

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**Operation Digital Board launched**

Union Human Resource Development Ministry has launched Operation Digital Board to leverage technology in order to boost quality education in the country.

Operation Digital Board(ODB):

- ODB aims at converting a class room into a digital class room and provide e-resources at any time and at any place to students.
- The digital board will be introduced all over the country in government and government aided schools from class 9th onwards as well as in higher education institutions.
- ODB will be implemented in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by the University Grants Commission (UGC).

Significance and benefits: ODB is a revolutionary step which will make the learning as well as the teaching process interactive and popularize flipped learning as a pedagogical approach.

It will also help in provisioning of personalised adaptive learning as well as Intelligent Tutoring by exploiting emerging technologies like Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics.

Need for such initiatives: The biggest challenge facing education sector in the country is maintaining acceptable quality standards across the country. Although we have good number of premier institutions, which compete with the best in the world, a large number of higher education institutions and schools needs improvements in quality teaching-learning, as the students coming out of these institutions find themselves unsuitable for the requirements of the society and market. The spread of educational technology and connectivity has given an opportunity to resolve this issue and aim at equity in educational standards.

HOPE Portal

National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Organizations (NABH) has revamped Entry-Level Certification Process of hospitals to make it simpler, digital, faster and user-friendly.

Why NABH Certification?

- HCOs and small HCOs that want to avail benefits associated with IRDAI and Ayushman Bharat.
- NABH accreditation provides assurance of quality and care in hospitals at par with international benchmarks.
- NABH has designed an exhaustive healthcare standard for hospitals and healthcare providers that have been accredited as per global standards.

HOPE Portal

- The revamped certification process is driven through a new portal called HOPE – Healthcare Organizations' Platform for Entry-Level-Certification.
- It is an online platform for smooth and secure registration which provides a self-explanatory questionnaire to be filled by the HCO/SHCOs.
- It ensures quality at nascent stages by enrolling a wide range of hospitals across the country including Healthcare Organizations (HCOs).
- HOPE also enables them to comply with quality protocols, improve patient safety and the overall healthcare facility of the organization.

NABH: It is a constituent body of QCI, has been working to ensure reliability, efficiency and global accreditation in Indian healthcare sector. It uses contemporary methodologies and tools, standards of patient safety and infection control.

QCI: Established in 1997 Quality Council of India (QCI) is an autonomous organization under the DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It is the Quality Apex and National Accreditation Body for accreditation and quality promotion in the country. The Council was established to provide a credible, reliable mechanism for third party assessment of products, services and processes which is accepted and recognized globally.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**Military Space Force of USA**

President Trump has signed a directive- Space Policy Directive-4 (SPD-4)- to create a Military Space Force. Accordingly, the Pentagon will establish the Space Force as the sixth branch of the United States military, to go along with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard. However, the challenge ahead is that the Congress must approve the creation of any new military branch.

US Military Space Force:

- The main goal of the Space Force is to secure and extend American dominance of the space domain.
- The Space Force would initially reside within the Department of the Air Force, much as the Marine Corps is part of the U.S. Navy.
- S. Space Force will organize, train, and equip military space forces. Eventually, the aim is to push the Space Force out from under the Air Force's wings and make it a stand-alone organization.

Challenges ahead:

- The fundamental difficulty of a space corps is that the physical environment of space is not conducive to the conduct of military operations without incurring serious losses in the form of spacecraft and debris. And despite efforts to make spacecraft more fuel efficient, the energy requirements are enormous.
- The technical demands of defending assets in space make the possibility of dominance and space as a domain for war-fighting a sort of chimera.
- A new space force is not merely a brand new service; it potentially increases greater organisational uncertainty within the U.S. military. Notwithstanding these concerns, Washington's headlong rush is the by-product of a strong commitment to preserving American advantages in space.

Importance of space:

- Space is a "war-fighting domain" and global powers like Russia and China are already treating it as such.
- Besides, the stakes are high. Much of our 21st-century economy and lifestyle — from bank transactions to weather forecasting to television service to the GPS directions — depends on satellites functioning round the clock and without interruption. The military depends on them too.
- In 2007, China shot down one of its own satellites — mission accomplished in its own right, it also littered orbit with potentially destructive space debris. Many saw the operation as a veiled display of military power.

US declares National Emergency

US President Trump has officially declared the US-Mexico border a "national emergency," which will allow him to circumvent Congress's constitutional powers to control spending and divert federal funds toward his much-ballyhooed border wall. The president has argued that the emergency declaration is warranted because the migrants "invading" the United States across the Mexico border have caused epidemics of crime and drug use.

National emergency in US:

- In 1976, Congress passed the National Emergencies Act, which permits the president to pronounce a national emergency when he considers it appropriate. The act offers no specific definition of "emergency" and allows a president to declare one entirely at his or her discretion.
- By declaring a national emergency, the president avails himself or herself of dozens of specialized laws. Some of these powers have funds the president otherwise could not access.
- Under current law, emergency powers lapse within a year unless the president renews them. A national emergency can be re-declared indefinitely, and, in practice, that is done frequently. There have been 58 pronounced under the National Emergencies Act, of which 31 are still in effect.
- Even though there aren't many limits on a president's ability to declare an emergency, it does not create complete freedom to act. Anyone directly affected by the order can challenge it in court.
- Congress can also draft a concurrent resolution to terminate the state of emergency, leading to a somewhat novel act. Ordinarily, congressional resolutions support a president's declaration of a national emergency.

India-Saudi Arabia and Pakistan

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has visited India. This will lead to further strengthening of Saudi Arabia-Indian ties.

Importance of Saudi Arabia for India:

- Saudi Arabia is India's 4th largest trading partner. Saudi Arabia is one of the three largest suppliers of oil to India.
- Saudi Arabia is the key pillar of India's energy security, a source of 17% or more of crude oil and 32% of LPG requirements of India.
- Indian community is the largest expatriate group in Saudi Arabia. It is about 2.7 million. The remittances from this community is around US \$11 billion annually.
- Hajj pilgrimage to over 1,75,000 Indians every year is facilitated by Saudi Arabia. This is a major reason why Saudi Arabia is an important country for India.
- The Riyadh Declaration of 2010 had forged a Strategic Partnership between India and Saudi Arabia.
- Saudi Arabia has identified India as one of the eight strategic partners to deepen partnership in areas of political engagement, security, trade and investment, and culture.
- Recently, Saudi ARAMCO, in partnership with ADNOC of UAE, has agreed to partner in Ratnagiri Refinery and Petrochemical project Ltd., a Joint Venture of US\$ 44 billion.
- Saudi Arabia is undertaking large development projects including Smart City, Red Sea Tourism Project, and Entertainment City. Indian companies will be looking to participate.
- Saudi Arabia has shown interest to be a part of Prime Minister Modi's 'International Solar Alliance' initiative.

India-Saudi Arabia defense relations:

- Cooperation in the defence sector is an important area of India-Saudi ties. An MoU on Defence Cooperation was signed in 2014.
- The two sides are exploring the possibility of elevating this engagement with Joint Production and Joint Exercises, Joint Naval exercises.
- In 2016, an MoU on cooperation in the exchange of intelligence related to money laundering and terrorism financing was signed.
- Riyadh has greater understanding of India's terrorism-related concerns. Saudi Arabia is willing to work with India in countering the global menace.

How is Pakistan different to India from Saudi Arabia?

- Pakistan is important to Saudi Arabia for internal security reasons for Riyadh.
- The Pakistan Army has previously acted as the Saudi rulers' guard. Saudi may need the services of Pakistani mercenaries.
- Afghanistan has been a point of strategic convergence for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.
- U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the expansion of Taliban influence has enhanced Pakistan's strategic value.
- Iran is Saudi Arabia's chief adversary in West Asia. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry is being played out from Syria to Yemen.
- Saudi Arabia wants to curb Iranian influence in Afghanistan. It needs Pakistan to contain Iran.
- Pakistan is a natural ideological ally of Saudi Arabia due to Sunni fundamentalism and both are an ideological foe of Shia Iran.
- Pakistan is in dire economic straits. It has been forced to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loans.
- Saudi Arabia, MBS has promised multibillion-dollar investment in Pakistan. This includes the construction of an oil refinery in Gwadar on the Makran coast.
- This project is being developed as a strategic port by China and features prominently in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) plan.
- The strategic and economic nexus between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan is stronger than India-Saudi Arabia's economic partnership.

INDIAN ECONOMY**States' ranking on Startup initiatives**

Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has released second edition of Startup Ranking for 2019.

Startup Ranking framework:

- The Startup Ranking framework aims to rank the States/UTs for establishing a robust ecosystem for supporting Startups.
- The framework also encourages States and UTs to identify, learn and replicate good practices from each other.

The 2019 edition: The Ranking Framework 2019 comprises of 7 pillars and 30 action points. The pillars will assess States' /UTs efforts across institutional support, simplifying regulations, easing public procurement, incubation support, seed funding support, venture funding support and awareness and outreach related activities. The ranking exercise aims to evaluate measures taken by States/UTs during the assessment period from May 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019.

Significance of Startups: India is home to about 20,000 startups, with about 1,400 beginning operations every year. They are not only driving economic growth but also leading to technological innovations and employment generation in every state. Entrepreneurs are introducing new solutions everyday and also improving existing processes.

To encourage and help startups the Govt of India has taken the lead in creating policies and a framework. Many States and UTs have a startup focussed environment with ease of doing business for startups.

Way ahead: The Govt has to align its strategies to tap into the infinite potential of young entrepreneurial minds. Startups need help in the journey from idea to business and business to success. States will also have to take proactive steps to enable startup ecosystems at the local level.

Govt approves capital infusion in 12 PSBs

The Central Govt has approved the capital infusion of Rs. 48,239 Crore into 12 public sector banks (PSBs).

- The latest round of capital infusion is aimed at equipping better-performing PSBs under prompt corrective action (PCA) framework of RBI to be above regulatory PCA triggers such as CET-1 ratio of 7.375%, Tier I ratio of 8.875%, CRAR of 10.875% and NNPA below 6%.
- With the latest funding, the total amount of capital infusion would increase to Rs 100958 crore of the planned recapitalization of Rs 1.06 lakh crore for PSBs in FY2019.

Concerns associated with frequent capital infusions:

- The government as the major owner is free to recapitalize but the issue is, at what cost, for how long, and whether recapitalization alone is enough.
- The government is finding it increasingly difficult to recapitalize public sector banks due to the compulsion to adhere to the stringent budgetary deficit benchmarks.
- Bankers become lackadaisical toward debt recovery and tend to escalate provisions and contingencies to be adjusted against the fresh capital.
- In different-banks-same-pay situations, employees in the loss-making, but recapitalized, banks become unenthusiastic while those in profit-making, but not recapitalized are demotivated.
- It also implies cross-subsidization: dividend-paying PSU banks subsidizing the non-dividend paying. Ultimately, systemic efficiency suffers.

Way ahead:

PSBs are in very real danger of losing not only their market share but also their identity unless the government intervenes with surgical precision and alacrity. Hence, policymakers and bankers need to put their heads together and come up with a smart option to resolve an issue that can no longer be put on the backburner.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETCLOFAR telescope

A new map of the night sky published recently charts hundreds of thousands of previously unknown galaxies discovered using LOFAR telescope that can detect light sources optical instruments cannot see. The discovery literally shed new light on some of the Universe's deepest secrets, including the physics of black holes and how clusters of galaxies evolve.

LOFAR Telescope:

- The Low-Frequency Array or LOFAR, is a large radio telescope network located mainly in the Netherlands, completed in 2012 by ASTRON, the Netherlands Institute for Radio Astronomy and its international partners.
- How it works? LOFAR consists of a vast array of omnidirectional antennas using a new concept in which the signals from the separate antennas are not combined in real time as they are in most array antennas. The electronic signals from the antennas are digitized, transported to a central digital processor, and combined in software to emulate a conventional antenna.
- The project is based on an interferometric array of radio telescopes using about 20,000 small antennas concentrated in at least 48 stations.
- The mission of LOFAR is to map the Universe at radio frequencies from ~10–240 MHz with greater resolution and greater sensitivity than previous surveys, such as the 7C and 8C surveys, and surveys by the Very Large Array (VLA) and Giant Meterwave Radio Telescope (GMRT).

Kerala Police-Bot

Kerala Police has inducted a humanoid police robot 'KP-BOT' recently into the force. Hence, the Kerala police department has become the first police department in the country to use robot for police work. It was developed by Kochi-based startup venture Asimov Robotics Pvt Ltd and Cyberdome, R&D center of Kerala police.

This Robo-cop gives information about all services available at the police headquarters and issue identity cards for visitors and allot time for them to meet police officers. The Robocop, modeled after the female personnel, follows the 'Three Laws of Robotics' given by Isaac Asimov.

- A robot may not harm a human being.
- It must follow orders
- It must protect itself as long as such protection does not conflict with the first two laws.

Humanoid robots

- These robots have body resembles to the human body.
- They can perform the human tasks and are used as research tools in several scientific areas.
- Sophia is the first humanoid in the world which was manufactured by the Hanson robotics.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Why settle for average, when you are destined for Iconic?