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## Current Affairs - 28 August 2025

### WHAT IS THE EXPORT PROMOTION MISSION?



- It is a flagship initiative announced in the Union Budget 2025-26.

- It seeks to enable broad-based, inclusive, and sustainable export growth over six years (FY 2025-31) by exploring approaches beyond conventional mechanisms to address key bottlenecks faced by Indian exporters, especially MSMEs.
- It is driven jointly by the Ministries of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, and the Ministry of Finance to enhance export competitiveness by facilitating improved access to export credit, enabling cross-border factoring, and assisting MSMEs in addressing non-tariff barriers in global markets.

The Department of Commerce is the lead department for the Mission.

- The mission is proposed to be implemented through two sub-schemes - Niryat Protsahan (over Rs 10,000 crore) and Niryat Disha (over Rs 14,500 crore).
- The main elements under the Niryat Protsahan scheme being considered by the government, include interest equalisation support worth over Rs 5,000 crore for six financial years (2025-2031), support for alternative trade finance instruments, a credit card for e-commerce exporters, and other financing mechanisms to bridge liquidity gaps faced by exporters.
- Similarly, under Niryat Disha, the proposed components include support for export quality compliance (about Rs 4,000 crore), overseas market development (over Rs 4,000 crore), branding, export warehousing and logistics, and capacity building to integrate more Indian enterprises into global value chains.



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### PM SVANIDHI SCHEME



- It was initially launched on 1st June 2020 to support street vendors who faced unprecedented hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It is implemented jointly by the **Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA)** and **Department of Financial Services (DFS)**, with DFS being responsible for facilitating access to loan/ credit cards through banks/financial institutions and their ground level functionaries.

### Key facts about the Restructured PM SVANidhi Scheme

- The scheme's coverage is being expanded **beyond statutory towns to census towns, peri-urban areas**
- The enhanced loan structure includes **first tranche loans increased up to ₹15,000** (from ₹10,000) and second tranche loans increased up to ₹25,000 (from ₹20,000), while the third tranche **remains unchanged at ₹50,000**.
- The introduction of **UPI-linked RUPAY Credit Card** would provide **immediate access of credit** to the street vendors in order to meet any emergent business and personal requirements.
- In order to give boost to digital adoption, the **street vendors can avail cashback incentives up to ₹1,600** on making retail & wholesale transactions.
- The scheme also focuses on building the capacity of the street vendors with a focus on **entrepreneurship, financial literacy, digital skills**, and marketing through convergence.
- **Standard hygiene** and food safety training would be conducted for street food vendors, in **partnership with FSSAI**.



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- In order to ensure holistic welfare & development of the street vendors and their families, the ‘SVANidhi se Samriddhi’ component will be further strengthened, through monthly Lok Kalyan Melas.
- **Significance:** It envisages the **holistic development of street vendors** by offering a reliable source of finance to support business expansion and opportunities for sustainable growth. This will not only empower street vendors but will also foster inclusive economic growth, socio-economic upliftment of street vendors and their families.

### THE ASI IS FACING A CREDIBILITY CRISIS

- **Archaeology**, as a scientific discipline, aims to **reconstruct the past through material evidence and objective analysis**.
- Yet in India, **it has often become a contested field**, where historical narratives are shaped as much by politics as by empirical findings.
- The **recent controversy surrounding the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Keeladi excavations** highlights not only the **struggle between scientific inquiry and political agendas**, but also the **institutional limitations of the ASI** in sustaining credibility and scholarly integrity.

#### The Keeladi Excavations: A Challenge to Established Narratives

- **The Objective of Keeladi Excavations**
  - The Keeladi excavations in Tamil Nadu, initiated in 2014, **quickly emerged as one of the most significant archaeological projects in India**.
  - With over **7,500 artefacts unearthed in its early phases**, the findings pointed to the existence of a literate, urban, and secular society in South India during the Early Historic Period.
  - By potentially **bridging the historical gap between the Iron Age (12th–6th century BCE) and the Early Historic period (6th–4th century BCE)**, Keeladi **questioned the prevailing narrative of India’s second urbanisation** being centred solely around the Gangetic plains.

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### Challenges Faced by the ASI

- **Methodological Inconsistency and Selective Rigor**
  - The Union government has argued that **isolated findings cannot substantiate sweeping historical revisions** without broader validation.
  - While such caution ostensibly reflects methodological rigour, **the ASI's track record reveals glaring inconsistency.**
  - **At Adichanallur, one of the earliest archaeological sites in Tamil Nadu,** the rediscovery of Iron Age artefacts in 2004 **was met with prolonged neglect.**
  - Despite evidence suggesting a 3,000-year-old civilisation, **the ASI delayed publication of results for over 15 years, requiring court intervention.**
- **Selective Caution**
  - On one hand, **findings that complicate dominant narratives (such as Keeladi's evidence of Dravidian urbanism)** are dismissed as inconclusive; on the other hand, sites that reinforce mytho-historical or nationalist narratives are promoted with little hesitation.
  - **Such double standards weaken the ASI's credibility** and reveal what scholars describe as methodological nationalism, an approach that privileges a singular, state-sanctioned vision of India's past.

### Conclusion

- The **controversies** surrounding the ASI and the Keeladi excavations are **symptomatic of larger tensions within Indian archaeology.**
  - **Unless the ASI reorients itself toward openness, rigour, and inclusivity, it risks further eroding its legitimacy and credibility as the custodian of India's archaeological heritage.**
  - **At stake is not just the fate of individual excavation sites, but the very possibility of reconstructing India's past in all its complexity and plurality.**
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### PROJECT AAROHAN



- It has an objective of to support the educational aspirations of the **children of toll plaza employees**.
- **It was launched by the** National Highway Authority of India.
- The nationwide project will reach a community of toll-plaza personnel that are deployed at a vast network of toll plazas on National Highways.
- The initiative aims to **address financial barriers**, bridge **socio-economic divides** and provide equal access to quality education for students from economically weaker sections, including girls from low-income households, first-generation learners and those from Economically **Weaker Sections/Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes** and minority communities.
- The program combines financial aid with **structured mentorship**, **skill-building workshops**, and career guidance to holistically prepare students for higher education, employment and entrepreneurship.
- It will be implemented by **SMEC Trust's Bharat Cares**.

### Funding for Project Aarohan

- The first phase of 'Project Aarohan' will have a fund allocation of Rs. 1 Crore and will **span from July 2025 to March 2026**.
  - The project aims to **cover 500 students from Class 11 to the final year graduation**, each receiving an annual scholarship of Rs.12,000 during FY 2025–26.
  - Additionally, 50 bright students aspiring for postgraduate and higher studies will be supported with **scholarships of Rs. 50,000 each**.
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### H-1B VISA DEBATE

- The H-1B is a **temporary, non-immigrant visa** that enables US employers to hire foreign workers in specialized fields like technology, engineering, and finance.
- Launched in 1990, it allows US employers to **hire skilled foreign professionals** in jobs requiring at least a bachelor's degree.
- The visa can be granted for up to six years, after which holders must either leave the US for at least 12 months or obtain permanent residency (Green Card).
- **H-1B Visa Caps and Exemptions**
  - Currently, there is an annual cap of 65,000 visas, with an additional 20,000 for individuals holding advanced degrees from US universities.
  - However, not all petitions fall under this cap — exemptions apply for continuing employment, higher education institutions, and nonprofit or government research organisations. As a result, approvals far exceed the cap.
  - In FY 2023, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services approved 118,948 initial employment petitions and 267,370 for continuing employment, totalling 3,86,318.

### **Indians as the Largest Beneficiaries of H-1B**

- Since 2015, Indians have consistently accounted for over 70% of all H-1B visa approvals, far outnumbering Chinese applicants, who remain around 12–13%.
- This dominance has made Indian professionals a focal point of criticism from nativist Republicans, who argue that the program allows Indians to take American jobs at lower wages.

### **Trump's Proposed Overhaul of H-1B**

- Although details remain unclear, Trump and his allies have hinted at a major restructuring of the H-1B visa system.
- A 2021 rule proposed under his administration offers insights into the possible direction of reforms.

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- **Salary-Based Selection Rule**
    - The 2021 proposal sought to prioritize H-1B petitions based on salary levels under the Occupational Employment Statistics (OES).
    - Higher-paid applicants (Level 3 and 4) would be favored over lower-paid ones (Level 1 and 2).
    - This aligns with Trump’s narrative of prioritizing “higher-value” workers while curbing low-wage immigration.
  - **The “Golden Card” Project**
    - In parallel, Trump has floated the idea of a “Golden Card,” offering residency and citizenship to wealthy investors contributing \$1 million to businesses or \$800,000 to rural or distressed areas.
    - The initiative has reportedly attracted 250,000 applicants, potentially generating up to \$1.25 trillion in investments.
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### INTEGRATED AIR DEFENCE WEAPON SYSTEM (IADWS) - INDIA’S MAIDEN TEST OF INDIGENOUS AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted the **maiden flight test of the Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS)** off the coast of Odisha.
- This marks a significant step in **India’s quest for self-reliance** (Atmanirbhar Bharat) in advanced defence technology.

#### Key Features of IADWS:

- **Three-layered defence structure:**
  - Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QR-SAM): Range 30 km.
  - Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS): Range up to 6 km.
  - Directed Energy Weapon (DEW): High-power laser with range 2–4 km.
- **Operational mechanism:** Controlled by a Centralised Command and Control Centre, developed by DRDL (Defence Research and Development Laboratory).



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### DRDO's Technological Evolution:

- The IADWS missile defence system **incorporates multiple technologies** that the DRDO has developed over time, in different labs.
- **For example**, India began this technological synergising with the **Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP)** that was set up in 1983 by A P J Abdul Kalam.
- The IGMDP's "**missile cluster**", which is mainly located in Hyderabad, includes 5 specialised labs:
  - **ASL (Advanced Systems Laboratory)**: Developed Agni and Prithvi ballistic missiles, which were developed into a highly advanced -
    - Anti-ballistic missile (ABM) shield,
    - Anti-satellite (ASAT) missile system, and
    - Multi independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV)
  - **DRDL (Defence Research and Development Laboratory)**: Developed tactical missiles like Trishul, Akash, Nag.
  - **Research Centre Imarat (RCI)**: Specialises in navigation, guidance, homing, command and control, high-temperature materials.
  - **Terminal Ballistic Research Laboratory**: Specialises in warhead design.
  - **Young Scientists Laboratory**: Works in the field of emerging tech (AI, quantum computing).
- **Public-private synergy: Transfer of DRDO technology to the private sector**, for example, Carborundum Universal Limited (CUMI) licensed for manufacturing ceramic radomes (critical for missiles and aircraft under extreme heat).

### Conclusion:

- The successful test of the IADWS signals **India's steady progress** towards building a multi-layered, indigenously developed air defence architecture that **reduces external dependence**.
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### EXERCISE BRIGHT STAR

#### Exercise Bright Star 2025



- It is a multilateral exercise **hosted by Egypt in conjunction with the US** since 1980.

- It is amongst the largest **Tri-Service multilateral exercises** in the region.
- The **exercise is held biennially**, with the last edition having taken place in 2023, which witnessed the participation of a host of nations including India along with troops.
- The upcoming edition will feature a comprehensive spectrum of military activities, including:
  - Live Firing by the three Services showcasing the operational capabilities of the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force.
  - Command Post Exercise to enhance joint planning, decision-making and operational coordination.
  - Short Training Exercises by all three Services focusing on varied aspects of modern warfare.
  - Subject Matter Expert Interactions on multiple domains of contemporary military operations.

**Significance:** Participation of the Indian Armed Forces in this exercise underscores India's commitment to regional peace, stability, and security while enhancing Jointness, interoperability and cooperation with friendly foreign countries.

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