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Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF)

- This fund was operationalised by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to increase payments acceptance infrastructure by adding 30 lakh touch points every year in Tier-3 to Tier-6 centres.
- There would be special focus on the north-eastern states.
- An Advisory Council, under the chairmanship of RBI Deputy Governor BP Kanungo, has been constituted for managing the PIDF.
- The types of acceptance devices to be covered under the scheme are physical PoS, mPoS, GPRS, PSTN, and QR code-based payments.
- [mPoS - mobile PoS, GPRS - General Packet Radio Service, PSTN - Public Switched Telephone Network]
- However, payment methods that are not inter-operable would not be considered under the PIDF.
- PIDF scheme is on a reimbursement basis and accordingly, the claim has to be submitted only after making payment to the vendor.
- The maximum cost of the physical acceptance device eligible for subsidy is Rs 10,000 (including one-time operating cost up to Rs 500).
- The maximum cost of the digital acceptance device eligible for subsidy is Rs 300 (including onetime operating cost up to Rs 200).

Cigarettes Draft Bill

- The Centre has drafted this bill to increase the age to allow sale of cigarettes and tobacco products from the current 18 years to 21 years.
- The bill has proposed the penalty for smoking in restricted areas has been increased from Rs.200 to Rs.2,000.
- Trade and commerce in cigarettes or other tobacco products should be in sealed and intact packaging.
- The sale of illicit products will lead to imprisonment of up to one year and a fine of Rs.50,000.

Vertical and Horizontal Reservations

- **Vertical reservation** refers to as reservation for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC).
- It applies separately for each of the groups specified under the law.
- **Horizontal reservation** refers to the equal opportunity provided to other categories of beneficiaries such as women, veterans, and individuals with disabilities, cutting through the vertical categories.
- It is applied separately to each vertical category.
- Through the Saurav Yadav case, the Supreme Court clarified the position of law on the interplay of vertical and horizontal reservations.
- The court ruled against the Uttar Pradesh (UP) government.
- It held that if a person belonging to an intersection of vertical-horizontal reserved category had secured scores high enough to qualify without the vertical reservation,
 1. The person would be counted as qualifying without the vertical reservation, and
 2. The person cannot be excluded from the horizontal quota in the general category.

Rastriya Kamdhenu Aayog

- It is a high powered permanent advisory body that helps the Central Government to develop programmes for conservation, sustainable development and genetic upgradation of indigenous breeds of cows.
- It will function as an integral part of Rashtriya Gokul Mission.
- It is constituted to organize animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and to take steps for preserving and improving breeds.
- It is also constituted to prohibit the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.
- It will review existing laws, policies and will suggest measures for optimum economic utilization of cow wealth for enhanced production and productivity.

Stratospheric Warming

- Sudden stratospheric warming (SSW) event took place January 5, 2021.
- This would be the reason behind the very cold weather in large parts of the world.
- It was potentially the most dangerous kind, where the polar vortex split into two smaller 'child' vortices.
- [The polar vortex is a large area of low pressure and cold air surrounding both of the Earth's poles. To know more, [click here](#).]
- Researchers from the Universities of Bristol, Exeter, and Bath have come up with a new way to predict the knock-on effects of various changes to this

major air current high up in the stratosphere.

- During an SSW, polar stratospheric temperature can increase by up to 50 degrees Celsius over the course of a few days.
- Such events are often followed by very cold weather.
- The last time an SSW event took place was 'Beast from the East 2018'.

Delhi Earthquakes

- As per the National Centre for Seismology (NCS), Delhi experienced 4 small earthquakes during April - August 2020.
- All these events were located by the National Seismological Network, being operated and maintained by NCS of the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- Seismic network in Delhi and surroundings was strengthened by deploying 11 temporary additional stations covering the known faults in the region.
- This would precisely locate the earthquakes and their aftershocks for a better understanding of the causative sources
- [**Fault** - A fracture or discontinuity in a volume of rock.]
- Data from these stations are received in near real-time and used for locating the micro and small earthquakes in the region.
- The expanded network has now improved the accuracy of the epicenter location to ~2 km.
- A geophysical survey, namely, Magneto-telluric (MT) is also being conducted over the Delhi region.
- [**Magneto-telluric** (MT) - A geophysical method that uses natural time variation of the Earth's magnetic and electric fields to understand geological (underground) structure and processes.]
- These measurements are conducted across three major seismic sources, namely Mahendragarh-Dehradun Fault (MDF), Sohna Fault (SF) and Mathura Fault (MF).

Source: PIB, Times of India, Livemint, The Wire, The Indian Express, Science Alert, Down To Earth



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