

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**Smart India Hackthon 2019**

Smart India Hackathon 2019 is a nationwide initiative to provide students a platform to solve some of pressing problems we face in our daily lives, and thus inculcate a culture of product innovation and a mindset of problem solving. In SIH 2019, the students would also have the opportunity to work on challenges faced within the private sector organisations and create world class solutions for some of the top companies in the world, thus helping the Private sector hire the best minds from across the nation.

SIH2019:

- An initiative by Ministry of HRD, AICTE, Persistent Systems, i4c and Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini.
- Involves 1 Lakh+ technical students, 3000+ technical institutions, 200+ organizations from across India.
- World's biggest Software and Hardware hackathon.
- 3rd edition of highly successful Smart India Hackathon initiative.
- Technology Students across India compete to creatively solve problems and offer technical solutions.
- Harness expertise of students from IISc, IITs, NITs and AICTE/UGC approved institutions.

National Common Mobility Card

In order to ensure a seamless travel across metros and other transport systems in addition to retail shopping and purchases, the MoHUA came out with the National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) Program.

Background

- Public Transport is extensively used across India as the economical and convenient mode of commuting for all classes of society.
- Cash continues to be the most preferred mode of fare payments across the public transport.
- However, there are multiple challenges associated with the cash payment e.g. cash handling, revenue leakages, cash reconciliation etc.
- The introduction of closed loop cards issued by these operators helped to digitize the fare collection to a significant extent.

National Common Mobility Card:

- Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs brought to the fore the NCMC to enable seamless travel by different metros and other transport systems across the country besides retail shopping and purchases. India's First Indigenously Developed Payment Eco-system for transport consists of:
 - NCMC Card
 - SWEKKAR (SwachalitKiraya: Automatic Fare Collection System)
 - SWAGAT (Swachalit Gate)
- These are bank issued cards on Debit/Credit/Prepaid card product platform.
- The customer may use this single card for payments across all segments including metro, bus, suburban railways, toll, parking, smart city and retail.
- The stored value on card supports offline transaction across all travel needs with minimal financial risk to involved stakeholders.
- The service area feature of this card supports operator specific applications e.g. monthly passes, season tickets etc.

Agencies Involved

- CDAC was entrusted the task of finalization of NCMC specification for AFC system including the interface with Bank server.
- CDAC worked in collaboration with NPCI to complete this activity. Thereafter, BEL was roped in for making Gates & Reader.
- NCMC Ecosystem offers the value proposition for customers as they need not to carry multiple cards for different usage.

Automatic Fare Collection System

- AFC System (gates, readers/validators, backend infrastructure etc.) is the core of any transit operator to automate the fare collection process.
- The major challenge associated with AFC system implementation in India till now is the lack of indigenous solution provider.
- Till now, AFC systems deployed at various Metros are from foreign players.
- In order to avoid the vendor lock-in and create an interoperable system, there was a need to develop indigenous standards and AFC system under Make in India initiative.

INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE**KumbhMela 2019**

Prayagraj KumbhMela 2019 has been placed in the Guinness World Records in three sectors. It includes:

- Largest traffic and crowd management plan.

- The biggest painting exercise of public sites under paint my city scheme.
- Biggest sanitation and waste disposal mechanism.

About KumbhMela:

- The KumbhMela (the festival of the sacred pitcher) is anchored in Hindu mythology.
- It is the largest public gathering and collective act of faith, anywhere in the world.
- Crowds gather at the sacred confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the mystical Sarasvati. Primarily, this congregation includes Ascetics, Saints, Sadhus, Sadhvis, Kalpvasis, and Pilgrims from all walks of life.
- The Mela was included in the list of “Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity” by UNESCO in 2017.

Celebration: KumbhMela is celebrated four times over a course of 12 years. The geographical location of KumbhMela spans over four locations in India and the Mela site keeps rotating between one of the four pilgrimage places on four sacred rivers as listed below:

- Haridwar on the Ganges in Uttarakhand.
- Ujjain on the Shipra in Madhya Pradesh.
- Nashik on the Godavari in Maharashtra.
- Prayagraj at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati in Uttar Pradesh.

Selection of site: Each site's celebration is based on a distinct set of astrological positions of the Sun, the Moon, and the Jupiter. The celebrations occur at the exact moment when these positions are fully occupied, as it is considered to be the holiest time in Hinduism.

GEOGRAPHY

Atmospheric Waves Experiment (AWE)

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has selected a new mission- Atmospheric Waves Experiment (AWE)- that will help scientists understand and ultimately, forecast the vast space weather system around the Earth.

About Atmospheric Waves Experiment (AWE):

- It will be launched in August 2022 and will be attached to exterior of Earth-orbiting International Space Station (ISS).
- Objective of AWE is to study and focus on airglow, a colourful bands of light in Earth's atmosphere to determine what combination of forces drive space weather in upper atmosphere.
- It will be the first such experiment to obtain global observations of important driver of space weather in dynamic region of Earth's upper atmosphere that can cause interference with radio and GPS communications.
- AWE is a Mission of Opportunity under NASA's Heliophysics Explorers Program, which conducts focused scientific research and develops instrumentation to fill the scientific gaps between the agency's larger missions.

Need for this mission:

- Studying space weather is significant as it can have profound impacts, affecting technology and astronauts in space, disrupting radio communications and at its most severe, overwhelming power grids.
- It was earlier thought that only Sun's constant outflow of ultraviolet (UV) light and particles, solar wind, could affect airglow region. However, now researchers have learned that solar variability is not enough to drive changes observed at this region and Earth's weather also having effect on it.
- Hence to understand this deeper, AWE mission will investigate how waves in lower atmosphere, caused by variations in densities of different packets of air, impact upper atmosphere.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY

Rajasthan's Gujjar quota faces a legal challenge

A PIL has been filed in the High Court of Rajasthan challenging the Rajasthan Backward Classes Amendment Bill, 2019 on grounds of an “untenable basis” of proportionality of population.

Issue:

- Rajasthan government has proposed to give 5% reservation to Gujjars and four other nomadic communities in jobs and education in Rajasthan, citing them as being an “extremely backward class”.
- However, the PIL argues that this law breached the 50% ceiling on reservation. The PIL had also cited the proportion of Gujjars' population as per the last Census instead of referring to the quantifiable data of backwardness in education and public employment.

Rajasthan Backward Classes Amendment Bill, 2019:

- The Rajasthan government has passed the Rajasthan Backward Classes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutes in the State and of Appointments and Posts in Services under the State) Amendment Bill, 2019.

- The bill seeks to provide 5% reservation to Gujjars, Banjaras, GadiaLohars, Raikas and Gadaria. At present, the communities are provided 1% reservation under More Backward Classes (MBC).
- The bill has increased the OBC reservation in Rajasthan from the present 21% to 26%. It has also increased the income limit for defining creamy layer in OBC from Rs. 2.5 lakh to Rs. 8 lakh/annum.
- The Rajasthan government has also passed a resolution requesting the Centre to include the bill in Schedule IX of the Indian Constitution. This is because Rajasthan has breached the 50% cap on reservations set by the Supreme Court.

Background: A law enacted and included in the Ninth Schedule gets protection under Article 31-B (validation of certain Acts and Regulations) and is not subject to judicial review. However, in 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that all laws including those in the Ninth Schedule would be open to judicial review if they violated the basic structure of the constitution.

Concerns:

- Multiple commissions appointed by State governments have recommended the implementation of the 5% quota on the basis of the community's "extreme" or "most" backward nature.
- But the lack of adequate data in the absence of a proper socio-economic caste census to prove this has led to the policy's undoing in judicial orders.
- Also, the repeated agitations reveal the shortfall in adequate, gainful and secure job opportunities in States such as Rajasthan.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

7th RCEP Inter-Sessional Ministerial Meeting is being held in Cambodia.

RCEP:

- RCEP is proposed between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).
- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.
- Aim: RCEP aims to boost goods trade by eliminating most tariff and non-tariff barriers — a move that is expected to provide the region's consumers greater choice of quality products at affordable rates. It also seeks to liberalise investment norms and do away with services trade restrictions.
- When inked, it would become the world's biggest free trade pact. This is because the 16 nations account for a total GDP of about \$50 trillion and house close to 3.5 billion people. India (GDP-PPP worth \$9.5 trillion and population of 1.3 billion) and China (GDP-PPP of \$23.2 trillion and population of 1.4 billion) together comprise the RCEP's biggest component in terms of market size.

India's concerns:

- Greater access to Chinese goods may have impact on the Indian manufacturing sector. India has got massive trade deficit with China. Under these circumstances, India proposed differential market access strategy for China.
- There are demands by other RCEP countries for lowering customs duties on a number of products and greater access to the market than India has been willing to provide.
- If India is out of the RCEP, it would make its exports price uncompetitive with other RCEP members' exports in each RCEP market, and the ensuing export-losses contributing to foreign exchange shortages and the subsequent extent of depreciation of the rupee can only be left to imagination. Some of the sectors that have been identified as potential sources of India's export growth impulses under RCEP to the tune of approximately \$200 billion.
- There are more compelling trade and economic reasons for RCEP to become India-led in future, than otherwise. India would get greater market access in other countries not only in terms of goods, but in services and investments also.

Exercise Sampriti – 2019:

As part of the ongoing India Bangladesh defence cooperation, a joint military exercise Sampriti-2019 will be conducted at Tangail, Bangladesh.

Key facts:

- Exercise Sampriti-2019 is an important bilateral defence cooperation endeavour between India and Bangladesh and this will be the eighth edition of the exercise which is hosted alternately by both countries.
- The exercise is aimed to strengthen and broaden the aspects of interoperability and cooperation between the Indian and Bangladesh Armies.
- The exercise will involve tactical level operations in a counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment under the UN mandate.

WELFARE SCHEMES**Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme**

A National Conference on “Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)” was recently inaugurated at New Delhi. The Conference was organised by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The objective of the conference was to sensitize the stakeholders of the scheme i.e. Programme Implementing Agencies (PIAs), District level officers & State Government officers.

Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS): “Scheme to Promote Voluntary Action for Persons with Disabilities” was revised and renamed as the “Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)”.

The objectives of the scheme are:

- To create an enabling environment to ensure equal opportunities, equity, social justice and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
- To encourage voluntary action for ensuring effective implementation of the People with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities and Protection of Rights) Act of 1995.

Approach and Strategy:

- The approach of this Scheme is to provide financial assistance to voluntary organizations to make available the whole range of services necessary for rehabilitation of persons with disabilities including early intervention, development of daily living skills, education, skill-development oriented towards employability, training and awareness generation.
- With a view to inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream of society and actualizing their potential, the thrust would be on education and training programmes.

ENVIRONMENT**Red sanders is now free of export restrictions**

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), an agency of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has revised its export policy to permit the export of red sanders if it is obtained from cultivated land.

Reasons behind:

- Though a farmer can grow the tree, he/she requires permits to fell and transport the wood, which was difficult to obtain. Moreover, the price of this wood in the domestic market is less than half of what it is in the international market as the demand is low. At the same time, the farmer could not even export it earlier as the foreign trade policy prohibited it.
- Estimates suggest that there are more than 3,000 farmers across India who were unable to sell their produce due to the earlier export policy. Earlier, only seized logs from smugglers were being exported depending on state government rules. This is a great step taken by the DGFT which will benefit red sanders farmers.

About Red sanders:

- Red sanders (*Pterocarpus santalinus*), known for its rich hue and therapeutic properties, is high in demand across Asia, particularly in China and Japan, for use in cosmetics and medicinal products as well as for making furniture, woodcraft and musical instruments.
- Its popularity can be gauged from the fact that a tonne of red sanders costs anything between Rs 50 lakh to Rs 1 crore in the international market.

Why the restrictions?

- The tree is endemic to several districts in Andhra Pradesh and some parts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. But overexploitation prompted the Union government in the 1980s to recommend inclusion of red sanders in Appendix II of CITES, which says “trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilisation incompatible with their survival”.
- The species was listed in Appendix II of CITES in 1995, and subsequently export of red sanders was prohibited in 2004.
- In 2010, when the CITES was planning to suspend trade of red sanders obtained from India, the government submitted a Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) report saying it must be allowed to export from cultivated sources.
- So in 2012, India got an export quota on red sanders from CITES, under which the country could export 310 tonnes of red sanders obtained from “artificially propagated” sources (grown on farms) and 11,806 tonnes of wood from seized sources.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Nothing is worse than missing an opportunity that could have changed your life.