

17-02-2024

16th Finance Commission

Why in News?

- The 16th Finance Commission held its first meeting under the Chairmanship of Arvind Panagariya on 14th February, 2024.

More About 16th Finance Commission

- The Government of India, with the approval of the President of India, has constituted the Sixteenth Finance Commission, in pursuance to Article 280(1) of the Constitution.
- The Sixteenth Finance Commission was constituted on 31.12.2023 with Shri Arvind Panagariya, former Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog as its Chairman.



- Former Expenditure Secretary Ajay Narayan Jha, Annie George Mathew, former Special Secretary in the Expenditure Department of the Finance Ministry, along with noted economist Niranjana Rajadhyaksha, who is an executive director at policy think tank Artha Global and State Bank of India's group chief economic adviser Soumya Kanti Ghosh have been appointed as members of the 16th Finance Commission.

- The chairman and other members of the commission shall hold office from the date on which they respectively assume office up to the date of the submission of report or October 31, 2025, whichever is earlier.
- October 2025 is the deadline set for the commission to submit its recommendations, so that they can be incorporated in the Budget exercise for 2026-27.
- The Finance Commission usually takes about two years to consult stakeholders in the States and Centre and arrive at their conclusions.
- The Sixteenth Finance Commission's terms of reference include a review of the present arrangements for financing disaster management initiatives and mooted measures to augment States' consolidated funds to supplement resources available with panchayats and municipalities.
- The Sixteenth Finance Commission shall make recommendations as to the following matters, namely: -
 - (i) The distribution between the Union and the States of the net proceeds of taxes which are to be, or may be, divided between them under Chapter I, Part XII of the Constitution and the allocation between the States of the respective shares of such proceeds;
 - (ii) The principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India and the sums to be paid to the States by way of grants-in-aid of their revenues under article 275 of the Constitution for the purposes other than those specified in the proviso clause (1) of that article; and

(iii) The measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats and Municipalities in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State.

India Faces WTO Pressure on Farm Subsidies

Why in News?

- Farmers on a tractor march to the national capital are primarily seeking a legal guarantee on the minimum support price (MSP) for various crops announced by the Centre.

More About the Farm Subsidies

- To attain greater flexibility to offer farm support, India is in the process of pushing for a permanent solution at the upcoming inter-ministerial summit at Abu Dhabi from February 26 to 29 but a deadlock over the politically charged issues between developed and developing countries is unlikely to see a resolution.
- The Cairns Group – comprising Australia, Brazil and Canada among others members - have claimed that India's public stockholding (PSH) programme is highly subsidised and the farm support that India gives is "distorting" global food prices and "hurting" food security of other countries.
- Last year in November, the circulated a detailed proposal to slash trade-distorting

farm support in WTO members, halving the total global entitlement to subsidize. This triggered tensions among developing nations including India. While India's per farmer subsidy is abysmally low compared to what countries such as the US offer, the WTO rules do not consider subsidies on a per-farmer basis, thereby being heavily loaded against developing countries.



- The Cairns Group is trying to get India to "dismantle" the MSP scheme or "reduce its scope" and that is the reason India is fighting to get better legal protection for its MSP programme. Notably, India cannot be dragged into a dispute over its subsidies as it is protected by the 'Peace Clause' that was agreed by the WTO members during the Bali ministerial in 2013. But due to some of the provisions in the clause being ambiguous, India is open to face disputes.
- Farmers groups have demanded that agriculture should be taken out of WTO but that approach could pose problems and would restrict India and other developing nations from disciplining the subsidies being given by the developed world.
- India's per farmer subsidy is abysmally low compared to what the US gives. But the WTO rules, unfortunately, are not on the basis of per farmer subsidy. If new schemes are to be implemented, then for those products we will have to comply with the 10% subsidy ceiling and they will not be protected under the 'Peace Clause'.



BAPS Temple inaugurated by PM Modi in Abu Dhabi

Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 14th February, 2024 inaugurated the BAPS Swaminarayan Temple in Abu Dhabi, the first Hindu temple to be built in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- The inauguration of the 108-ft high temple marks a significant moment for the Hindu community in UAE, as well as for the two countries' bilateral ties.

What is BAPS?

- The temple has been built by the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a denomination of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, a Vaishnav sect of Hinduism.
- BAPS has a network of around 1,550 temples across the world, including the Akshardham temples in New Delhi and Gandhinagar, and Swaminarayan temples in London, Houston, Chicago, Atlanta, Toronto, Los Angeles, and Nairobi.

Feature of the Temple

- The Abu Dhabi temple is a traditional stone Hindu temple with seven shikhars. Built in the traditional Nagar style, the temple's front panel depicts universal values, stories of harmony from different cultures, Hindu spiritual leaders and avatars.
- Spread over 27 acres, the temple complex is on 13.5 acres, with a parking area of 13.5 acres that can accommodate around 1,400 cars and 50 buses. The 13.5 acres of land

was gifted by Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE in 2019.

- The height of the temple is 108 ft, length 262 ft and width 180 ft. While the external facade uses pink sandstone from Rajasthan, the interior uses Italian marbles. A total of 20,000 tonnes of stones and marble was shipped in 700 containers for the temple. More than Rs 700 crore was spent on the temple's construction.
- The temple has two central domes, Dome of Harmony and Dome of Peace, emphasising human coexistence through the carvings of earth, water, fire, air, and plants.
- A Wall of Harmony, one of the largest 3D-printed walls in the UAE, features a video showcasing key milestones of the temple's construction. The word 'harmony' has been written in 30 different ancient and modern languages.
- The seven shikhars (spires) are representative of the seven Emirates of the UAE. Other amenities include an assembly hall with a capacity of 3,000 people, a community centre, exhibitions, classrooms, and a majlis venue.

Key Architectural Features

- The temple was judged the Best Mechanical Project of the Year 2019 at the MEP Middle East Awards, and the Best Interior Design Concept of the Year 2020.
- It has 96 bells and gaumukhs installed around the path leading to the temple. These 96 bells are a tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 96 years of life. Nano tiles have been used, which will be comfortable



for visitors to walk on even in the hot weather.

- On the top left of the temple is a stone carving of the scene of Pramukh Swami Maharaj envisioning the temple in Abu Dhabi in 1997. No ferrous material (which is more vulnerable to corrosion) has been used in the temple.
- While many different types of pillars can be seen in the temple, such as circular and hexagonal, there is a special pillar, called the 'Pillar of pillars', which has around 1,400 small pillars carved into it.
- Buildings surrounding the temple are modern and monolithic, with their colour resembling sand dunes.
- Deities from all four corners of India have been featured in the temple. These include Lord Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman, Lord Shiv, Parvati, Ganpati, Kartikeya, Lord Jagannath, Lord Radha-Krishna, Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami), Tirupati Balaji and Padmavati and Lord Ayappa.
- The temple also has some special features, like a 'holy river' surrounding it, for which waters from Ganga and Yamuna have been brought in. The river Saraswati has been depicted in the form of white light. A Varanasi-like ghat has been created where the 'Ganga' passes.
- Apart from 15 value tales from Indian civilisation, stories from the Maya civilisation, Aztec civilisation, Egyptian civilisation, Arabic civilisation, European civilisation, Chinese civilisation and African civilisation have been depicted.

Significance of the Temple

- A Muslim king donated land for a Hindu Mandir, where the lead architect is a Catholic Christian, the project manager a Sikh, the foundational designer a Buddhist, the construction company a Parsi group, and the director comes from the Jain tradition, which represent the concept of

"Sarva Dharma Sadbhav" and respect for each other's faith and belief.

- The BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Temple in Abu Dhabi, UAE, holds significance as the first traditional Hindu temple in the UAE. Its construction and opening in 2019 marked a milestone in interfaith harmony and tolerance in the region.
- It serves as a symbol of cultural diversity and religious freedom, promoting understanding and acceptance among different communities. Additionally, it provides a place of worship and community gathering for Hindus residing in the UAE and visitors alike, contributing to the multi cultural fabric of the country.

First-ever Digital India future SKILLS Summit

Why in News?

- Union Minister of State for Electronics and IT, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, and Jal Shakti, Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar, announced that Assam will soon have its first-ever semiconductor packaging plant worth nearly Rs 25,000 Crore. He made this announcement during his address at the first-ever Digital India future SKILLS Summit, which was held today at the Birinchi Kumar Baruah Auditorium, Gauhati University.

More About the News

- The Digital India future SKILLS Summit hosted by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) through the National Institute of Electronics and IT (NIELIT) witnessed the convergence of



esteemed dignitaries, industry leaders, academia, policymakers and technology enthusiasts to deliberate on strategies for Catalyzing future-ready talent for India & the World.

- Future SKILLS is about bringing to your attention, the world of opportunities in areas that require many skilled people.
- These futureSKILLS are needed in emerging areas like semiconductors, AI, Electronics, HPC and cyber-security among others. These are technologies where India is on the same starting line as the rest of the world.
- The Exhibitions showcasing Future Skills has also been inaugurated by the Hon'ble Union Minister of State Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar and he interacted with numerous representatives of Start-ups and academia. The summit also organised an exhibition that showcased over 30 innovative future skills technologies & solutions.

- The summit facilitated more than 30 strategic collaborations between NIELIT and leading industry players and academia such as Intel, HCL, Microsoft, Kyndryl, IIM Raipur, IIITM Gwalior and Wipro, etc. These collaborations aim to bridge the gap between academia and industry, ensuring that educational programs are tailored to meet industry standards and demands.
- Globally around 100 million jobs will be created in AI, this is a huge opportunity for us Indians to grab a lot of these jobs. The market in areas like cyber-security will explode, which will create at least a few more million jobs for us to grab. India is stepping in the right direction and Future skills Summit is a fantastic initiative.
- It is fantastic to see the kind of progress that has been made. Today, there is no better time to start a company in AI today and there is no better place than India to do that.

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