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Vertical Launch Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM)

- Recently Vertical Launched Short Range Surface to Air Missile (VL-SRSAM) was successfully flight tested by Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and Indian Navy from an Indian Naval Ship at Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur Odisha.

About VL-SRSAM:

- VL-SRSAM has been jointly designed and developed by three units of Defense Research and Development Organization for deployment on warships of the Indian Navy.
- The missile has the capability to neutralize various airborne threats at close range including sea-skimming targets.
- Sea skimming is a technique used by many anti-ship missiles and some fighter or strike aircraft to evade radar and infrared detection.

Design:

- The missile has a range of 40 to 50 km. Designed to attack high-speed air targets at a distance of up to 15 km and at an altitude of about 15 km.
- Its design is based on the Astra missile, which is an air-to-air missile beyond visual range.
- Astra ("Weapon") is India's first air-to-air all-weather active beyond visible range radar homing air-to-air missile, developed by the Defense Research and Development Organization.
- Beyond-Visual-Range Missile (BVR) is an air-to-air missile capable of hitting a range of 20 nautical miles or more.

Features:

- Cruciform wings: They are four small wings arranged like a cross on four sides and provide a stable aerodynamic position to the projectile.
- Thrust vectoring: This is the ability to change the direction of thrust, angular velocity and position of the missile with its engine.
- Thrust is the force that moves the aircraft through the air.
- Canistered system: It controls the environment inside, thus making it easier to transport and store, and to make the weapon durable.

Defensive response:

Chaff:

- It is a countermeasure technique used around the world to protect naval ships from enemy radar and radio frequency (RF) missiles.

Missiles to counter anti-ship missiles:

- These systems should have a rapid detection mechanism and quick response to warships.

Menar Bird Village Rajasthan

- Menar village in Udaipur district, recognized as "Bird Village" after various conservation efforts, has been decided to be notified as the new wetland of Rajasthan.
- This will pave the way for this rural area of Mewar region to get the status of Ramsar site.

Wetlands:

- Wetlands are seasonal or permanent ecosystems located in water. These include mangroves, swamps, rivers, lakes, deltas, floodplains and floodplains, rice fields, coral reefs, marine areas (places with high tides less than 6 m) as well as man-made wetlands such as wastewater treatment ponds and Reservoir etc. are included.

Importance:

- Wetlands are an important part of our natural environment. They reduce the incidence of floods, protect coastal areas, as well as improve water quality by absorbing pollutants.
- Wetlands are important for humans and the earth. More than 1 billion people depend on them for subsistence and 40% of the world's species live and breed in wetlands.
- They are important sources of food, raw materials, genetic resources for medicines and hydropower.
- 30% of land-based carbon is stored in peatlands (a type of wetland).
- They play an important role in transport, tourism and cultural and spiritual wellbeing of the people.
- Many wetlands are areas of natural beauty and important to the tribal people.

Main features of Menar Wetland:

- Two lakes in Menar village- Brahma and Dhandha host a large number of migratory birds every year.
- The Forest Department has started the process of notifying Menar as a wetland, which will recognize its role in sediment and nutrient storage and help local authorities in conserving the lakes concerned.
- Two lakes will be strengthened to increase aquatic plants and protect biodiversity with wetland status.

Resident Species:

- More than 150 species of local and migratory birds inhabit both the lakes during the winter season.
- These include the Greater Flamingo, White-tailed Lapwing, Pelican, Marsh Harrier, Bar-headed Goose, Common Teal, Greenshank, Pintail, Wagtail, Green Sandpiper and Red-Wattled Lapwing.
- Bird lovers and tourists visit this village after the arrival of migratory birds from Central Asia, Europe and Mongolia.

Other Ramsar sites:

- Presently there are two wetlands recognized as Ramsar sites in Rajasthan-
- Keoladeo Ghana in Bharatpur District.
- Sambhar Salt Lake in Jaipur district.

Importance of Ramsar List:

- It is like an ISO (International Organization for Standardization) certification. Any site may also be removed from this list if it does not consistently meet their standards. It is like a valuable item which has a cost but that cost can be paid only when that article has a brand value.
- Ramsar tag depends on strong security system of any site and provides protection against encroachment.
- Many species of birds prefer to avoid going into the Himalayan region when entering here and instead choose a route through Afghanistan and Pakistan to enter the Indian subcontinent via Gujarat and Rajasthan.
- Thus Gujarat has become the first 'landing point' for many international migratory species like ducks, waders, plovers, terns, gulls etc. and shorebirds as well as birds of prey.
- Wetlands in India act as pastures and resting places for migratory birds during winter.
- According to the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Wildlife Species, the CAF (Central Asian Flyway), which covers 30 countries, covers at least 279 species of 182 migratory waterfowl species, including 29 globally threatened and near Threatened species are included.

NITI Aayog

- NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant is set to step down and will be replaced by Parameswaran Iyer, former Secretary, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.

NITI Aayog:

Background:

- The Planning Commission was replaced by a new institution NITI Aayog on January 1, 2015, emphasizing the 'bottom-up' approach to envisage the concept of Maximum Governance, Minimum Government, echoing the spirit of 'cooperative federalism'.
- It has two hubs.
- Team India Hub – acts as an interface between the states and the Centre.
- Knowledge and Innovation Hub- Works like a think-tank of NITI Aayog.

Combination:

- Chairman: Prime Minister
- Vice President: appointed by the Prime Minister
- Governing Council: Chief Ministers of all States and Lieutenant Governors of Union Territories.
- Regional Council: The Prime Minister or a person nominated by him presides over the meeting of Chief Ministers and Lieutenant Governors to address specific regional issues.
- Ad-hoc Membership: 2 ex-officio members on rotation from leading research institutes.
- Ex-officio Membership: Up to four members of the Union Council of Ministers nominated by the Prime Minister.
- Chief Executive Officer (CEO): Secretary to the Government of India who is appointed by the Prime Minister for a fixed term.
- Special Invitees: Experts from various fields nominated by the Prime Minister.

Purpose:

- Promoting cooperative federalism through structured support initiatives and mechanisms with states on an ongoing basis, recognizing that strong states make up a strong nation.
- Developing mechanisms for making credible plans at the village level and progressively collating these at higher levels of government.
- To ensure that the interests of national security are incorporated into economic strategy and policy, in particular in the areas it refers to.
- Pay special attention to those sections of society who may be at risk of not benefiting adequately from economic progress.
- Provide advice and encourage partnerships between key stakeholders and national and international like-minded think tanks as well as academic and policy research institutions
- Establishing a knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurial support system through a collaborative community of national and international experts, practitioners and other partners.
- To provide a forum for resolution of inter-sectoral and inter-departmental issues to expedite the implementation of the development agenda.
- To help in dissemination of stakeholders along with maintaining a state-of-the-art resource centre, aggregating research on good governance and best practices in sustainable and equitable development.

Importance of setting up NITI Aayog:

- The 65 year old Planning Commission had become a redundant organization. It was relevant in a directed economy structure but no longer.
- India is a country of diversities and its states are at different stages of economic development, with their own different strengths and weaknesses.
- The notion that one model should be applicable to all for economic planning is wrong. It cannot establish India as a competitor in today's global economy.

Related concerns and challenges:

- NITI Aayog has no authority to give discretionary funding to states, which makes it incapable of making transformative interventions.
- It acts only as an advisory body which advises the government on various issues without ensuring the enforceability of its ideas.
- NITI Aayog has no role in influencing private or public investment.
- The organization has been politicized in recent times.
- NITI Aayog has been turned into a glorified recommendatory body, which lacks the necessary powers to bring about a positive change in the working of the government.

Initiatives of NITI Aayog:

- SDG India Index
- Composite Water Management Index
- Atal Innovation Mission
- Project with
- Aspirational District Program
- School Education Quality Index
- District Hospital Index
- Health Index
- Agricultural Marketing and Farmer Friendly Reforms Index
- India Innovation Index
- Women Transforming India Awards
- Good Governance Index

Difference between NITI Aayog and Planning Commission

NITI Aayog

- It acts as an advisory think tank.
- It consists of a wide range of expert members.
- It works in the spirit of cooperative federalism as the states are equal partners.
- Secretaries appointed by the Prime Minister are known as CEOs.
- It focuses on the 'bottom-up' approach of the scheme.
- It does not have the authority to enforce policies.
- It does not have the authority to allocate funds, which is vested in the Finance Minister.

Planning Commission

- It functioned as a non-constitutional body.
- It had limited expertise.
- States participated in the Annual Planning Meetings as spectators.
- Secretaries were appointed through normal process.
- It followed a 'top-down' approach.
- Implemented policies on states and allocated funds with approved projects.
- It was empowered to allocate funds to ministries and state governments.

Need for an Urban Job Guarantee Scheme

A study commissioned by the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council has recommended an urban job guarantee scheme.

What is the history of urban employment schemes in India?

- India has had a history of urban employment schemes such as the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY), which was launched in 1997.
- It provided employment to the unemployed and underemployed urban poor through self-employment and wage employment.
- In 2013, the SJSRY was replaced by the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM).
- But none of them were employment guarantee schemes.
- More and more Indian state governments are looking favourably towards an urban version of MGNREGA. These include
 - Kerala – Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme
 - Odisha- Unnati or Urban Wage Employment Initiative
 - Himachal Pradesh- Mukhyamantri Shahri Aajeevika Guarantee Yojna or MMSAGY
 - Madhya Pradesh- Mukhyamantri Yuva Swabhiman Yojana
 - Jharkhand- Mukhyamantri Shramik Yojana
 - Rajasthan- Indira Gandhi Shahari Rozgar Yojana
 - Tamil Nadu- Tamil Nadu Wage Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme for Urban Poor

What is the need for an urban job guarantee scheme?

- The nationwide lockdown implemented strictly in urban areas led to job losses and reverse migration.
- Growing distress among the urban poor.
- Unemployment rates are typically higher in urban areas.
- Urban poor are worst affected by India's persistently high inflation.
- Prevalence of low-wage, poor quality, informal work.

Food transfers under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana as well as enhanced MGNREGA works saved the rural population but most of the urban poor have not signed up for PMGKY or Jan Dhan Yojana.

Can an urban job guarantee scheme be tailored along the lines of MGNREGA?

- An urban job guarantee scheme should not be tailored along the lines of a job guarantee like MGNREGA because the urban workforce is more diverse than its rural counterpart.
- The MGNREGA is essentially an income-support programme for off-season farm workers, whereas the urban workforce can be divided into two broad categories
 - Those living on the margins in cities for years
 - A more aspirational migrant population
- Those living on the margins in cities need to be enrolled in the government portals for benefits such as pension schemes.
- Investment in skilling is essential to ramp up competitiveness in manufacturing.
- The industrial training institutes need to be brought in line with the latest skilling needs by working in concert with industry.

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