7. Short News

50th Statehood Celebrations of Sikkim

Context - The Prime Minister of India visited Gangtok to participate in the closing ceremony of the 50th Statehood celebrations of Sikkim.

About the 50th Statehood Celebrations of Sikkim

1. Commemoration - The 50th Statehood celebrations of Sikkim mark five decades (1975–2025) since its integration into India.
2. Transformation - The event highlights Sikkim's transition from a monarchy to a democratic and sustainable state.
3. It also showcases Sikkim as a leader in eco-friendly practices and organic agriculture.
4. Development Push - The Prime Minister announced projects worth ₹4,000 crore, covering infrastructure, healthcare, education, and tourism sectors.

About Sikkim

1. Location - It is a state in northeastern India.
2. It is bordered by Bhutan (east), Tibet Autonomous Region of China (north & northeast), Nepal—Koshi Province (west), and West Bengal (south); located close to the Siliguri Corridor.
3. Physiography - It is situated in the Eastern Himalayas and features varied altitudes and climatic zones from subtropical to alpine.
4. Biodiversity - Part of the Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspot with over 4,500 plant species, about 550 bird species, and rich orchid and rhododendron diversity.
5. Biodiversity Hotspots - Regions with exceptionally high species richness and endemism that are under significant threat from habitat loss.
6. Highest Peak - Home to Kangchenjunga, the highest peak in India and third-highest mountain in the world.
7. Capital - Gangtok is the capital and largest city.
8. Protected Area - Around 35% of the state is under Khangchendzonga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Historical Background of Sikkim

1. Kingdom Formation (1642) - Established under Phuntsok Namgyal, marking the start of the Namgyal dynasty. The ruler was known as the Chogyal (monarch of Sikkim).
2. British Protectorate (1861) - The Treaty of Tum long made Sikkim a British protectorate and buffer state.
3. Post-Independence Status (1950) - The Indo-Sikkim Treaty 1950 made Sikkim an Indian protectorate with internal autonomy.

Events Leading to Statehood

1. Pro-democracy Movements - Political mobilisation within Sikkim demanded reforms and closer integration with India.
2. Tripartite Agreement (1973) - Agreement between the Chogyal, Government of India, and political parties introduced democratic reforms.
3. Referendum (1975) - Around 97.5% voters supported the abolition of monarchy and joining India.
4. Constitutional Integration (1975) - The 36th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1975 made Sikkim the 22nd state of India on May 16, 1975.

Significance of the 50th Statehood Celebrations of Sikkim

1. Democratic Integration - Shows how Sikkim was peacefully integrated into India through a referendum—strengthening democratic legitimacy.
2. Constitutional Innovation - Incorporation via the 36th Constitutional Amendment Act 1975 and safeguards under Article 371F reflect flexible federalism.

3. Article 371F provides special constitutional provisions for the State of Sikkim, ensuring political, social, and administrative continuity while protecting the rights of its diverse communities.
4. Strategic Significance - Sikkim's location at the India–China–Nepal tri-junction makes it crucial for national security and geopolitics.
5. Sustainable Development Model - Sikkim's achievement as India's first fully organic state highlights climate-resilient growth pathways.
6. Northeast Integration - Reinforces the importance of integrating the Northeast into mainstream development.
7. Ashtalakshmi Vision - Refers to the eight Northeastern states as eight forms of prosperity, envisioned as key drivers of India's growth.
8. Cultural Unity in Diversity - Reflects "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" through preservation of distinct traditions within the Indian Union.

India's Two Trillion Dollar Export Target

Context - Recently, the Union Commerce Minister chaired a review meeting on India's plan to achieve a two trillion-dollar export target by 2030–31.

Key Highlights

1. Overall Target - India aims to achieve two trillion-dollar exports by 2030–31, comprising one trillion-dollar merchandise exports and one trillion-dollar services exports.
2. Sectoral Framework - A structured Export Monitoring Framework has been developed with sector-wise strategies for engineering goods, textiles, electronics, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and services.

Strategy

1. Time-bound Planning - Clearly defined and time-bound action plans linked with performance indicators.
2. Institutional Coordination - Emphasis on coordination among ministries and departments.
3. Digital Monitoring - Use of an information technology-enabled platform for real-time monitoring.

Export Promotion Mission

1. Objective - The Export Promotion Mission (EPM) is India's flagship initiative to strengthen export competitiveness, particularly for MSMEs, first-time exporters, and labour-intensive sectors, through a unified, digitally enabled framework with a ₹25,060 crore outlay.
2. Sub-schemes -
    1. Niyati Protsahan - Provides financial support to exporters through interest subvention, export credit, factoring and collateral support to improve access to trade finance.
    2. Niryat Disha - Addresses non-financial barriers by improving market access through trade fairs, buyer-seller meets, export promotion activities, along with support for standards, certification, logistics and entry into new international markets.

Focus Areas

1. MSME and First-time Exporters - Ensuring benefits reach grassroots exporters through awareness and outreach.
2. Agricultural Exports - Continued emphasis across all components.
3. Logistics and Certification - Special focus on overseas warehousing, testing, inspection and certification.
4. Institutional Outreach - Role of Export Promotion Councils, Commodity Boards and DGFT Regional Authorities.
    1. Export Promotion Councils - Promote sectoral exports and provide market support.
    2. Commodity Boards - Improve quality and promote specific commodity exports.
    3. DGFT Regional Authorities - Act as field-level implementation arms of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) by issuing licences, disseminating schemes and assisting exporters in compliance and procedures.

5. Brand India - Strengthening India's global branding as an umbrella export strategy.

Other Measures

1. Relief Measures - Special scheme for exporters affected by the West Asia crisis.
2. Market Access Expansion - Extending support beyond Export Promotion Councils to other field-level organisations.
3. Trade Calendar - Development of a rolling three-year calendar for trade fairs and buyer-seller meets.

E100

Context - The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued a draft notification proposing to recognise E100 (or 100% ethanol) as an approved automotive fuel.

About E100

1. E100 fuel contains around 93% anhydrous (water-free) ethanol, with small amounts of gasoline and additives for stability, and is used as a standalone alternative to petrol.
2. Engine requirement - E100 needs flex-fuel or dedicated ethanol engines designed to handle high ethanol content.
3. Flex-fuel engines - Engines that can run on petrol, ethanol blends, or pure ethanol (E100) by using special materials and automatically adjusting fuel supply and ignition for smooth performance.

Key Points

1. Regulatory amendment - The proposal includes amendment to Rule 115(18) of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules to include E100 as an approved automotive fuel.
2. Vehicle eligibility expansion - Vehicles earlier approved up to E85 (85% ethanol) can now be certified for E100, enabling a shift from blended fuels to fully ethanol-powered vehicles.
3. Homologation - It is the official certification process ensuring a vehicle (or its components) comply with government technical, safety, and environmental regulations before it can be sold or used on public roads.
    1. Agencies like the Automotive Research Association of India will conduct official testing to ensure compliance with safety, emission, and performance norms.
4. Policy significance - The move transforms ethanol from a blending component to a standalone fuel, supporting energy security, reducing crude oil imports, and benefiting the agricultural economy.
    1. It enables for certification and mass production of ethanol-only vehicles
5. Key concerns -
    1. Lower fuel efficiency - Ethanol has lower energy per litre compared to petrol and diesel, so E100 vehicles give less mileage and need more frequent refuelling.
    2. Higher maintenance costs - Ethanol is corrosive and moisture-absorbing, increasing engine wear and servicing needs.
    3. No clear price benefit - Despite domestic production, fuel may not be cheaper due to feedstock costs (e.g., sugarcane), government procurement pricing, processing costs, and taxes, which keep retail prices relatively high.

About Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP)

1. Launch of Programme - India launched the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP) in 2003 to reduce oil import dependence and promote cleaner fuel.
2. Low initial progress - Blending levels remained low at around 2% in 2014 due to supply and policy constraints.
3. Acceleration phase - Strong policy push led to achievement of E10 (10% blending) by 2022.
4. Current status - India has adopted E20 (20% ethanol-blended petrol) as the default fuel nationwide from April 2026, following a phased rollout since 2023. India achieved the E20 blending target ahead of the 2030 deadline.

Tuareg Rebels

Context - A major coordinated offensive by Tuareg rebels has triggered Mali's worst security crisis in nearly 15 years, destabilising the state.

1. Strategic Capture - Rebels captured the northern stronghold of Kidal in Mali, a symbolic and strategic hub of Tuareg resistance.
2. Casualty - Mali's Defence Minister Sadio Camara, key architect of pro-Russia policy, was reportedly killed during the attacks.
3. Demand for Russian Withdrawal - Tuareg rebels have demanded that Russian forces withdraw completely from Mali.
4. Expansion Plans - Rebels intend to expand control to key northern cities like Gao, Timbuktu, and Menaka to consolidate territorial authority.
5. Weakening Junta Control - The military regime led by Assemi Goita is facing declining control, with rebels claiming its eventual collapse.
6. Rebel Objective - The rebels aim to establish an independent state "Azawad", asserting the principle of self-determination in northern Mali.

About Tuareg Rebels

1. Tuareg rebels are nomadic ethnic groups of the Sahara, primarily inhabiting regions of Mali and Niger.
2. Core Demand - They have historically demanded autonomy or independence for their homeland "Azawad" in northern Mali, citing political marginalization and cultural neglect.
3. Major Uprisings - Tuareg rebellions have occurred repeatedly since the 1960s, with a major insurgency in 2012 led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA).
4. Azawad Declaration - In 2012, Tuareg rebels briefly declared independence of Azawad, though it was not internationally recognized and soon collapsed.