

Current Affairs : 19 July 2022

CLEARING CM'S FOREIGN TRIPS

In News:

- Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has questioned why the Centre has delayed the clearance of his trip to Singapore.
- He has been invited by the Singapore to attend a World Cities Summit scheduled during July 31-August 3.

Chief Ministers' foreign trips

Clearance required by Chief Ministers to travel abroad

- Chief Ministers have to inform the Cabinet Secretariat. This has been mandated by the government circular issued in May 2015.
 - The Cabinet Secretariat and the Ministry of External Affairs should be kept informed of the proposed foreign visit, either official or private, of Chief Ministers and Ministers of State Governments/Union Territories.
- However, before informing Cabinet Secretariat, prior political clearance and FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) clearance are mandatory.
- In case of Chief Ministers and Ministers of state governments, a copy of the application must also be sent to the Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs (DEA).

What is political clearance?

- Political clearance comes from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). This is required not only for public servants but any government servant for a foreign trip.
- The decision to grant political clearance is taken based on multiple factors such as:
 - the nature of the event,
 - the level of participation from other countries,
 - the kind of invitation that has been extended, and
 - India's relations with the host country.

- Since 2016, applications can be made for e-political clearance, on the portal epolclearance.gov.in.
- The concerned ministry and the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) entertain an application only if political clearance from the MEA is attached with the request.
- Without this clearance, no public servant can go abroad.

Any other clearances needed

- **Different officers need different additional clearances.**
 - Chief Ministers, ministers of state governments and other state officials also need clearance from the Department of Economic Affairs.
 - For Union ministers, after getting political clearance from the MEA, additional clearance is needed from the Prime Minister, whether the trip is official or personal.
 - Lok Sabha MPs need clearance from the Speaker, and Rajya Sabha members from the Chairperson (Vice President of India).
 - For officers of various ministries up to Joint Secretary level, clearance is given by the minister concerned, after political clearance.
 - For those above that rank, the proposal needs approval of a screening committee of secretaries.
- Rules vary according to the duration of the visit, the country to be visited, and the number of members in a delegation.
 - If the foreign trip involves the hospitality of organisations other than those of the UN, FCRA clearance is needed from the Home Ministry.
 - For MPs, it is not obligatory to inform the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha secretariat if the trip is private.
 - For government employees, all foreign trips, official or personal, need approval.

Instances of CMs' requests for political clearance being denied

- In October 2019, the then Delhi CM had to address a conference in Denmark through videoconferencing, as the Centre denied clearance to a trip there.
- Earlier, the MEA had denied political clearance to trips by then Chief Ministers Tarun Gogoi (Assam) to the US and Israel, and Arjun Munda (Jharkhand) to Thailand.

Do judges need clearance for foreign trips?

- For official foreign travel, the proposal by a Supreme Court or High Court judge is sent to the Department of Justice (DoJ).
 - This is done after taking clearance from the Chief Justice of India.
 - The DoJ, after taking political clearance from the MEA and in some cases from the Home Ministry (when FCRA is involved), issues approval.
 - Political clearance from the MEA was needed even for personal trips until February 2010, when the DoJ decided to dispense with this necessity in case of private visits.
 - Judges do not need clearance for personal foreign trips.
-

GOVERNMENT SETS UP MSP PANEL, BUT IS MUM ON LEGAL GUARANTEE

In News:

- The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare recently notified a committee to promote zero-budget based farming and to make the MSP more effective and transparent.
- However, the committee's terms of reference (headed by former agriculture secretary **Sanjay Agrawal**) do not include any legal guarantee on MSP.
 - Legal guarantee on MSP was one of the key demands of the Sanyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) of farmer unions that led the protest.

Minimum Support Price (MSP) Regime in India:

Background:

- India's agriculture was devastated under British rule and the farmers were impoverished.
- The Food-Grain Enquiry Committee, established by the Jawaharlal Nehru administration in 1957, was the first attempt to address the agricultural earning issue. However, it turned out to be insignificant.
- Then, in 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri formed the Food Grain Price Committee (under LK Jha), to push for a minimum support price (MSP) regime.

- Despite the fact that the report was quickly accepted by the Shastri government, the first MSP announcement was made in 1967.
- Thus, the MSP regime came into existence as a policy decision and the government set up the Agricultural Prices Commission (renamed as the CACP in 1985) for fixing MSP for crops.

About MSP:

- MSP is a form of market intervention (a policy decision not enforceable by law) by the Government of India to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices during bumper production years.
- These are announced by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (Chaired by the Prime Minister of India).
- The recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) at the beginning of the sowing season for certain crops forms the basis of these announcements.
- The CACP considers the following factors when recommending MSPs –
 - A commodity's demand and supply;
 - Its cost of production;
 - Market price trends (both domestic and international);
 - Inter-crop price parity;
 - The terms of trade between agriculture and non-agriculture (the ratio of farm input and farm output prices);
 - A minimum of 50% as a margin over cost of production; and
 - The likely implications of an MSP on consumers of that product.

Objectives:

- MSPs are a guarantee price for farmer's produce from the Government to prevent the farmers from distress sales and to procure food grains for public distribution.
- g., if the market price for a commodity falls below the specified minimum price due to bumper production and a market glut, government agencies will buy the entire quantity supplied by farmers at the announced minimum price.

Crops covered:

- Government announces MSPs for **22** mandated crops and fair and remunerative price (**FRP**) for **sugarcane** (total 23).
- Crops covered by MSPs include:
 - 7 types of cereals (paddy, wheat, maize, bajra, jowar, ragi and barley),
 - 5 types of pulses (chana, arhar/tur, urad, moong and masur),
 - 7 oilseeds (rapeseed-mustard, groundnut, soyabean, sunflower, sesamum, safflower, nigerseed),
 - 4 commercial crops (cotton, sugarcane, copra, raw jute)

Associated issues:

- **Majority of farmers remain uncovered:**
 - According to a NSSO survey (2012-13), less than six percent of Indian farmers (over 9 crore agricultural households) have benefited directly from selling their wheat or rice under the MSP regime.
- **Government does not procure all farm produce at MSPs:**
 - Actual procurement (at MSP) varies with crop and geography. Also, MSPs have no statutory backing, a farmer cannot demand MSP as a matter of right.
- **Protest over new farm laws:**
 - In order to reform the legal-administrative framework that governs agriculture in India, **Shanta Kumar committee** (2014) was constituted to study food procurement mechanism.
 - In concurrence to its report, the government brought two new farm laws and amended one existing law, which were opposed by many farmer's unions as anti-farmer, aimed at ending the MSP regime, forcing the repeal of the laws.

News Summary:

- As a result, the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare recently notified a committee under the former Agriculture Secretary Sanjay Agrawal as the chairman and will have 26 members (including 3 of SKM).

Term of reference of the committee:

- **To promote Zero budget natural farming (ZBNF).**

- ZBNF guides farmers toward sustainable farming practices, which helps to retain soil fertility, ensure chemical-free agriculture, and ensure low production costs (zero cost), thereby increasing farmers' income.

PRADHAN MANTRI KAUSHAL KENDRAS

The Government said 818 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKKs) have been allocated across the country to promote model training.



About:

- In a written reply in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Rajeev Chandrasekhar said out of total 818 allocated PMKKs, 722 PMKKs have been established covering 707 districts in 36 States and Union Territories.
- He said over 71 lakh candidates have been trained during the last three years under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana in the country.

NAMASTE SCHEME

Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Kaushal Kishore said, the Government has formulated a National Action Plan for Mechanized Sanitation Ecosystem- NAMASTE scheme for cleaning of sewers and septic tank.



About:

- The scheme is a joint venture of Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

- It aims to achieve outcomes like zero fatalities in sanitation work in India, no sanitation workers come in direct contact with human faecal matter and all Sewer and Septic tank sanitation workers have access to alternative livelihoods.
 - The Ministry has shortlisted type of machineries and core equipments required for maintenance works, safety gear for Safai Mitras. The same is also available on the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal for ease of their procurement by States and Urban Local Bodies.
 - Mr Kaushal Kishore said that Skill Development and trainings of Safai Mitras is being taken up with the support of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment through the National Safai Karamchari Finance Development Corporation.
-

CRYPTO CURRENCIES

The Government has said that the Reserve Bank of India has registered its concern over the adverse effect of Cryptocurrencies on the Indian economy.



About:

- This was informed by the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in a written reply in Lok Sabha.
 - She said that according to the RBI, Crypto currencies are not a currency because every modern currency needs to be issued by the Central Bank or government.
 - The Finance Minister said that in view of the concerns expressed by RBI on the destabilising effect of cryptocurrencies on the monetary and fiscal stability of the country, RBI has recommended framing of legislation on this sector. She said that the RBI is of the view that cryptocurrencies should be prohibited.
 - The Finance Minister said that RBI has been cautioning users, holders and traders of virtual currencies that dealing in these currencies is associated with potential economic, financial and operational, legal, customer protection and security-related risks.
-

MAINSTREAMING MILLETS IN ASIA AND AFRICA

NITI Aayog and the World Food Programme (WFP), India, will launch the ‘Mapping and Exchange of Good Practices’ initiative for mainstreaming millets in Asia and Africa on 19 July 2022 in a hybrid event.



About:

- NITI and WFP will prepare a compendium of good practices for scaling up the production and consumption of millets in India and abroad.
- Representatives from ICAR, Central and state government departments, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, industry, Central and state agriculture universities, FPOs, NGOs, start-ups, academic and research institutions, and international organizations such as the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Food Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), etc., will also participate in the event.

e-SHRAM PORTAL

The government said around 28 crore unorganised workers have been registered on e-Shram Portal.



About:

- In a written reply in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Labour and Employment Rameswar Teli said the government had launched e-Shram portal in August last year with an objective to create a national Database of unorganised workers.
- It also facilitates delivery of Social Security Schemes and Welfare schemes to the unorganised workers.
- He said the Centre is also implementing Prime Minister Street Vendor’s Atmanirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi Scheme) since 1st June 2020 to facilitate collateral-free working capital loan to street



CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK



vendors to restart their businesses, which were adversely impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Mr Teli said over 33 lakh loans amounting to above three thousand six hundred crore rupees have been disbursed to over 30 lakh beneficiaries under the scheme till 11th of this month.

