

OFFICERS' PULSE

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YOU WILL
NEVER WIN IF
YOU NEVER
BEGIN

AT A GLANCE
& IN DEPTH.

COVERAGE.

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Polity and Social Issues

Economy

International Relations

Environment

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Culture

CURRENT AFFAIRS WEEKLY
THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT YOUR FINGER TIPS



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News @ a glance

POLITY

1) Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019

How is citizenship acquired in India?

- In India, citizenship is regulated by the **Citizenship Act, 1955**.
- The Act specifies that citizenship may be acquired in India through **five methods** – by birth in India, by descent, through registration, by naturalisation (extended residence in India), and by incorporation of territory into India.

Can illegal migrants acquire citizenship?

- An illegal migrant is prohibited from acquiring Indian citizenship.
- An illegal migrant is a foreigner who: (i) enters the country without valid travel documents, like a passport and visa, or (ii) enters with valid documents, but stays beyond the permitted time period.
- Illegal migrants may be imprisoned or deported under the **Foreigners Act, 1946** and the **Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920**.

How does the 2019 Act seek to change the criteria for determining citizenship?

- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 makes it clear that immigrants belonging to **Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi communities** from the Muslim-majority nations (**Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan**) will not be treated as illegal.
- They will also be eligible to get naturalised citizenship.
- One of the requirements for citizenship by **naturalization** under the 1955 Act is that the applicant must have resided in India during the last 12 months, and for 11 of the previous 14 years.
- The amendment act **relaxes this 11-year requirement to five years** for

persons belonging to these six religions from these three countries.

- They will also no longer be deported or jailed under the Foreigners Act of 1946 and the Passport (Entry into India) Act of 1920.
- The cut-off date for citizenship is **December 31, 2014** which means the applicant should have entered India on or before that date.

Rationale of the Law

- The Statement of Objects and Reasons in the amendment Act (SoR) states that India has had historic migration of people from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and these countries have a state religion, which has resulted in **religious persecution** of minority groups.

Are the provisions of the Act applicable across the country?

- The Act clarifies that the amendments will not apply to certain areas. These are:
 - the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, as included in the **Sixth Schedule to the Constitution**. These tribal areas include Karbi Anglong (in Assam), Garo Hills (in Meghalaya), Chakma District (in Mizoram), and Tripura Tribal Areas District.
 - the **states regulated by the "Inner Line" permit** under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873.

How does the Act change the regulations for Overseas Citizens of India?

- The Act also amends the provisions on registration of Overseas Citizens of India (OCI).
- OCI cardholders are foreigners who are persons of Indian origin.

- The government may cancel a person's OCI registration on various grounds specified in the 1955 Act.
- The 2019 amendment **adds another ground for cancelling OCI registration** — violation of any law notified by the central government.

Why in News?

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has been granted extension for the sixth time from the Parliamentary Committees in the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha to frame the rules for the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.
- The rules are essential for implementation of the CAA.

Related Information

Inner Line Permit

- The Inner Line Permit (ILP) is an official travel document that allows Indian citizens to stay in an area under the ILP system.
- The document is currently required by visitors to **Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram**.
- The ILP is issued by the **concerned state government**. The permits issued are mostly of different kinds, provided separately for tourists, tenants and for other purposes.
- The main objective of the ILP system is to prevent settlement of other Indian nationals in the notified states in order to **protect the indigenous population**. It also offers protection for the locals with regards to lands, jobs and other facilities.

History of ILP

- Under the **Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873**, the British framed regulations restricting the

entry and regulating the stay of outsiders in designated areas.

- This was to protect the Crown's own commercial interests by preventing "British subjects" (Indians) from trading within these regions.
- In 1950, the Indian government replaced "British subjects" with "Citizen of India". This was to address local concerns about protecting the interests of the indigenous people from outsiders belonging to other Indian states.

2) Global Innovation Index

About the Index

- Global Innovation Index (GII) is co-published annually by **Cornell University, INSEAD Business School, and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)**, a specialized agency of the United Nations.
- **GII ranks global economies according to their innovation capabilities**, using roughly 80 indicators, grouped into **innovation inputs and outputs**.
- The metrics include institutions, human capital and research, infrastructure, market sophistication and business sophistication, knowledge and technology outputs and creative outputs.
- Over the years, the GII has established itself as a policy tool for various governments and helped them to reflect upon the existing status quo.

Global Innovation Index 2021

- The Global Innovation Index 2021 was released recently.

TOP THREE INNOVATION ECONOMIES BY INCOME GROUP

Incomes	Countries (top three)
High income	Switzerland, Sweden, USA
Upper middle income	China, Bulgaria, Malaysia
Lower middle income	Vietnam, India, Ukraine
Low income	Rwanda, Tajikistan, Malawi

Source: Global Innovation Index 2021 by World Intellectual Property Organization

Highlights of the Index

- **India** has climbed two spots and has been **ranked 46th** in the Global Innovation Index 2021 rankings (48 in GII 2020).
- India has been on a rising trajectory over the past several years in the GII and **rose from a rank of 81 in 2015 to 46 in 2021.**
- **India ranks second among 34 lower middle-income group economies and first among the 10 economies in Central and Southern Asia.**
- The consistent improvement in the GII ranking is owing to the immense knowledge capital, the vibrant startup ecosystem and the work done by the public and the private research organisations.
- The Scientific Departments like the Department of Atomic Energy; the Department of Science and Technology; the Department of

Biotechnology and the Department of Space have played a pivotal role in enriching the National Innovation Ecosystem.

- **Switzerland, Sweden, U.S., and U.K.** continue to lead the innovation ranking, and have all ranked in the top 5 in the past three years.

Why in News?

- The Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal has called upon stakeholders in the innovation ecosystem to strive to take India to the top 25 in the Global Innovation Index.
- India's startups are the key reason behind the country's rise in Global Innovation Index from 76 in 2014 to 46 in 2021.

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ENVIRONMENT

1) National Clean Air Program

About NCAP

- NCAP is a pollution control initiative that was launched by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** in January 2019. This is the first ever effort in the country to frame a national framework for air quality management with a time-bound reduction target.
- It aims to reduce particulate matter (**PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀**) pollution by **20-30%** in **132 cities by 2024**, with 2017 as the base year for comparison.
- The **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** executes this programme.

Implementation

- Under NCAP, **132 non-attainment cities** have been identified across the country based on the **Air Quality data from 2014-2018**.
- Apart from experts from the industry and academia, the programme is a collaboration between the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Heavy Industry, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, NITI Aayog, and Central Pollution Control Board.
- **City specific action plans** have been prepared which include measures for strengthening the monitoring network, reducing vehicular/industrial emissions, increasing public awareness etc.
- Implementation of the city specific action plans are regularly monitored by Committees at Central and State level namely Steering Committee, Monitoring Committee and Implementation Committee.
- Air quality of cities is monitored by **State Pollution Control Boards** which publishes their results from time to time.

Why in news?

- The analysis by NCAP Tracker, a joint project by news portal *Carbon Copy*

and a Maharashtra-based start-up 'Respirer Living Sciences', designed to track India's progress in achieving the clean air targets, ranked **Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh as the most polluted city** out of the 132 non-attainment cities with highest levels of **PM 2.5 and PM 10**.

News in detail

- According to the analysis, **Delhi and most of the other non-attainment cities under the National Clean Air Programme have shown only a marginal improvement**.
- **Delhi was the second most polluted city** in the list of cities with the highest **PM 2.5 level and fourth in cities with the highest PM 10 level**.
- According to the three-year comparative analysis, Ghaziabad, with annual PM 2.5 level above 100, remained at the top of the table in the most polluted cities, except in **2020, when Lucknow ranked first with an annual PM 2.5 level of 116**.

2) Cabinet clears Rs.12,000 crore Green Energy Corridor

What's the news?

- As part of India's green energy push, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by the Prime Minister approved the **₹12,031 crore second phase of setting up transmission projects** for supplying electricity from renewable energy projects.
- The scheme on **Green Energy Corridor (GEC) Phase-II for Intra-State Transmission System (InSTS)** will add up to approximately 10,750 circuit kilometres (ckm) of transmission lines and approx. 27,500 MegaVolt-Amperes (MVA) transformation capacity of substations.
- Green energy corridors are being set up in two phases with the second phase of the transmission corridors to supply **20 gigawatt (GW)** of renewable energy to the national grid from the seven states of **Gujarat**,

Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

About Green Energy Corridor Project

- The Green Energy Corridor Project aims at **synchronizing electricity produced from renewable sources, such as solar and wind, with conventional power stations in the grid.**
- For evacuation of large-scale renewable energy, the **Intra State Transmission System (InSTS)** project was sanctioned by the Ministry in 2015-16.
- It is being implemented by **eight renewable-rich states of Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh** and will help supply around **24 GW of renewable energy by 2022.**
- The decision comes in the backdrop of PM pledging at the COP26 summit in Glasgow to meet **50% of India's energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030** and increasing **non-fossil fuel power generation capacity to 500GW** by the end of this decade.

- The transmission systems will be created over a **period of five year from Financial Year 2021-22 to 2025-26.**
- According to the Central Electricity Authority, by 2030, the country's power requirement would be **817GW, more than half of which would be clean energy.**

Progress so Far

- India has achieved its **NDC target** with total **non-fossil based** installed energy capacity of 157.32 GW which is **40.1% of the total installed electricity** capacity. Of this, solar, wind and hydropower accounts for 48.55 GW, 40.03 GW and 51.34 GW respectively.
- Also, India's **nuclear energy based** installed electricity capacity stands at **6.78 GW.**
- Around **63 GW of renewable energy capacity** is under various phases of construction and installed power capacity from **non-fossil fuels is expected to go up to 66% by 2030.**

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ECONOMY

1) World Trade Organization

About WTO

- The World Trade Organization (WTO) is an intergovernmental organization that is concerned with the regulation of international trade between nations.
- The WTO officially commenced on **1 January 1995** under the **Marrakesh Agreement**, replacing the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**, which commenced in 1948.
- It is the largest international economic organization in the world.
- The WTO deals with **regulation of trade in goods, services and intellectual property** between participating countries by providing a framework for negotiating trade agreements and a dispute resolution process aimed at enforcing participants' adherence to WTO agreements, which are signed by representatives of member governments ratified by their parliaments.

Objectives

- The primary purpose of the WTO is to **open trade for the benefit of all**.
- The WTO is essentially an **alternative dispute or mediation entity** that upholds the international rules of trade among nations. The organization provides a platform that allows member governments to negotiate and resolve trade issues with other members.
- The WTO **prohibits discrimination between trading partners**, but provides exceptions for environmental protection, national security, and other important goals.
- At present, the WTO has over 160 members representing 98 per cent of world trade.
- **India** has been a WTO member since 1 January 1995 and a member of GATT since 8 July 1948.

WTO Structure

Ministerial Conference

- The topmost decision-making body of the WTO is the Ministerial Conference, which usually meets **every two years**.
- It brings together all members of the WTO, all of which are countries or customs unions.
- The Ministerial Conference can take decisions on all matters under any of the multilateral trade agreements.

General Council

- The General Council comprises the representatives of all member countries and acts as the representative of the Ministerial Conference when it comes to daily operations. Its job is to carry out the implementation and monitoring function of the WTO.

Dispute Settlement Body

- The Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) is a **part of the General Council** and is responsible for settling trade disputes between member states.
- According to the procedure established by the WTO, the first step to resolve a trade dispute is engaging in the **consultation process**.
- If two trading partners having a dispute could not resolve at that level, one of them can ask for a settlement of **DSB** for hearing. The General Council of the WTO convenes as the DSB.
- The DSB's ruling can be challenged at the **appellate body**, the highest court for global trade disputes.

Appellate Body

- The Appellate Body is a standing committee of **seven members** that presides over appeals against judgments passed in trade-related disputes brought by WTO members.
- Members of the Appellate Body have **four-year terms**. In the selection process, WTO members follow the **consensus principle**, which means that the nomination of the Appellate Body members can only proceed smoothly with the agreement of all the members of WTO.

- The Appellate Body **must have at least three sitting members** to hear an appeal.

Why in News?

- India has appealed against a ruling of the World Trade Organisation's trade dispute settlement panel on domestic sugar subsidies.
- The panel had recently ruled that India, by subsidising sugar producers, was breaking rules framed under the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)** which govern international trade.

About the Issue

- In 2019, Australia, Brazil, and Guatemala complained against India at the WTO arguing that subsidies offered by the Indian government, which include both domestic subsidies as well as export subsidies, exceed the limits imposed by WTO trade rules. According to WTO rules, **subsidies cannot exceed 10% of the total value of sugar production.**
- These countries believe that subsidies offered by India have led to increased production of sugar and caused the price of sugar to drop significantly in the global market.
- After two years, the WTO ruled in December that India's sugar policy was favouring domestic producers through subsidies to the detriment of foreign producers. The panel recommended that India withdraw its alleged prohibited subsidies.

What is India's stand?

- **India is the second-largest sugar producer** in the world after Brazil and it is estimated that **more than 5 crore people depend on the cultivation of sugarcane alone for their livelihood.**
- India has argued at the WTO that it does not offer direct subsidies to sugarcane farmers and thus doesn't break any international trade rule. This argument, however, has not convinced other countries who point out that, among other things, the Centre and the State governments in India mandate the minimum price (the **Fair and Remunerative Price, or**

FRP) at which sugar mills can buy sugarcane from farmers.

- The high procurement price for sugarcane set by the Government is believed to have led to a **supply glut** that in turn has caused sugar prices to drop. In fact, **several sugar mills are caught in a debt trap** as consumer demand for sugar has remained stagnant.
- The low price of sugar has affected the revenues of mills, their ability to pay farmers and also forced many mills to shut down. To help the sugar sector, the Centre has even mandated the **compulsory blending of ethanol derived from sugarcane with fuels** such as petrol and diesel.
- Further, the Centre also regularly sanctions funds to **encourage sugar mills to export sugar** depending on sugar prices in the global market.

What lies ahead?

- India has stated that the WTO's dispute panel ruling has made certain "erroneous" findings about domestic schemes to support sugarcane producers and exports and the findings of the panel are completely "unacceptable" to it.
- However, the **WTO Appellate Body's** decision will be considered final on the dispute. In case India refuses to comply with the decision, it might have to face **retaliatory action** from other countries. This could be in the form of additional tariffs on Indian exports and other stringent measures.
- Such retaliatory measures may benefit producers in these countries but affect consumers who have enjoyed lower sugar prices due to subsidies offered by India. It should be noted that the WTO was founded to prevent exactly such tit-for-tat tariffs that shrink international trade.
- Incidentally, the **appellate body of the WTO is not functioning** because of differences among member countries to appoint members, and disputes are already pending with it. The U.S. had blocked the appointment of members.

2) Venture Capital Funds

What are Venture Capital Funds?

- Venture capital funds manage **pooled investments in high-growth opportunities in startups and other early-stage firms.**
- These investments are generally characterized as **very high-risk/high-return opportunities.**
- Venture capital funds are used as seed money or "venture capital" by new firms seeking accelerated growth, often in high-tech or emerging industries.
- Investors in a VC fund will earn a return when a portfolio company exits,

either through an IPO, merger, or acquisition.

Why in News?

- Union Minister of Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal has called upon the Global Venture Capital (VC) Funds to focus more on Startups from Tier 2 and 3 cities.
- He invited the VCs to explore new sectors for investing, promote and protect the intellectual property created by the young Indian entrepreneurs, provide expertise to scale-up and explore greater capital infusion including risk capital.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1) NATO

About NATO

- Formed in **1949** with the signing of the **Washington Treaty**, NATO is a **security alliance of 30 countries from North America and Europe**.
- Established in the Cold War as a bulwark against Soviet aggression, NATO's fundamental goal is to safeguard the Allies' freedom and security by political and military means.
- **Article 5 of the Washington Treaty** states that an attack against one Ally is an attack against all — is at the core of the Alliance, a promise of collective defence.
- **Article 4** of the treaty ensures consultations among Allies on security matters of common interest, which have expanded from a narrowly defined Soviet threat to the critical mission in Afghanistan, as well as new threats to security such as cyber attacks, and global threats such as terrorism and piracy that affect the Alliance and its global network of partners.
- A "**NATO decision**" is the expression of the collective will of all 30 member countries since all decisions are taken by **consensus**.
- At present, NATO has **30 members**. In 1949, there were **12 founding members** of the Alliance: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States. The other member countries are: Greece and Turkey (1952), Germany (1955), Spain (1982), the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland (1999), Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia (2004), Albania and Croatia (2009), Montenegro (2017) and North Macedonia (2020).
- NATO's Headquarters are located in **Brussels, Belgium**.

Why in News?

- NATO held a meeting of foreign ministers recently to talk about the Russian military build-up on the border with Ukraine.
- Tensions between Moscow and the West have soared in recent months and U.S. officials have warned that Moscow could be planning a full-scale invasion of its neighbor after amassing more than 100,000 troops at the frontier.

2) India extends \$900 mn aid to Sri Lanka

What's in the news?

- India has confirmed a **\$400 million currency swap with Sri Lanka** while **deferring another \$500 million** due for settlement to the **Asian Clearing Union (ACU)**, in a move aimed at helping the island nation witnessing an unprecedented economic crisis.
 - *ACU is a regional initiative with the Central Banks and Monetary Authorities of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.*
- India's assistance follows a request from Sri Lanka during Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa's visit to New Delhi in December, for emergency financial assistance, including Lines of Credit for importing essentials and a currency swap to boost Sri Lanka's draining foreign reserves.
- Sri Lanka is facing a severe dollar crunch that economists say might lead to a default on external debt and create a food shortage in the imports-reliant island nation. Colombo must service over \$7 billion outstanding debt in 2022, including bond repayments of \$500 million in January and \$1 billion in July.
- In July 2020, the **RBI extended a similar swap facility — of \$400 million** — to help Sri Lanka cope with the impact of the first wave of the pandemic, and later provided a three-month roll over until February 2021,

when the Central Bank of Sri Lanka settled it.

Leveraging Trinco deal

- Significantly, India's confirmation of the swap comes a week after the two countries signed a long-pending agreement on jointly developing the **strategically located Trincomalee oil tank farm** along the north-eastern coast of the island.
- While RBI's assistance seeks to help Sri Lanka meet its immediate challenge, the Trincomalee project has long-term implications both, in terms of investment from New Delhi and its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean.
- Apart from the obvious potential for storage in Trincomalee, the recent agreement gives both countries an opportunity to elevate "transactional" ties to a more "strategic level".

Related Information

What are currency swap arrangements?

- In the swap arrangement, generally a country provides dollars to a foreign central bank, which, at the same time, provides the equivalent funds in its currency to the former, based on the market exchange rate at the time of the transaction.
- The parties agree to swap back these quantities of their two currencies at a specified date in the future, which could be the next day or even two years later, using the same exchange rate as in the first transaction.

Similar arrangements

- The RBI also offers similar swap lines to central banks in the **SAARC region** within a total corpus of \$2 billion.
- This facility originally came into operation in 2012 to provide a backstop line of funding for short-term foreign exchange liquidity requirements or balance of payment crises until longer term arrangements were made.
- Under the facility, RBI offers swaps of varying sizes in US Dollars, Euro or Indian Rupee to each SAARC member country depending on their two months import requirement.
- India also has a \$75 billion bilateral currency swap line with **Japan**, which has the second highest dollar reserves after China.

Advantages of such arrangements

- These swap operations **usually carry no exchange rate risk**, as transaction terms are set in advance. The absence of an exchange rate risk is one of the major benefits of such a facility.
- This facility provides the country, which is getting the dollars, with the **flexibility to use these reserves at any time** in order to maintain an appropriate level of balance of payments or short-term liquidity.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1) e-Passport

Why in News:

- The Ministry of External Affairs signed an agreement with Tata Consultancy Services Limited for the second phase of the **Passport Seva Programme (PSP)**, one of the several Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) of the Government of India.
- The latest agreement will facilitate the **next phase of the PSP termed PSP-V2.0**.

What are the new features?

- The **agreement will focus on faster delivery of passports** to the citizens and create a more effective integration between various wings of the Government for **verification of applicants** and **quick tracing** in case of emergency situations.
- The programme also plans to have a **Data Centre, Disaster Recovery Centre and Government Secure Repository** which would be networked with all the Passport Seva Kendras and the Post Office Passport Seva Kendras (POPSK). The overall system would be **connected** to all the **Indian diplomatic missions** abroad and will allow **monitoring and supervision** through state-of-art Network Operation Centre, and Security Operation Centre (SOC).
- The new programme is expected to have technology upgrades including the use of the **latest biometrics technology, Artificial Intelligence, Advance Data Analytics, Chat-Bot, Auto-response, Natural Language Processing, Cloud Enablement**.
 - **Advanced Analytics** is the autonomous or semi-autonomous examination of **data** or content to discover **deeper insights, make predictions, or generate recommendations**.
 - A **chatbot** is software that simulates human-like conversations with users via text messages on chat.

- **Natural language processing (NLP)** refers to the branch of artificial intelligence concerned with giving **computers** the **ability to understand text and spoken words** in much the same way human beings can.

- The newest feature under the PSP-V2.0 will be the issuance of the **new generation of passports** called **e-passports**. Under this, new and renewed passports will be **fitted with a microchip** that will **hold all biometric information regarding the applicants**.
- The next gen e-passports **will ease immigration process** across the world and will also **increase digital safety for the passport holders**.

Significance

- The **present passport application and processing** continues to involve **manual sections** and these are **expected to go digital** in the new phase.
- The Ministry of External Affairs said that the **PSP-V2.0** is a continuation and enhancement of PSP-V1.0. The new initiative is aimed at creating a digital platform that would be **transparent, more accessible and reliable**. This will create a state-of-the-art digital ecosystem, overhaul existing processes and integrate various wings of Government that are involved in issuance of passports.
- **Current passports** are **scanned** at the **immigration counters** to reveal the **travel record** of the citizen using the same document and the e-passport is also expected to perform the same function. However, unlike the current passports, the **e-passport users** will have **physical storage of their biometric data in a chip** which will **reduce risk of data leakage**.

Related Information

- A **mission mode project (MMP)** is an individual project **within the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)** that

focuses on one aspect of electronic governance, such as banking, land records or commercial taxes etc.

- Components of Mission Mode Projects
 - **Capacity building scheme** - The scheme envisions
 - Establishment of Institutional Framework for State Level Strategic decision- making including setting-up of State e-Governance Mission Team (SeMT).
 - Imparting specialized training, Orientation program for SeMTs and decision makers.
 - Setting up of a central Capacity Building Management Cell for coordination and implementation of the scheme.
 - **Awareness and communication** - The main objectives of the scheme are
 - Build NeGP as an umbrella brand
 - Create awareness about e-Governance services and service delivery points
 - Build ownership/ stake of implementers in NeGP
 - **Impact and outcomes** - Besides assessment of projects, DeitY also undertakes e-Readiness Assessment of States and Union Territories.
 - **Standards and Policies** - Standards in e-Governance are a high priority activity, which will help ensure sharing of information and seamless interoperability of data across e-Governance applications.

Additional Information

- India's **passport power** has improved this quarter compared to 2021. It now **ranks at 83rd** position in the **Henley Passport Index**, climbing seven places from 90th rank in 2021.
- India's visa-free score is 60 which means that **Indian passport holders can visit 60 countries without a**

prior **visa**. **Japan** along with **Singapore** took the **number 1 position** in the **Passport Index**.

2) Cookies

Why in News?

- Google and Facebook were hit with a combined 210 million Euros fine for not complying with France's data privacy law. The country's data protection authority, CNIL, said that Facebook, Google's French homepage and YouTube websites failed to provide its users a 'disable' cookies option similar to the enable button.

What are cookies?

- **Cookies and web beacons** are **electronic placeholders** that are kept on your device by **websites to track your specific movements** on that website over time. They are useful to a limited extent to individual users. For example, **cookies retain login details for quick retrieval** next time the user logs back in. But **they also extensively track people's digital footprint and share browsing details with advertisers**.
- **HTTP cookies, or Internet cookies**, have become an essential fixture of the modern Internet, and are a **necessary part of web browsing**. For developers, this tracking tool is a way to **customise and personalise their interface for users**. But they **pose a threat to user privacy**.
- Using cookies, **websites** remember the **user , user login credentials, browsing history**, and sometimes **peep into e-commerce shopping carts**. The **data these cookies gather is largely used by advertisers and marketers** to place and sell their products online.
- **Most cookies** are perfectly **safe**, and are generated by the websites themselves to **enhance their page's performance**. These are usually **harmless**, and are commonly called necessary cookies.
- **Third-party cookies** are **more troubling** as they are **placed by companies that do not own the**

website the user is accessing. For example, a student may be surfing an educational website that contains advertisements of various other companies. These advertisers can deploy relevant cookies to track the user's digital footprint.

Why was the fine imposed?

- The authority said **these websites made it hard for users to refuse cookies** and nudged them to accept it. They **required users to make several clicks** and take a circuitous route to disable cookies, which **affects the website visitor's freedom of consent** on the Internet.
- A user expects to be able to quickly check a website, and the fact that they can't refuse cookies as easily as they can accept them influences their choice in favour of consent.

India and cookie laws

- India should draft rules to protect its citizens from being stalked by large tech firms, which control a significant part of the digital space.
- India **has no comprehensive personal data protection** at the moment.
- While some experts note that the use of cookies without the user's consent could be subsumed under **Section 43 of the Information Technology Act**, in the absence of any explicit legislation, companies can circumvent the law by finding technical loopholes. For instance, the Section deals with a 'computer virus' that can potentially contaminate an electronic device. But cookies don't harm the computer like malware.
- The **draft Personal Data Protection Bill (PDP), 2019**, is also **not** up to the mark on **regulating cookies**.
- The Bill defines 'personal data' as any information about a natural person who can be directly or indirectly identified. This means, businesses that use cookies can argue that their web trackers inherently cannot spot a 'natural' person.

3) mmWave bands

What is a millimeter Wave band?

- **Millimetre Wave band or mmWave** is a **particular segment of radio frequency spectrum that ranges between 24 GHz and 100 GHz**. This spectrum, as the name suggests, has a **short wavelength**, and is apt to **deliver greater speeds and lower latencies**.
- This in turn **makes data transfer efficient** and seamless as the current available networks work optimally only on lower frequency bandwidths.
- **5G services can be deployed using lower frequency bands**. They can cover greater distances and are proven to work efficiently even in urban environments, which are prone to interference. But, when it comes to data speeds, these bands fail to hit peak potential needed for a true 5G experience. So, mmWave is an important piece in the 5G jigsaw puzzle for mobile service providers.

Why in News?

- The Satcom Industry Association-India (SIA), an industry body that represents interests of the communication satellite ecosystem in India, has voiced concerns over the Government's plan to include the mmWave bands in the 5G spectrum auction.

Concerns

- The **Satcom Industry Association-India**, in its submission to TRAI, has urged the regulator to **limit the inclusion of mmWave spectrum in the 5G** auction as 27.5-31 GHz and 17.7-21.2 GHz bands have been **preserved for satellite-based broadband services** as per the decision taken by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The industry body pointed to Europe's "5G Roadmap", which is built on the ITU's decision to hold these bands for satellite-based broadband services.
- **Satellite-based communication** service providers (example, SpaceX's Starlink and Bharti Airtel's OneWeb) **use low-Earth orbit (LEO) satellites to provide broadband to both urban and rural users**. Their service could also be used for **weather predictions**.

- **Offering excessive spectrum resources** in the upcoming 5G auction will **result in Indian citizens being denied the benefits of high-demand, advanced satellite broadband services**
- In addition to this, it will result in a **massive loss to the Indian economy** of up to \$184.6 billion by 2030, along with the **loss of foreign direct investment (FDI) and employment generation benefits.**
- The industry body also noted that **providing excess spectrum** could pose a **downside** risk of the **bands going unsold**, or even worse, underutilised by terrestrial players at the **expense of satellite-based service providers.**
- The allocation of **mmWave band is critical to the satellite communication industry**, which needs a stronger regulatory support to ensure that 5G operations don't interfere with their existing operations.

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DEFENCE

1) Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas

Why in News:

- Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) expects to deliver all Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas in the Final Operational Clearance (FOC) variant to the Indian Air Force (IAF) in 2022 while the LCA MK-1A, with specific enhancements, will take flight by middle of 2022.

What is new?

- The aircraft features **enhanced range and endurance** including an **onboard oxygen generation system**, which is being integrated for the first time.
- Heavy weapons of the class of **Scalp, Crystal Maze and Spice-2000** will also be integrated on the Mk2.
 - The **Crystal Maze missile**, manufactured by **Israel's Rafael**, is based on the standoff **air-to-surface missile (ASM)** family
 - **SPICE-2000 laser guided bomb**, manufactured by the **Israeli** defence technology company Rafael, is short for 'Smart, Precise-Impact and Cost-Effective'.
 - The **Scalp missile**, manufactured by **European defence giant MBDA**, is designed to hit high value, strongly protected targets deep inside enemy territory. The Scalp is a **stealth missile** and is designed to **escape radar detection and fly at a very low level**.
- The LCA-Mk2 will be a heavier and much more capable aircraft than the current LCA variants.
- The Mk2 is 1,350 mm longer featuring canards and can carry a payload of 6,500 kg compared to 3,500 kg the LCA can carry.
- The Mk2 will be powered by a more powerful GE-414 engine.

About LCA- Tejas

- The **Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA)** was founded by the Government of India to supervise the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) programme, which began in 1984.
- It was **designed to replace the Mig 21 fighter jets**, which were getting old.
 - The Aeronautical Development Agency, which is **part of the Department of Defence Research and Development**, designed it.
 - **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited**, a government-owned company, **produced** the plane .
- **Tejas is India's first light fighter aircraft designed and manufactured in the country.** It's a **single-seat, single-engine supersonic multirole light fighter aircraft**.
- **Tejas** is a fourth-generation light combat aircraft (LCA). Its configuration is largely geared on **mobility and agility**.
- To make handling easier, the plane has a computerised **fly-by-wire flight control system**. This allows the pilot to focus on other tasks (especially mission-critical tasks) without having to worry about the plane deviating from its flying route.
- It can travel at a **top speed of Mach 1.8**
 - Mach is used as a unit of measurement in stating the speed of a moving object in relation to the speed of sound.
- The aircraft has a **range of 3,000 kilometres**.
- In its class, it is the lightest, smallest, multi-role supersonic fighter aircraft.
- Designed to carry a variety of precision-guided air-to-air and air-to-surface weaponry.
- **Capability for air-to-air refuelling.**

2) Brahmos Advanced Variant

Why in News?

- An **extended range sea-to-sea variant of the BrahMos supersonic**

cruise missile was test fired from the recently commissioned stealth guided missile destroyer INS Visakhapatnam.

New features

- This version of the missile has been designed to **launch either in a vertical or a horizontal** mode from moving/stationary assets to target both land and sea targets.
- The missiles, **fired at a speed of 2.8 Mach or nearly three times the speed of sound**, significantly **increase the capability of the ships in engaging long-range targets**.

About Brahmos

- **BrahMos** is a **joint collaboration** between **India and Russia**(India's Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and Russia's NPOM.) and is capable of being launched from **land, sea, sub-sea and air against surface and sea-based targets**, with a range capped at 290 km initially.
 - The **range** of the missile was **originally capped at 290 km as per obligations of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)**. Following **India's entry into the club** in

2016, the **range** would be **extended to 450 km and to 600km at a later stage**.

- Originally introduced in 2001, variations of these supersonic missiles can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft, and land platforms.
- Brahmos is **named after the rivers Brahmaputra and Moskva**.
- It is the first supersonic cruise missile to enter into the service.
- **India and the Philippines** have inked a "**Implementing Arrangement**" for "**procurement** of defence material and equipment procurement." This deal provides the **framework** for the widely anticipated government-to-government export of the **BrahMos cruise missile**.
- Aside from that, India is in **advanced negotiations** with other nations, including **Vietnam, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Indonesia, and South Africa**, to sell the BrahMos missile system.

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PIB ANALYSIS

1) Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas

About PBD

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention is the flagship event of the **Ministry of External Affairs** and provides an important platform to engage and connect with the **overseas Indians**.
- It is **celebrated on January 9 once in every two years** to strengthen the engagement of the overseas Indian community with the Government of India and reconnect them with their roots.
- The day commemorates the return of **Mahatma Gandhi** from South Africa to Mumbai on 9 January 1915.
- The first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was organized in 2003.

Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award

- The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) is the highest honour conferred on overseas Indians.
- PBSA is conferred by the **President of India** as a part of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Conventions.

Why in News?

- Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas was celebrated on January 9.

2) Target Olympic Podium Scheme

About the Scheme

- In order to improve India's performance at Olympics and Paralympics, the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports** started the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) in 2014. This was revamped in 2018 to establish a technical support team for managing the TOPS athletes and providing holistic support.
- It is an attempt to **provide assistance to India's top athletes**. The Scheme looks to add a premium to the

preparations of these athletes so that they can win medals in the Olympics.

- The Scheme currently supports 104 TOPS Core Group athletes across 13 sports disciplines & Hockey teams and 269 TOPS Development Group athletes across 12 sports disciplines.

Why in News?

- Haryana-based golfer Diksha Dagar and Judoka Yash Ghangas have been included in the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) in the Core and Development groups respectively.

3) Startup India Innovation Week

What's in the news?

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) organized the first-ever Startup India Innovation Week from 10th -16th of January 2022.
- The virtual week-long innovation celebration was aimed to commemorate the 75th year of India's independence 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' and was designed to showcase the spread and depth of entrepreneurship across India.
- India is emerging as a global innovation hub, boasting the **world's third-largest startup ecosystem**.
- India's startups representing 55 industries, spread across 633 districts with at least one startup from every State and UT of the country have created over 6 lakh jobs since 2016.
- **45% of the startups are from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and 45% of them are represented by women entrepreneurs**. Startups have the potential to accelerate India's integration into global value chains and create global impact.

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News in Depth

AIR NEWS

1) Guru Gobind Singh

About

- Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth and last Sikh Guru who became the leader of the Sikhs at the age of 9 after Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded.
- He was a spiritual master, warrior, poet and philosopher.
- In 1699, he established the Sikh warrior community called **Khalsa**.
- Guru Gobind Singh started the tradition of the **Five K's** for the Khalsa. The Five K's are kesh (uncut hair), kanga (wooden comb), kara (iron or steel bracelet), kirpan (dagger) and kacchera (short breeches)
- His literary contributions include the **Jaap Sahib, Benti Chaupai, Amrit Savaie**, etc.
- **Chandi di Var** was his famous composition in Punjabi.
- In 1708, he declared that Guru Granth Sahib will be the holy scripture of Sikhism and will be the permanent Guru of Sikhs.

Why in news?

- The 355th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th and last Sikh guru was celebrated recently.

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THE HINDU EDITORIALS

1) Reaping India's demographic dividend

Context:

- Forward-looking policies incorporating population dynamics, education and skills, healthcare, gender sensitivity, and providing rights and choices to the younger generation can help realise the true potential of demographic dividend.

What is the demographic dividend?

- **Demographic dividend**, as defined by the **United Nations Population Fund**, is "the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the **share of the working-age population is larger** than the non-working-age share of the population"

What happened to the demographic dividend?

- As fertility declines, the share of the young population falls and that of the older, dependent population rises.
- If the fertility decline is rapid, the increase in the population of working ages is substantial yielding the 'demographic dividend'.

The window of demographic opportunity

- The smaller share of children in the population enables higher investment per child.
- The future entrants in the labour force can have better productivity and thus boost income.
- With the passage of time, the share of the older population rises and that of the working age population begins to fall and hence the dividend is available for a period of time, 'the window of demographic opportunity'.

Challenges for realisation of the benefits of potential demographic dividend

1. **Falling fertility rate**
2. **Rising median age** (from 24 years in 2011, 29 years now and expected to be 36 years by 2036)
3. **Falling dependency ratio** (expected to decrease from 65% to 54% in the coming decade taking 15-59 years as the working age population)

- These factors indicate that India is in the middle of a demographic transition. However in India, the benefit to the GDP from demographic transition has been lower than its peers in Asia and is already tapering. Hence, there is an urgency to take appropriate policy measures.

Measures to be taken

Forward-looking policies

- Countries like Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea have already shown us how demographic dividend can be reaped to achieve incredible economic growth by adopting forward-looking policies and programmes to empower the youth in terms of their education, skills and health choices.

Undertake an updated National Transfer Accounts (NTA) assessment

- The NTA data for India needs to be updated to capture the progress made on per capita consumption investments since 2011-12.
- State-specific NTAs need to be calculated every year and States need to be ranked for investing in the youth.

Invest more in children and adolescents

- **India ranks poorly in Asia in terms of private and public human capital spending.**
- It needs to invest more in children and adolescents, particularly in nutrition and learning during early childhood.
- Given that India's workforce starts at a younger age, a greater focus needs to be on transitioning from secondary education to universal skilling and entrepreneurship, as done in South Korea.

Health investments

- **The public spending on health has remained flat at around 1% of GDP.**
- It is important to draft policies to promote health during the demographic dividend for which health spending should be increased to keep in pace with economic growth.

Accessible reproductive healthcare services

- The **unmet need for family planning in India at 9.4%** as per the latest National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) is high as compared to 3.3% in China and 6.6% in South Korea, which needs to be bridged.
- Making reproductive healthcare services accessible on a **rights-based approach** is needed.

Bridge gender differentials

- In India, boys are more likely to be enrolled in secondary and tertiary school than girls which is the reverse in Philippines, China and Thailand.

Increase female workforce participation

- As of 2019, 20.3% of women were working or looking for work, down from 34.1% in 2003-04. New skills and opportunities for women and girls befitting their participation in a \$3 trillion economy is urgently needed.
- South Korea's female workforce participation rate of 50% has been built on
 - i) **legally compulsory gender budgeting** to analyse gender disaggregated data and its impact on policies,
 - ii) **increasing childcare benefits**, and
 - iii) boosting **tax incentives for part-time work**.

Address the diversity between States

- While India is a young country, the status and pace of population ageing vary among States which reflect differences in economic development and health and that needs to be addressed.
 - Southern States, which are advanced in demographic transition, already have a **higher percentage of older people**.

New federal approach to governance reforms

- A new federal approach to governance reforms for demographic dividend will need to be put in place for policy coordination between States on various emerging population issues such as migration, ageing, skilling, female workforce participation and urbanisation.

- Inter-ministerial coordination for strategic planning, investment, monitoring and course correction should be an important feature of this governance arrangement.

2) Recast the selection process of the ECs

Context

- Reports of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and his Election Commissioner colleagues attending an informal meeting with the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister recently has brought renewed focus on the independence and the impartiality of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Appointment process of Election Commissioners

- The appointment of Election Commissioners falls within the purview of **Article 324(2)** of the Constitution, which establishes the institution.
- It contains a 'subject to' clause which provides that both the number and tenure of the Election Commissioners shall be "subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament".
- However, apart from enacting a law in 1991, which was subsequently amended to enlarge the number of Election Commissioners from one to three, **Parliament has so far not enacted any changes to the appointment process**.

Arguments against current appointment process

- The Election Commission is not only responsible for conducting free and fair elections but it also renders a **quasi-judicial function** between the various political parties including the ruling government and other parties. Accordingly, the **Executive cannot be a sole participant** in the appointment of members of the Election Commission.
- The Executive's role in the current appointment process has come under judicial scrutiny over its **lack of transparency**.

- Several petitions urge the Supreme Court to declare that the current practice of appointment of Election Commissioners by the Centre **violates Articles 14, 324(2), and democracy** as a basic feature of the Constitution.

Need for change in appointment process

- ECI is the **institutional keystone holding up the edifice of Indian democracy and hence** Changes in the appointment process for Election Commissioners can **strengthen the ECI's independence, neutrality and transparency.**
- Establishing a **multi-institutional, bipartisan committee** for the fair and transparent selection of Election Commissioners can enhance the perceived and actual independence of the ECI.
- The **quasi-judicial nature of the ECI's** functions makes it especially important that the appointments process conform to the **strictest democratic principles.**

Various recommendations in this regard

- **Justice Tarkunde Committee** in 1975, **Dinesh Goswami Committee** in 1990 and the **Law Commission in 2015** recommended that Election Commissioners be appointed on the advice of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Lok Sabha Opposition Leader and the Chief Justice of India.
- The **Fourth Report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission** additionally recommended that the Law Minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha be included in such a Collegium.

Conclusion

- The ECI's constitutional responsibilities require a **fair and transparent appointment process that is beyond reproach**, which will reaffirm our faith in this vital pillar of our polity.

3) Treating the planet well can aid the progress

Context

- The 2020 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), titled "**The Next Frontier – Human Development and the Anthropocene**" proposed a **planetary pressure-adjusted Human Development Index (HDI).**

Planetary pressure adjusted HDI, or PHDI

- The concept of the planetary boundary was introduced by a group of scientists across the world, led by J. **Rockström of the Stockholm Resilience Centre** in 2009.
- This planetary pressure adjustment has been worked out by **factoring per capita carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission (production), and per capita material footprint.**
- The **purpose of the planetary pressure adjusted HDI, or PHDI, is to communicate to the larger society the risk involved in continuing with existing practices** in our resource use and environmental management, and the retarding effect that environmental stress can perpetuate on development.
- Both global and local evidence indicate that biodiversity loss, climate change, land system/land-use change, disruption of biogeochemical cycles, and scarcity of freshwater availability are a threat and **increase the vulnerability of society.**

Impact on country rankings

- When planetary pressure is adjusted, the **world average of HDI in 2019 came down from 0.737 to 0.683.**
- The average per capita global CO₂ emission (production) is **4.6 tonnes** and the per capita material footprint is **12.3 tonnes.**
- The **global ranking of several countries was altered**, in a positive and negative sense, with adjustment of planetary pressure.
- **Switzerland** is the only country in the group of high human development countries whose world rank has not changed with adjustment of planetary pressure.
- Among 66 very high human development countries, **30 countries recorded a fall** in rank values.

- In the case of **India**, it **gained in global rankings by eight points** (131st rank under HDI and 123rd rank under PHDI), and its per capita carbon emission (production) and material footprint are **well below the global average**.

Challenges in India, SDGs

- The twin challenges of **poverty alleviation and environmental safeguarding** that former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi first articulated in her lecture during the Stockholm conference on the human environment in 1972 still remain unattended.

Progress after Stockholm conference

- Adoption of **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)** with a specific target to meet by 2030.
- The **Sixth Assessment Report (AR6)** of the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** 2021 laid stress on limiting global temperature rise at the 1.5° C level and strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty.
- This was reaffirmed in the **Conference of Parties (COP) 26 at Glasgow in 2021**.
- Widespread awareness about the environment and several initiatives both at the level of the government and the community.

Still lagging

- India has 27.9% people under the Multidimensional Poverty Index ranging from 1.10% in Kerala to 52.50% in Bihar, and a sizable section of them directly depend on natural resources for their sustenance.
- According to NITI Aayog (2020-21), out of 100 points set for the grade of Achiever, India scored 60 (Performer grade, score 50-64) for **no poverty** and 47 (Aspirant grade, score 0-49) for **zero hunger**, with wide State-level variations.
- India's score in the **SDGs of 8, 9, and 12** ('Decent work and economic growth'; 'Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure' and 'Responsible Consumption and Production',

respectively) considered for working out planetary pressure are 61 (performer), 55 (performer) and 74 (front runner), respectively.

Way forward

- **Interdependencies of earth system** processes including social processes, and their relationships necessitates to **nest human development including social and economic systems into the ecosystem**, and biosphere building on a systematic approach to nature-based solutions that put people at the core.
- It is now essential to **consider people and the planet as being a part of an interconnected social-ecological system**. This can be conceived and addressed at the local level, for which India has constitutional provisions in the form of the **73rd and 74th Amendments**.
- The remarkable **advances in earth system science and sustainability research** along with enabling technology of remote sensing and geographic information system have helped to document and explain the impact of human activities at the ground level and stimulate new interdisciplinary work encompassing the natural and social sciences.

Conclusion

- What is required is a **reorientation of the planning process, adoption of a decentralised approach, a plan for proper institutional arrangements, and steps to enable political decisions**.

4) Hate speech in the time of free speech

Context

- Growing incidence of hate speeches in combination with the judicial ambiguity has provided an **opportunity to chart legislative reforms**.

What is hate speech?

- The **Supreme Court, in Pravasai Bhalai Sangathan v. Union of India (2014)**, described hate speech as "an effort to marginalise individuals based

on their membership in a group” and one that “seeks to delegitimise group members in the eyes of the majority, reducing their social standing and acceptance within society.”

Judiciary on hate speeches

- The **High Court of Karnataka, in Campaign Against Hate Speech v. The State of Karnataka (2020)**, was of the opinion that the Indian Penal Code illegalises speeches that are intended to promote enmity or prejudice the maintenance of harmony between different classes.
- In *G. Thirumurugan Gandhi v. State* (2019), the Madras High Court explained that **hate speeches cause discord between classes** and that responsibility attached to free speech should not be forgotten.
- Summing up these legal principles, in **Amish Devgan v. Union of India (2020)**, the Supreme Court held that “**hate speech has no redeeming or legitimate purpose other than hatred towards a particular group**”.

Issues surrounding hate speech

- **Laws dealing with hate speech are ineffective and deficient.**
- Hate speech is **neither defined** in the Indian legal framework **nor can it be easily reduced to a standard definition** due to many forms it can take.
- The current legislative set-up has **several provisions to criminalise offences** which can be characterised as hate speech.
- Despite judicial guidance from the Amish Devgan case, uncertainty around interpretation of hate speech has resulted in the **adoption of varying standards.**
- Action commonly taken against modern-day hate speeches have a **piecemeal effect** wherein the underlying objective of inciting communal disharmony or hatred, despite the detention of the offender, **survives through digital or social media platforms for eternity.**
- Much of the existing penal provisions deal with hate speech belong to the **pre-Internet era.**

- **None of the law commission recommendations have been acted upon** and this has partly given rise to ambiguity in construing hate speech by various constitutional courts.

What were the recommendations?

- The **Law Commission of India, in its 267th report**, recommended the **insertion of two new provisions** to criminalise and punish the propagation of hate speech: **Section 153C and Section 505A of IPC.**
 - **Section 153C** was drafted to cover an offence committed when any person uses threatening words which are intended to cause fear, or commends hatred for the purpose of inducing violence through words, spoken or written, visible representation or signs on the grounds of race, caste, religion, sex, gender identity and other characteristics.
 - **Section 505A** was to include provisions penalising causing of fear, alarm, or provocation of violence.
- The **189th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs**, in 2015, recommended the **incorporation of separate and specific provisions in the Information Technology Act** to deal with **online hate speech.**

Need of the hour

- The need of the hour is **specialised legislation that will govern hate speech** propagated via the Internet and, especially, social media.
 - Reference can be drawn to the **Australian federal law called the Criminal Code Amendment Act, 2019**, which imposes liability upon Internet service providers if such persons are aware that any abhorrent violent material, which is defined to include material that a reasonable man would regard as offensive, is accessible through the service provided by them.

- Taking cue from best international standards, it is important that **specific and durable legislative provisions** that combat hate speech, especially that which is propagated online and through social media, is enacted **by**

**amending the IPC and the
Information Technology Act.**

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INDIAN EXPRESS EXPLAINED

1) National Education Alliance for Technology

What's in the news?

- The Government of India has launched **NEAT 3.0, a single platform to provide the best-developed ed-tech solutions and courses to students of the country.**
- NEAT will be a game-changer in bridging the digital divide, especially among the economically disadvantaged students and also in fulfilling the knowledge-based requirement of India and the world.

About NEAT

- National Educational Alliance for Technology (NEAT) is an initiative to provide the **use of best-developed technological solutions in the education sector** to enhance the employability of the youth on a single platform for learners' convenience.
- It aims to act as a **bridge between edtech companies, academic institutions and students.**
- The initiative was taken after a **Ministry of Education review** noted that learning tools developed by edtech platforms that can supplement classroom teaching need to be made more accessible.
- Accordingly, it was proposed that a **portal be created** where edtech platforms can be roped in to display their products after a shortlisting process.

What are the products on display in the portal?

- The portal — **neat.aicte-india.org**— has separate sections listing products for students and educational institutes respectively. So far the government has roped in 58 edtech companies.
- Under the **B2B (business to business) segment** of the portal, courses are on offer for higher education institutes to purchase in bulk for their students. And the **B2C (business to customer) section** lists courses that eligible students can browse through and choose from. The

courses range from accounting and finance to coding, including advanced programming languages like python.

How were students picked under the scheme?

- The basic objective of the scheme is to **make students from disadvantaged backgrounds aware of the availability of such opportunities** that can help them learn new skills or polish existing ones.
- In that regard, the AICTE reached out to higher education institutes across the country, directing them to inform students about the portal and enroll them based on their needs and consent. The edtech platforms have been **allowed to charge fees as per their policies.**

How will it benefit students from backward communities?

- The government has mandated that every shortlisted company will have to offer **free coupons to the extent of 25 per cent of the total registrations** for their solution through NEAT portal.
- Through this route, the government created a bank of 12.15 lakh free coupons over the last two years. And it has now started distributing those coupons among **students belonging to SC/ST/OBC and EWS categories with the annual family income cap fixed at Rs 8 lakh.**

How were SC/ST/OBC/EWS students chosen?

- After the government opened the registrations for students of these categories for free courses, nearly 37 lakh applications were received. As the number of free coupons were limited, the **authorities used an AI tool to pick students with caste, income, gender, age as filters.**
- **Older students and women** have been given preference over men.

What are the courses in demand?

- The top five courses in terms of demand are python programming, C, C++, Java programming, data science, life science and healthcare analysis, and interview preparation.

- In the next phase of NEAT, school students will also be brought under its ambit.

2) India-UK FTA

What's in the news?

- India and the United Kingdom have launched formal Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, with the aim of concluding an **early harvest trade agreement** over the next few months.
- Both countries have agreed to avoid “sensitive issues” in the negotiations. The interim (early harvest agreement) aims to achieve up to 65 per cent of coverage for goods and up to 40 per cent coverage for services. By the time the final agreement is inked, the coverage for goods is expected to go up to “90 plus percentage” of goods.
- India is also negotiating a similar early harvest agreement with **Australia**, which is supposed to set the stage for a long-pending **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement** that both countries have been pursuing for nearly a decade.

What are early harvest pacts?

- Early harvest agreements are used to **open up bilateral trade between two countries on a restricted list of goods and services**, primarily as a **frontrunner to clinching a more comprehensive FTA**.
- The problem, though, is that these early harvest schemes potentially target the low-hanging fruits, leaving the tougher goods and services for later. This strategy can lead to **significant delays** in wrapping up the more broad-based FTAs, which could potentially lead to impediments.
- India had concluded an early harvest agreement with **Thailand** in 2004 but has not been able to conclude a comprehensive FTA with the country. India also has a trade agreement with **Sri Lanka** dealing with goods but was not able to conclude an agreement on services and investments.
- Early harvest agreements that do not graduate into full-scale FTAs are

exposed to **legal challenges from other countries** that are members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), an organisation that was formed on the premise that member countries should not discriminate between their trading partners. The **exception to the rule are full-scale FTAs, subject to some conditions**.

- Experts noted that it is often beneficial to negotiate the entire deal together, as an early harvest deal may **reduce the incentive for one side to work towards a full FTA**.

What is the status of the trade pacts under negotiation?

- India now has in place **10 FTAs and six PTAs (preferential trade agreements)**. In addition, India is negotiating 16 new and expanding seven existing agreements, including with trading partners such as Canada, the EU, the US, alongside Australia and the UK.
- Meanwhile, India is also simultaneously carrying out a **review of the existing FTAs with South Korea, Japan and ASEAN** on the ground of India's rising trade deficit with these trading partners.
- Experts noted that New Delhi may seek conditions in such FTA that trading partners import more from India.

Related Information

Levels of Economic Integration

- Economic integration takes the form of the Preferential Trade Area, Free Trade Area, Customs Union, Common Market and Economic Union.
- A **preferential trade area (PTA)** is a trading bloc that gives preferential access to certain products from the participating countries. This is done by reducing tariffs but not by abolishing them completely. A PTA can be established through a trade pact. It is the first stage of economic integration.
- A **free trade area** is the region encompassing a trade bloc whose member countries have signed a free-trade agreement (FTA). Such agreements involve cooperation between at least two countries to

reduce/abolish trade barriers. e.g. South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

- A **customs union** is defined as a type of trade block which is composed of a free trade area with no tariffs among members and (zero tariffs among members) with a **common external tariff**. e.g. BENELUX (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg).
- A **common market** has the same features as a customs union, but, in addition, factors of production (labour, capital and technology) are mobile among members. Restrictions on immigration and cross-border

investment are abolished. e.g. European Common Market (ECM).

- An **economic union** is the last step in an economic integration process. In addition to free movement of goods, services and production factors, it also requires integration of economic policies, both monetary and fiscal. Under an economic union members harmonized monetary policies, taxation and government spending. (e.g. European Economic Union).

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INFOGRAPHIC OF THE WEEK

1) Chips to Startup (C2S) Programme

Chips to Startup (C2S) Programme



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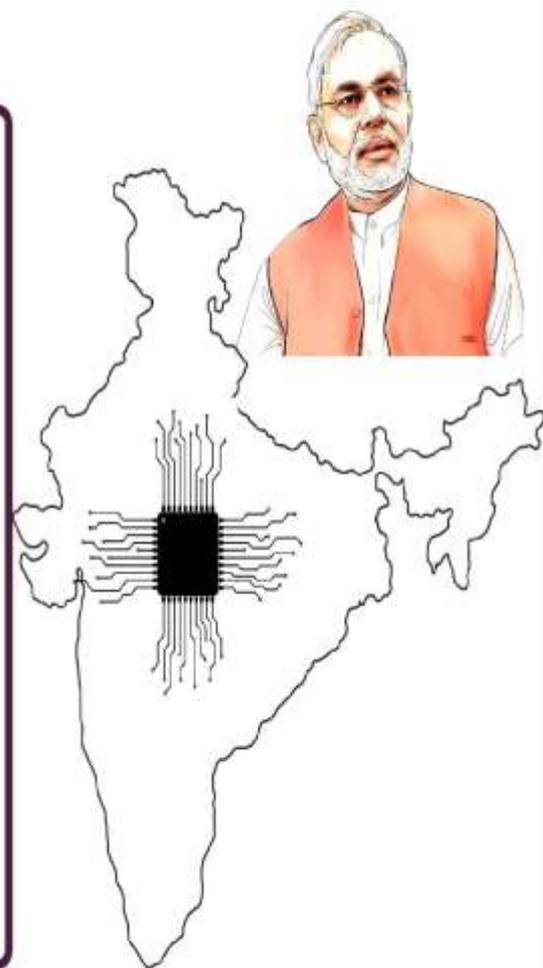


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What's in the news?

In line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plan to transform India into the next semiconductor hub, the Ministry of Electronics and Information (MeitY) has sought applications from 100 academia, R&D organisations, start-ups and MSMEs under its Chips to Startup (C2S) Programme.



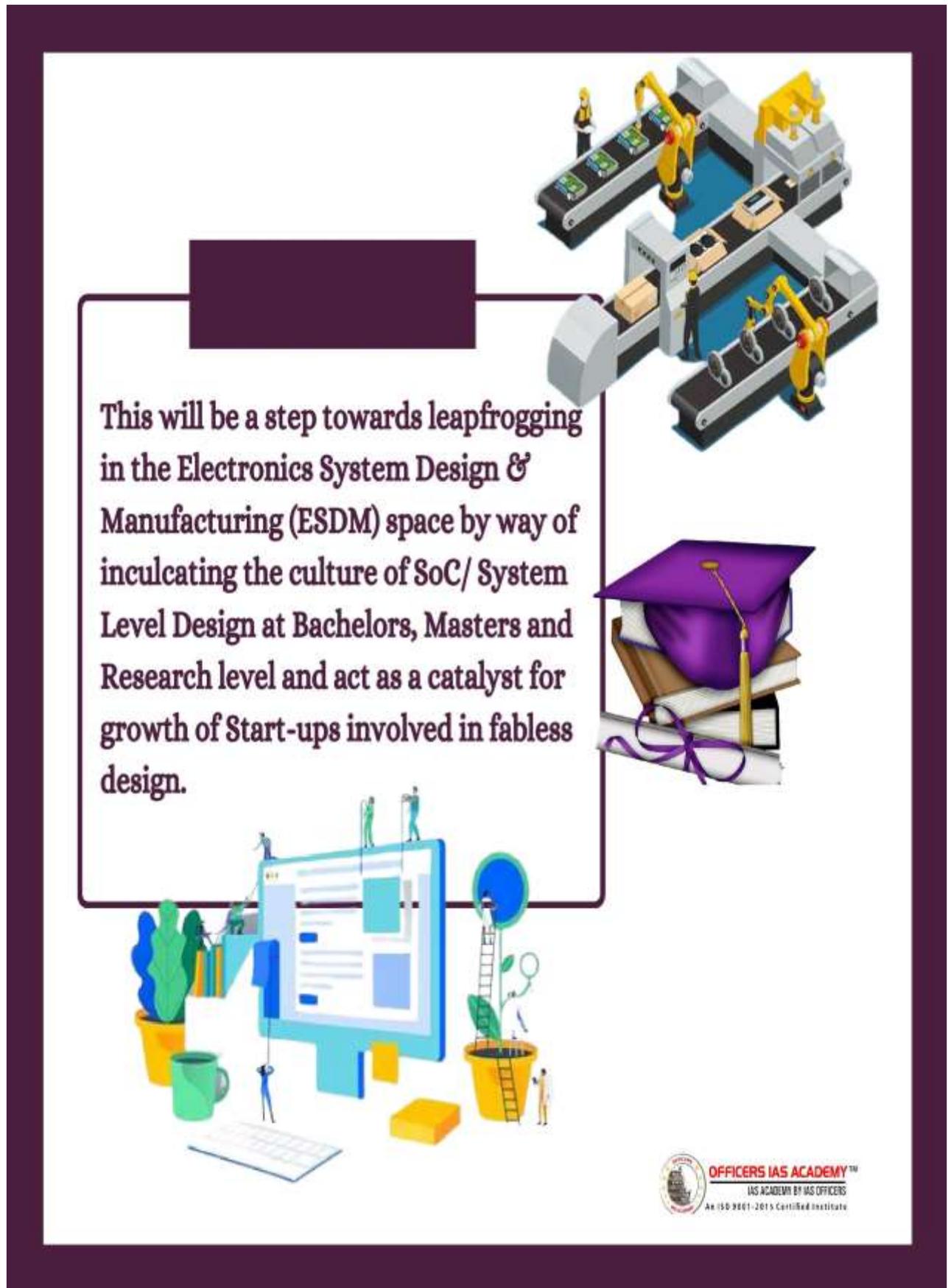
The Chips to Startup (C2S) Programme aims to train 85,000 number of high-quality and qualified engineers in the area of Very large-scale integration (VLSI) and Embedded System Design as well as result in development of 175 ASICs (Application Specific Integrated Circuits), Working Prototypes of 20 System on Chips (SoC) and IP Core repository over a period of 5 years.

85,000



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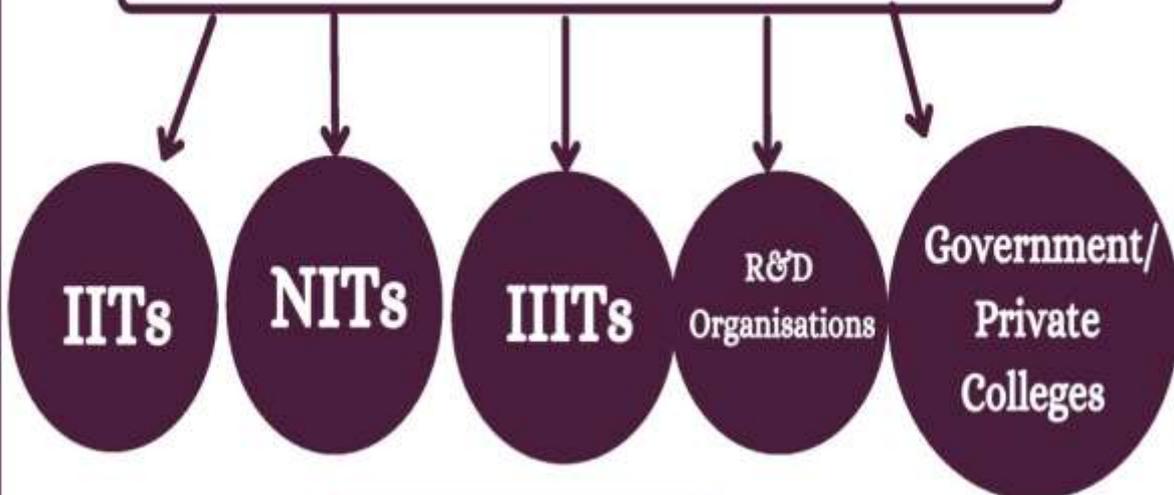
This will be a step towards leapfrogging in the Electronics System Design & Manufacturing (ESDM) space by way of inculcating the culture of SoC/ System Level Design at Bachelors, Masters and Research level and act as a catalyst for growth of Start-ups involved in fabless design.

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The programme would be implemented at about 100 academic institutions/R&D organisations across the Country



Startups and MSMEs can also participate in the programme by submitting their proposals under Academia- Industry Collaborative Project, Grand Challenge/ /Hackathons/RFP for development of System/SoC/IP Core(s).

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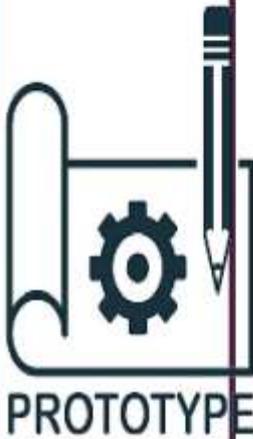


Academia- Industry Collaborative Project, Grand Challenge/ /Hackathons/RFP for development of System/SoC/IP Core(s).



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The C2S Programme addresses each entity of the value chain in electronics viz. quality manpower training, research and development, hardware IPs design, System design, application-oriented R&D, Prototype design and deployment with the help of academia, industry, start-ups and R&D establishments.



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Technology readiness levels



Under the Programme, based on the Institutions' expertise, Technology Readiness Level (TRL) and design experience acquired during earlier SMDP Programmes, proposals are invited in three different categories,

Design and Development of Systems/SoCs/ASICs/Reusable IP Core(s),

Development of Application Oriented Working Prototype of IPs/ASICs/SoCs,

Proof of Concept oriented Research and Development of ASICs/FPGAs.

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C-DAC (Centre for Development of Advanced Computing), a scientific society operating under MeitY, will serve as the nodal agency for the programme.



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