

GOVERNANCE**24th National Conference on e-Governance 2021**

Recently, the 24th National Conference on e-Governance (NCeG) was organised by the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions) and Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), in association with the State Government of Telangana. DARPG is the nodal agency of the Government of India for administrative reforms as well as redressal of public grievances relating to the states in general and those pertaining to Central Government agencies in particular.

Key Points**About:**

- The Conference provides a platform for constructive exchange of ideas on some of the latest technologies for promoting e-Governance.
- At the conference, the 'Hyderabad Declaration' on e-Governance was adopted. The declaration aims to bring citizens and governments closer through digital platforms and transform citizen services through the use of technology.
- The Conference resolved that Government of India and State Governments shall collaborate to:
 1. Transform citizen services through use of technology by leveraging the artifacts of India Stack that include Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, UMANG, e Sign and consent framework.
 2. Fast track the implementation of the national level public digital platforms in key social sectors viz. Health, Education, Agriculture, etc by adopting open interoperable architecture for joined up connected services.
 3. Operationalize the data governance framework to facilitate data sharing within Government entities as also make available all data on data.gov.in except for a negative list.
 4. Foster responsible use of emerging technology such as Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Blockchain, 5G, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, etc for Social Empowerment.
 5. Make India the global hub for emerging technology through creation of a large pool of skilled resources on futuristic technologies.
 6. Ensure resilient Government Infrastructure with robust technological solutions to withstand pandemic like disruptions.
 7. Integration of all State/District portals with Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) for seamless Redressal of Public Grievances.
 8. National E-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) 2021 to be adopted in collaboration with MeITY for improving e-Governance landscape.

Theme: "India's Techade: Digital Governance in a Post Pandemic World"

National e-Governance Awards 2021:

- To recognise the implementation of e-Governance initiatives, the National e-Governance Awards 2021 were presented during the Inaugural Session.
- 26 awards were presented under the 6 categories of the Award Scheme to Central Ministries/Departments, State/UT Governments, Districts, Local Bodies, Public Sector Undertakings and Academic & Research Institutions.
- These Awards are being given since 2003.

E-governance**About:**

- It can be defined as the usage of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) by the government to provide and facilitate government services, exchange of information, communication transactions and integration of various standalone systems and services.
- Through e-governance, government services are made available to citizens and businesses in a convenient, efficient and transparent manner.

Types of Interactions in e-Governance:

- **Government to Government (G2G):** Information is exchanged within the government i.e., either, between the central government, state government and local governments or between different branches of the same government.
- **Government to Citizen (G2C):** The citizens have a platform through which they can interact with the government and get access to the variety of public services offered by the Government.
- **Government to Businesses (G2B):** The businesses are able to interact with the government seamlessly with respect to the services of the government offered to businesses.

- **Government to Employees (G2E):** The interaction between the government and its employees occurs in an efficient and speedy manner.

Objectives:

- To support and simplify governance for government, citizens, and businesses.
- To make government administration more transparent and accountable while addressing the society's needs and expectations through efficient public services and effective interaction between the people, businesses, and government.
- To reduce corruption in the government.
- To ensure speedy administration of services and information.
- To reduce difficulties for business, provide immediate information and enable digital communication by e-business.

Challenges:

- **Lack of computer literacy:** India is still a developing country and a vast majority of the citizens lack computer literacy which hinders the effectiveness of e-governance.
- **Lack of accessibility:** Lack of accessibility to the internet or even computers in some parts of the country is a disadvantage to e-governance.
- **Loss of Human interaction:** Governance results in a loss of human interaction. As the system becomes more mechanised, lesser interaction takes place among people.
- **Risk of Data Theft:** It gives rise to the risk of personal data theft and leakage.
- **Lax Administration:** Governance leads to a lax administration. The service provider can easily provide excuses for not providing the service on technical grounds such as "server is down" or "internet is not working", etc.

e-Governance in the Indian context:

- There are a large number of e-Governance initiatives, both at the Union and State levels.
- In 2006, the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) was formulated by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology and Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances that aims at making all government services accessible to the common man, ensure efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man.
- **NeGP has enabled many e-governance initiatives:** Digital India, Aadhaar, myGov.in, (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) App, Digital Locker, PayGov, Computerisation of Land Records. myGov.in is a national citizen engagement platform where people can share ideas and be involved with matters of policy and governance. PayGov facilitates online payments to all public and private banks.

Way Forward

- A hybrid approach needs to be adopted for enhancing interoperability among e-governance applications which will encompass a centralized approach for document management, knowledge management, file management, grievance management etc.
- The e-governance initiatives in rural areas should be taken by identifying and analyzing the grassroots realities.
- The government should also focus on devising appropriate, feasible, distinct and effective capacity building mechanisms for various stakeholders viz bureaucrats, rural masses, urban masses, elected representatives, etc.
- e-Governance through regional languages is appreciable for nations like India where people from several linguistic backgrounds are the participants.

ECONOMY
National Startup Awards 2021

Recently, the Union Minister of Commerce & Industry presented the second edition of National Startup Awards 2021. It was also announced that 16th January (Startup India Initiative was launched on this day in 2016) will be celebrated as National Start-up Day, to take the Startup culture to the far flung areas of the country.

The 'Blockchain-enabled verification for Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) tax incentive certificates', 'Digilocker enabled DPIIT Startup recognition certificate' were also launched.

Startup India Initiative

- It envisages building a robust Startup ecosystem in the country for nurturing innovation and providing opportunities to budding entrepreneurs. It was launched in 2016.
- The action plan of this initiative focuses on following three areas:
 1. Simplification and Handholding.

2. Funding Support and Incentives.
3. Industry-Academia Partnership and Incubation.

Key Points

Designed by:

- Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

Aim:

- To recognize and reward outstanding Startups and ecosystem enablers that are building innovative products or solutions and scalable enterprises, with high potential of employment generation or wealth creation, demonstrating measurable social impact.

2021 Awards:

- The second edition of the awards invited applications across 15 sectors and 49 sub-sectors.
- The 2021 edition of the awards also recognized exceptional Startups innovating solutions to promote Indic languages and to compliment national efforts to combat Covid-19 pandemic. All applicants were evaluated against six broad parameters namely Innovation, Scalability, Economic Impact, Social Impact, Environmental Impact, and Inclusiveness and Diversity.

Prize:

- The winning startup founders will get a cash prize of Rs. 5 lakh and an opportunity to present their solutions to relevant public authorities and corporates. Incubators and accelerators will get Rs. 15 lakh as the winning amount. 46 startups along with 1 incubator and 1 accelerator were honoured with the award.

Status of Start-ups in India

About:

- Today, India is the third largest start-up ecosystem globally (by number of start-ups) with more than 15,000 start-ups established in 2020, up from 5000 in 2010.
- The underlying enablers of this startup ecosystem include smartphone and internet penetration, cloud computing, application programming interfaces (APIs), and a national payments stack in place.
- Additionally, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, India has witnessed more number of Unicorn startups (startups having valuation of over USD1 billion) in just 2021 than it did in the period 2011-20.
- However, still there are many challenges (Building and Scaling an Indian Startup, Diversity and the Digital Divide, Complex Regulatory Environment) that act as a hindrance in realising the true potential of startups in India.

Other Related Initiatives:

- **Ranking of States on Support to Startup Ecosystems:** It is an evolved evaluation tool aimed to strengthen the support of States and UTs to holistically build their startup ecosystems.
- **SCO Startup Forum:** The first-ever Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Startup Forum was launched in October 2020 to develop and improve startup ecosystems collectively.
- **Prarambh:** The 'Prarambh' Summit aims to provide a platform to the startups and young minds from around the world to come up with new ideas, innovation and invention.
- **Startup India Seed Fund Scheme:** It aims to provide financial assistance to startups for proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry, and commercialization.
- **Fisheries Startup Grand Challenge:** The Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying In association with Startup India, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry inaugurated the Fisheries Startup Grand Challenge.

GEOGRAPHY

Rare Earth Metals

Recently, the US has proposed a law aiming to end China's alleged "chokehold" on rare-earth metal supplies. The Bill aims to "protect the US from the threat of rare-earth element supply disruptions, encourage domestic production of those elements, and reduce its reliance on China.

- The law would require the creation of a "strategic reserve" of rare earth minerals by 2025.
- That reserve would be tasked with responding to the needs of the army, the tech sector and other essential infrastructure "for one year in the event of a supply disruption".

Key Points

About:

- They are a set of seventeen metallic elements. These include the fifteen lanthanides on the periodic table in addition to scandium and yttrium that show similar physical and chemical properties to the lanthanides.

- The 17 Rare Earths are cerium (Ce), dysprosium (Dy), erbium (Er), europium (Eu), gadolinium (Gd), holmium (Ho), lanthanum (La), lutetium (Lu), neodymium (Nd), praseodymium (Pr), promethium (Pm), samarium (Sm), scandium (Sc), terbium (Tb), thulium (Tm), ytterbium (Yb), and yttrium (Y).
- These minerals have unique magnetic, luminescent, and electrochemical properties and thus are used in many modern technologies, including consumer electronics, computers and networks, communications, health care, national defense, etc.
- Even futuristic technologies need these REEs (For example high-temperature superconductivity, safe storage and transport of hydrogen for a post-hydrocarbon economy, environmental global warming and energy efficiency issues).
- They are called 'rare earth' because earlier it was difficult to extract them from their oxides forms technologically.
- They occur in many minerals but typically in low concentrations to be refined in an economical manner.

India's Current Policy on Rare Earths:

- Exploration in India has been conducted by the Bureau of Mines and the Department of Atomic Energy. Mining and processing has been performed by some minor private players in the past, but is today concentrated in the hands of IREL (India) Limited (formerly Indian Rare Earths Limited), a Public Sector Undertaking under the Department of Atomic Energy.
- India has granted government corporations such as IREL a monopoly over the primary mineral that contains REEs: monazite beach sand, found in many coastal states.
- IREL produces rare earth oxides (low-cost, low-reward “upstream processes”), selling these to foreign firms that extract the metals and manufacture end products (high-cost, high-reward “downstream processes”) elsewhere.
- IREL’s focus is to provide thorium — extracted from monazite — to the Department of Atomic Energy.

China's Monopoly:

- China has over time acquired global domination of rare earths, even at one point, it produced 90% of the rare earths the world needs.
- Today, however, it has come down to 60% and the remaining is produced by other countries, including the Quad (Australia, India, Japan and United States).
- Since 2010, when China curbed shipments of Rare Earths to Japan, the US, and Europe, production units have come up in Australia, and the US along with smaller units in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
- Even so, the dominant share of processed Rare Earths lies with China.

Heavy dependence on China (India and the World):

- India has the world’s fifth-largest reserves of rare earth elements, nearly twice as much as Australia, but it imports most of its rare earth needs in finished form from China.
- In 2019, the US imported 80% of its rare earth minerals from China while the European Union gets 98% of its supply from China.

Way Forward

- India needs to create a new Department for Rare Earths (DRE), which would play the role of a regulator and enabler for businesses in this space.
 1. Currently, mining and processing has been largely concentrated in the hands of IREL (India) Limited, a PSU under the department of atomic energy.
 2. Its progress and capacity to produce rare earths, while growing slowly, is nowhere close to international REE conglomerates.
- Indian companies can be encouraged to form such junior exploration businesses in the Indian Ocean Region to prospect for REEs and feed value added products into the Indian market. Most governments in this region have mining and exploration friendly policies and welcome investment. India has strong historical, cultural, business and Diaspora links in this region that has developed over centuries of trade and migration.
- India can also coordinate with other agencies to partner directly with groupings such as the Quad, building up a strategic reserve as a buffer against global supply crises.

PRELIMS FACT

India- Russia PASSEX Exercise

Recently, India’s INS Kochi and Russian ships engaged in the international Passage Exercise (PASSEX). A passage exercise is normally undertaken whenever an opportunity arises, in contrast to pre-planned maritime drills.

Earlier, Indian Naval ships conducted PASSEX with the US Navy also.

Key Points

Russia's Importance for India:

- **In Indian Ocean Region:** Russia's inclusion as a dialogue partner of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has opened up a plethora of opportunities for collaboration with India including a possible maritime security architecture to create balance in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and on scientific and research endeavors.
- **In the Arctic Region:** India has scientific, environmental, commercial and strategic interests in the Arctic region, and the Russian Arctic can potentially address India's energy security objectives.
- **Hydrocarbons:** Russia has the largest proven natural gas reserves in the world, enough to last for about 80 years at current production rates.
- **Strategic Minerals:** The Russian Arctic also has vast deposits of cobalt, copper, diamonds, gold, iron, nickel, platinum, high-value rare earth elements, titanium, vanadium and zirconium.
 1. The Arctic accounts for 90% of Russia's nickel and cobalt production, 60% of copper, and over 96% of platinum metals.
 2. Indian rare earth reserves are richer in lighter fractions and deficient in heavier ones.
 3. Most of the rare earth products used in strategic industries viz. Defence, fibre optic communications, space and nuclear energy are also critical to various clean energy technologies, including wind turbines and electric vehicles.
 4. The Russian Arctic, therefore, has the potential to mitigate India's critical deficiencies in rare earth and strategic minerals.
- **Northern Sea Route:** For Indian ports, the Northern Sea Route or NSR does not offer any benefits and is longer than the current route, for Rotterdam.
 1. However, there are other avenues for cooperation on the NSR.
 2. Russia has announced its intention, inter alia, to ensure year-round, safe, uninterrupted and cost-effective navigation in the waters of the NSR.
 3. India has indicated its willingness to partner with Russia, stating that "India and Russia will also be partners in opening of the NSR for international trade and commerce". In response, President Putin has stated that Russia welcomes India's interests in the NSR.
- **Russian Far East:** The Russian Far East or RFE is rich in natural resources.
 1. About one-third of all coal reserves and hydro-engineering resources of the country are available here. Forests of the region comprise about 30% of Russia's total forest area.
 2. India's cooperation in the development of RFE including NSR has been endorsed by the two countries.
 3. Addressing the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) in 2019, India announced a USD 1 billion line of credit to further contribute to the development of RFE.

Other Exercises of India and Russia:

1. Exercise TSENTR 2019 (Multilateral Military Exercise).
2. Indra Exercises - Joint Tri-Services (Army, Navy, Air Force) Exercises.
3. ZAPAD 2021 (Multilateral Military Exercise).

INS Kochi

- It is an indigenously designed second ship of the Kolkata-class stealth guided-missile destroyers, was built under the code name of Project 15A for the Indian Navy.
- It was constructed by Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) in Mumbai and was later commissioned to the Indian Navy services in 2015, after undergoing extensive sea trials.
- Earlier, it took part in many other naval services including:
 1. 'Zayed Talwar: It is a bilateral naval exercise between the Indian and UAE Navy.
 2. 'Al-Mohed Al-Hindi': India and Saudi Arabia started their first-ever Naval joint exercise.
 3. India- US PASSEX

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. What are Digital Public Goods? Discuss their potential in achieving developmental ambitions of India. (250 words)

Ans:

Introduction

Digital Public Goods (DPG) are non-excludable and non-rivalrous. The UN defines DPGs as "Open-source software, open data, open AI models, open standards and open content that adhere to privacy and other applicable international and domestic laws, standards and best practices, and do no harm, and help attain the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals]." DPGs are aimed at achieving the SDGs.

Body

Digital Public goods and India's progress

- India is pioneering the concept of digital public goods that enhance the ease, transparency and speed with which individuals, markets and governments interact with each other.
- Built on the foundation of Aadhaar and India Stack, modular applications, big and small, are transforming the way we make payments (UPI revolution), withdraw our PF, get our passport and driving licence and check land records, to name just a few activities.
- Children have access to QR-coded textbooks across state boards and languages, the economically disadvantaged have access to the public distribution system and beneficiaries of government schemes have money transferred directly into their bank accounts.
- There is an opportunity for India to embark on digital diplomacy — to take its made-in-India digital public goods to hundreds of emerging economies across the world.
- This could be a strategic and effective counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative(BRI). But India needs to bring transformation in its technological, startup and innovation ecosystem.

Benefits and significance

- **Cost-Benefit ratio is high:** The cost of setting up an open source-based high school online educational infrastructure, to supplement the physical infrastructure, for an entire country is less than laying two kilometres of high-quality road.
- **Less resources major reward:** The investments required for transporting digital public goods are minuscule in comparison and there is no chance of a debt trap. Also, the code(platform) is highly reusable.
- **Instant Visible Outcomes:** Unlike physical infrastructure such as ports and roads, digital public goods have short gestation periods and immediate, and visible impact and benefits.
 1. Processes get streamlined and wait times for any service come down dramatically.
 2. Issuances of passports, PAN cards and driving licences are such examples.
- **Plugs the Leakage:** It eliminates ghost beneficiaries of government services, removes touts collecting rent, creates an audit trail, makes the individual-government-market interface transparent and provides efficiencies that help recoup the investments quickly.
- Productivity goes up and services can be scaled quickly. Benefits can be rapidly extended to cover a much larger portion of the population.
- The digital public goods infrastructure compounds while physical infrastructure depreciates. Compounding happens for two reasons.
 1. One is the growth of technology itself. Chips keep becoming faster, engines more powerful, and technology keeps improving.
 2. The second reason is the network effect. As more and more people use the same technology, the number of "transactions" using that technology increases exponentially — be it Facebook posts or UPI transactions.

Impediments to realise full potential of Digital Public goods

- **Privacy Issues:** Potential violations of privacy and possible weaponization of data is a primary issue related to such digital initiatives.
- **Digital Divide:** Success in the digital provision of services is dependent on many underlying factors, including digital literacy, education and access to stable and fast telecommunication services. In this setting, undertaking large-scale digitisation of services without bridging these digital divides could result in increasing existing inequalities.
- **Security Issues:** There is a cybersecurity challenge in ensuring end-to-end protection of data throughout the whole ecosystem.
 1. While channels and databases used by the Government for transmission and storage are usually secure, other players in the ecosystem may not possess the requisite expertise or security to prevent and respond to breaches.
 2. The alleged breach of the Aadhar database is a case in point.
- **Unservd Remote Areas:** With digital services not being uniformly distributed, communities in remote areas often require on-ground staff to deploy and supplement digital tools.

Conclusion

India's digital diplomacy can be beneficial to and welcomed by, all emerging economies from Peru to Polynesia, from Uruguay to Uganda, and from Kenya to Kazakhstan. It can take made-in-India digital public goods across the world and boost India's brand positioning as a leading technology player in the digital age. It will also enable quick, visible and compounding benefits for India's partner countries and earn India immense goodwill. And it will help create a strong foothold for India globally to counter the extravagantly expensive, brick-and-mortar led Belt and Road Initiative of China.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA):

1. The act was enacted on the basis of the report of the Bhuria Committee submitted in 1995.
2. Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Andaman and Nicobar have Schedule V Areas.
3. The Ministry of Panchayat Raj is the nodal Ministry for implementation of the provisions of PESA in the States.

Which of the above statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only**
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Kendu leaf is called the green gold of Odisha.
2. Kendu leaves are commonly used for making bidis.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2**
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q3. Consider the following statements :

1. Ken and Betwa rivers originate in Uttara Pradesh.
2. Ken and Betwa are the tributaries of Yamuna.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only**
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q4. Consider the following statements about Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI):

1. It is a statutory body established under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.
2. It is responsible for protecting and promoting public health through the regulation and supervision of food safety.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only**
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Q5. The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee is constituted under the

- a. Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006
- b. Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999
- c. Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**
- d. Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972