including laptops, mobile phones & telecom equipment, white goods, chemical cells and textiles, etc.
- **Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC):**
 - ACCs are the **new generation of advanced storage technologies that can store electric energy either as electrochemical or as chemical energy** and convert it back to electric energy as and when required.
 - Such battery storages will **cater not only to electric vehicles but also to the consumer electronics** industry and electricity grids.
- **About NPACC Scheme:**
 - The plan is to **set up 50 gigawatt hour (GWh) manufacturing capacity for ACC batteries** by attracting investments totaling Rs. 45,000 crore.
 - Requires each selected ACC battery Storage manufacturer to set-up an **ACC manufacturing facility of minimum 5 GWh capacity**, achieve a **domestic value addition of at least 25%** and incur the mandatory investment **Rs.225 crore /GWh within 2 Years**.
 - Furthermore, the beneficiary firms need to ensure a **minimum 60% domestic value addition** at the Project level within **five years**.
 - The **incentive** will be disbursed **over a period of five years**. It will be paid out **on the basis of sales, energy efficiency, battery life cycle, and localization levels**.
- **Expected Benefits from NPACC Scheme:**
 - Facilitate **demand creation for battery storage** in India.
 - Facilitate **Make-in-India** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.
 - Facilitate demand for **Electric Vehicles (EVs)**, which are proven to be significantly less polluting.
 - A key contributing factor to **reduce India's GreenHouse Gas (GHG) emissions**.
 - **Import substitution** of around Rs. 20,000 crore every year.
 - **Impetus to Research & Development** to achieve higher specific energy density and cycles in ACC.
 - Promote **newer and niche cell technologies**.

Death of 186 Elephants in 10 Years

Why in News

According to the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**, a total of **186 elephants were killed** after being **hit by trains** across India **between 2009-10 and 2020-21**.

Key Points

- **Data Analysis:**

Assam accounted for the **highest number** of elephant casualties on railway tracks (62), followed by **West Bengal (57)**, and **Odisha (27)**.

Uttar Pradesh saw a **single death**.

- **Measures Taken:**

- A **Permanent Coordination Committee** has been constituted between the **Ministry of Railways** and the **MoEFCC** for preventing elephant deaths in train accidents.
- **Clearing vegetation along railway tracks** to enable clear view for loco pilots, **construction of underpass/overpass** for safe passage of elephants, **regular patrolling of vulnerable stretches** of railway tracks, **warning sign boards**, etc.
- The **MoEFCC** has released **Rs. 212.49 crore** to elephant range States under the **Project Elephant** between 2011-12 and 2020-21.
- Elephant was **declared a 'national heritage animal' in 2010**, considering the valuable ecological services rendered by the species.
 - Elephants are **architects of the forest and woodland ecosystem (keystone species)**.
 - Considered nature's 'gardener', they are **key in shaping the landscape, in pollination, germination of seeds and improving the fertility of forest soil** with heaps of dung.

- **Project Elephant:**

- **About:**

- It was **launched in 1992** to provide financial and technical support to wildlife management efforts by states for their free ranging populations of wild **Asian Elephants**.
 - It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)**.

- **Objectives:**

- To protect elephants, their habitat & corridors.
 - To address issues of man-animal conflict.
 - Welfare of captive elephants.

- **Implementation:**

The Project is being **mainly implemented in 16 States / UTs** , viz. Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal.

- **Elephant Census:**

- Elephant census is conducted **once in 5 years** under the aegis of Project Elephant. Last Elephant Census was conducted **in 2017**.
 - According to the Elephant Census 2017, India's **Asian elephant population is 27,312**.
 - The numbers are **lower than** from the **last census estimate in 2012** (between 29,391 and 30,711).
 - **Karnataka** has the **highest number of elephants**, followed by Assam and Kerala.

- **Elephant Reserves:**

There are around **32 Elephant Reserves** in India. The very first elephant reserve was the **Singhbhum Elephant Reserve of Jharkhand**.

- **Protection Status of Asian Elephants:**

- **IUCN Red List:** Endangered.
 - **CITES:** Appendix I
 - **India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule I.

- **Related Global Initiative:**

The **Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme**, launched **in 2003**, is an international collaboration that tracks trends in information related to the illegal killing of elephants from across Africa and Asia, to monitor effectiveness of field conservation efforts.

- **Recent Developments:**

- **Seed Bombs:**

- Recently Odisha's Athagarh Forest Division has started casting seed balls (or bombs) inside different reserve forest areas to enrich food stock for wild elephants to prevent **man-elephant conflict**.

- **Right of Passage of the Animals:**

- Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) upheld the 2011 order of the Madras High Court (HC) on the Nilgiris elephant corridor, affirming the right of passage of the animals and the closure of resorts in the area.

Source: TH

SWAMIH Fund

Why in News

Recently, the Government of India's **Special Window for Affordable & Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH)** completed its **first residential project**.

The residential project - Rivali Park, located in **suburban Mumbai**, was the **first housing project in India** to have received funding under the **SWAMIH Fund**.

Key Points

About the SWAMIH Fund:

- This is a government backed fund that was set up as a **Category-II AIF (Alternate Investment Fund)** debt fund **registered with SEBI**, launched in 2019.
- **SWAMIH Investment Fund** was formed to complete construction of stalled, **RERA**-registered affordable and mid-income category housing projects which are stuck due to paucity of funds.
- The **Investment Manager** of the Fund is **SBICAP Ventures**, a wholly-owned subsidiary of SBI Capital Markets, which in turn is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the **State Bank of India**.
- The **Sponsor of the Fund** is the **Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance**, on behalf of the Government of India.

RERA

- **Inception:**

Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA) is an act passed by the Parliament in 2016 that came into effect fully **from 1st May, 2017**.

The Act establishes Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) in each state for regulation of the real estate sector and also acts as an adjudicating body for speedy dispute resolution.

- **Aim:**

It seeks to protect **home-buyers** as well as help **boost investments in the real estate sector** by bringing efficiency and transparency in the sale/purchase of real estate.

Alternative Investment Fund (AIF):

- AIF means any fund established or incorporated in India which is a privately pooled investment vehicle which collects funds from sophisticated investors, whether Indian or foreign, for investing it in accordance with a defined investment policy for the benefit of its investors.
- **Regulation 2(1)(b) of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Regulations (AIFs), 2012** lays down the definition of AIFs.
 - Through a company, or a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP), an Alternative Investment Fund can be established.
- AIF **does not include** funds covered under the SEBI (**Mutual Funds**) Regulations, 1996, SEBI (Collective Investment Schemes) Regulations, 1999 or any other regulations of the Board to regulate fund management activities.
 - Other **exemptions** include family trusts, employee welfare trusts or gratuity trusts.
- **Categories of AIFs:**
 - **Category-I AIFs:**
 - These funds are **invested in** businesses that have the potential to grow financially such as **StartUps, Small and Medium Enterprises**.
 - The government encourages investments in these ventures as they have a positive impact on the economy with regards to high output and job creation.
 - **Examples** include Infrastructure Funds, Angel Funds, Venture Capital Funds and Social Venture Funds.
 - **Category-II AIFs:**
 - Under this category, funds that are **invested in equity securities and debt securities** are included. Those funds not already under Category I and III respectively are also included. No concession is given by the government for any investment made for Category II AIFS.
 - **Examples** include Real Estate Funds, Debt Fund, Private Equity Funds.
 - **Category-III AIFs:**
 - Category-III AIFs are those funds which **give returns under a short period of time**. These funds use complex and diverse trading strategies to achieve their goals. There is no known concession or incentive given towards these funds specifically by the government.
 - **Examples** include Hedge Funds, Private Investment in Public Equity Funds, etc.

Source: PIB
