29 Oct 2020: PIB Summary & Analysis

1. MoC between India and Japan

Context:

Cabinet approves Memorandum of Cooperation between India and Japan on cooperation in the field of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Details:

- The MoC is expected to contribute to strengthening bilateral cooperation and mutual understanding in the field of communications and will serve as a strategic initiative for India as Japan is an important partner with "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" status.
- The MoC will help in cooperation between both countries in various fields like 5G network, telecom security, submarine cable, standard certification of communication equipment, utilization of latest wireless technologies and ICTs, ICTs capacity building, public protection and disaster relief, artificial intelligence (AI)/block chain, spectrum chain, spectrum management, cooperation on multilateral platforms, etc.
- The MoC will further enhance opportunities for India to get into the global standardization process.

Additional information:

The Cabinet also approved an MoU between India and Cambodia on cooperation in the field of health and medicine.

2. Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP)

Context:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) Phase II & Phase III with the financial assistance of the World Bank (WB), and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

About the DRIP:

- The project aims to improve the safety and operational performance of selected dams across the whole country, along with institutional strengthening with a system-wide management approach.
- The project cost is Rs 10,211 crore. The project will be implemented over a period of 10 years duration in two phases, each of six years duration with two years overlapping from April 2021 to March 2031. The share of external funding is Rs.7000 crore.
- **Project objectives:**
  - To improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams and associated appurtenances in a sustainable manner.
  - To strengthen the dam safety institutional setup in participating states as well as at the central level.
  - To explore the alternative incidental means at a few selected dams to generate incidental revenue for sustainable operation and maintenance of dams.

- The scheme envisages the comprehensive rehabilitation of 736 existing dams located across the country.

3. Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme (EBP Programme)

Context:

Cabinet approves the mechanism for the procurement of ethanol by Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies under the Ethanol Blended Petrol Programme.

EBP Programme:

- The government has been implementing the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme wherein OMCs sell petrol blended with ethanol up to 10%.
- This programme has been extended to the whole of India except the Union Territories of Andaman Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands with effect from April 2019 to promote the use of alternative and environment-friendly fuels.
- This intervention also seeks to reduce import dependence for energy requirements and give a boost to the agriculture sector.
- The government has notified the administered price of ethanol since 2014.
- For the first time during 2018, the differential price of ethanol-based on raw material utilized for ethanol production was announced by the government.
- These decisions have significantly improved the supply of ethanol thereby ethanol procurement by Public Sector OMCs has increased from 38 crore litre in Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2013-14 to contracted over 195 crore litre in ESY 2019-20.

Know more about the EBP Programme in [PIB dated Sep 3, 2019](#).

4. Secure Application for Internet (SAI)

Context:

Army launches Secure Application for Internet (SAI).

Details:

- The Indian Army has developed a simple and secure messaging application named the "Secure Application for Internet (SAI)".
- The application supports an end to end secure voice, text and video calling services for Android platform over the internet.
- The model is similar to commercially available messaging applications like Whatsapp, Telegram, SAMVAD and GIMS and utilises end to end encryption messaging protocol.
- SAI scores over on security features with local in-house servers and coding which can be tweaked as per requirements.
- The application has been vetted by CERT-in empanelled auditor and Army Cyber Group.
- The process for filing Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), hosting the infrastructure on NIC and working on the iOS platform is currently in progress.

- SAI will be utilised pan Army to facilitate secure messaging within the service.

5. SERB-POWER

Context:

Union Minister for Science & Technology launched a scheme titled "SERB-POWER (Promoting Opportunities for Women in Exploratory Research)", designed exclusively for women scientists.

About SERB-POWER:

- SERB-POWER is an initiative of the Department of Science & Technology (DST).
- The scheme will have two components:
  - **SERB-POWER Fellowship**
    - **Target**: Women researchers in 35-55 years of age. Up to 25 Fellowships per year and not more than 75 at any point in time.
    - **Components of support**: Fellowship of Rs. 15,000/- per month in addition to regular income; Research grant of Rs. 10 lakh per annum; and Overhead of Rs. 90,000/- per annum.
    - **Duration**: Three years, without the possibility of extension. Once in a career.
  - **SERB-POWER Research Grants**
    - Level I (Applicants from IITs, IISERs, IISc, NITs, Central Universities, and National Labs of Central Government Institutions): The scale of funding is up to 60 lakhs for three years.
    - Level II (Applicants from State Universities/Colleges and Private Academic Institutions): The scale of funding is up to 30 lakhs for three years.
    - POWER Grant will be regulated through terms of reference conforming to SERB-CRG (Science and Engineering Research Board -Core Research Grant) guidelines.
  - While a Search-cum-Selection Committee constituted for the purpose will help in identifying the POWER Fellowship, the existing Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) mechanism will be used to select the POWER Research Grants.
  - It is proposed to institute 25 POWER Fellowships annually. A total of 50 POWER Grants each will be sanctioned in Level I & Level II per annum.
  - These schemes of the government are expected to empower women scientists and cultivate a women-friendly culture in India's academic and research institutions and ensure more women in leadership positions in decision-making bodies.

About SERB:

- The Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) is a statutory body established through an Act of Parliament.
- Supporting basic research in emerging areas of Science & Engineering is the primary and distinctive mandate of the Board.
- The SERB Act 2008 is the legislation of Parliament that established the Board.
- It functions under the Department of Science and Technology, GOI.
- **Objectives of SERB:**
  - Serve as a premier agency for planning, promoting and funding of internationally competitive research in emerging areas.
  - Identify major inter-disciplinary research areas, and individuals, groups or institutions and fund them for undertaking research.

- o Assist in setting up infrastructure and environment for scientific pursuit.
- o Enable in order to achieve synergy between academic institutions, research and development laboratories and industry for promoting basic research in science and engineering.
- o Evolve a system of approach to expeditiously provide funding for research, including monitoring and evaluation, by adopting modern management practices.