



Daily Current Affairs

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4th Australia-India Education Council Meeting (AIEC)

Why in news?

In the 4th AIEC meeting held on 29th June 2018 at Adelaide, Australia 7 agreements/MoUs were signed between Indian and Australian Institutions.

Highlights:

In the 4th AIEC meeting held on 29th June 2018 at Adelaide, Australia, both the sides reviewed the progress on the four key thematic areas -

- (i) Higher Education, Research and Student Mobility
- (ii) Quality Assurance and Qualifications Recognition
- (iii) Skills, and
- (iv) Schools.

A joint Communique was adopted by both the sides emphasizing the need for enhanced bilateral cooperation in -

- i. Academic research collaboration between institutions on both sides.
- ii. Online education, including by means of sharing of massive open online courses on each other's platforms.
- iii. Skill development and vocational training.
- iv. Greater mobility of faculty and students through Government of India schemes like Global Initiative of Academic Network (GIAN).

v. School education, especially in the curriculum revision and development of pedagogies.

- There is growing collaboration between Australian and Indian Institutions on joint research projects and PhD programmes in areas of mutual interest.
- At the 4th Australia-India Education Council Meeting, it was agreed to further strengthen the partnership of Australia and India in the area of research collaboration to allow greater mobility of researchers, academics and scholars to support our mutual interest in high quality research outputs.
- Under the newly initiated Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) programme of this Ministry.
- 157 Joint research proposals between reputed Indian Institutions and Australian Institutions have been received and in the process of approval.

About Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) programme:

- Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) aims at improving the research ecosystem of India's higher educational institutions by facilitating academic and research collaborations between Indian institutions and the best institutions in the world from 28 selected nations to jointly solve problems of national and international relevance in the first phase.
- The major outcome of the SPARC initiative will be strong research collaboration between Indian research groups with best-in class faculty and renowned research group in the leading universities of the world, in areas that are at the cutting edge of science or with direct social relevance to the mankind, specifically of India.
- Long term stay of international faculty will lead to tangible result such as large number of high impact research publications, solution to key national and international problems, development of niche courses, high quality text books and research monographs, imbibing of best practices from top international academicians and researchers, strong bilateral cooperation, and improved world reputation and ranking of Indian Institutes.

Objective:

- SPARC proposes to enable productive academic cooperation by supporting the following critical components that can catalyze impact making research.
 - Visits and long-term stay of top international faculty / researchers in Indian institutions to pursue teaching and research.
 - Visits by Indian students for training and experimentation in premier laboratories worldwide.
 - Visit by Indian faculty to foreign institute Joint research project between India and foreign institute Joint development of niche courses, world-class books and monographs, translatable patents, demonstrable technologies or action oriented research outcomes and products
 - Consolidation of bilateral cooperation through academic and research partnerships through Indo-X workshops in India
 - Publication, Dissemination and Visibility through a high profile annual international conference in India
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Open Acreage Licensing Programme Bid Round-II launched

Why in news?

Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas & Skill Development and Entrepreneurship here today launched NIO and MRSC for Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP) Bid Round-II.

Highlights:

- In this bid round, 14 E&P blocks, with an area of approximately 30,000 sq. km., are being offered for bidding to the investor community under the investor friendly HELP regime.
- 10 blocks are based on Expressions of Interest submitted by the bidders, and 4 blocks have been carved out by the Government based on data received through the National Seismic Programme and the Resource Reassessment Study carried out by the Government.

About Open Acreage License Policy (OALP):

- Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) gives an option to a company looking for exploring hydrocarbons to select the exploration blocks on its own, without waiting for the formal bid round from the Government.
- Under Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), a bidder intending to explore hydrocarbons like oil and gas, coal bed methane, gas hydrate etc., may apply to the Government seeking exploration of any new block (not already covered by exploration).
- The Government will examine the Expression of Interest and justification. If it is suitable for award, Govt. will call for competitive bids after obtaining necessary environmental and other clearances.
- OALP was introduced vide a Cabinet decision of the Government in 2016, as part of the new fiscal regime in exploration sector called HELP or Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy, so as to enable a faster survey and coverage of the available geographical area which has potential for oil and gas discovery.

About Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP)

Four main facets of this policy are:

- uniform license for exploration and production of all forms of hydrocarbon.
 - an open acreage policy.
 - easy to administer revenue sharing model and
 - marketing and pricing freedom for the crude oil and natural gas produced.
1. The decision will enhance domestic oil & gas production, bring substantial investment in the sector and generate sizable employment. The policy is also aimed at enhancing transparency and reducing administrative discretion.
 2. The uniform licence will enable the contractor to explore conventional as well as unconventional oil and gas resources including CBM, shale gas/oil, tight gas and gas hydrates under a single license.
 3. The concept of Open Acreage Policy will enable E&P companies choose the blocks from the designated area.
 4. Present fiscal system of production sharing based on Investment Multiple and cost recovery /production linked payment will be

- replaced by a easy to administer revenue sharing model.
5. The earlier contracts were based on the concept of profit sharing where profits are shared between Government and the contractor after recovery of cost.
 6. Under the profit sharing methodology, it became necessary for the Government to scrutinize cost details of private participants and this led to many delays and disputes.
 7. Under the new regime, the Government will not be concerned with the cost incurred and will receive a share of the gross revenue from the sale of oil, gas etc. This is in tune with Government's policy of "Ease of Doing Business".
 8. Recognising the higher risks and costs involved in exploration and production from offshore areas, lower royalty rates for such areas have been provided as compared to NELP royalty rates to encourage exploration and production.
 9. A graded system of royalty rates have been introduced, in which royalty rates decreases from shallow water to deepwater and ultra-deep water.
 10. At the same time, royalty rate for onland areas have been kept intact so that revenues to the state governments are not affected. On the lines of NELP, cess and import duty will not be applicable on blocks awarded under the new policy.
 11. This policy also provides for marketing freedom for crude oil and natural gas produced from these blocks.
 12. This is in tune with Government's policy of "Minimum Government -Maximum Governance".
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Integrated Road Accident Database Project

Why in news?

Minister of State in the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways gave this information about Integrated Road Accident Database Project in Parliament.

About Integrated Road Accident Database Project:

- The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways is in the process of implementing 'Integrated Road Accident Database Project (IRAD)' which will be applicable across the country.
 - This project is proposed on IT based system for capturing the spot accident data using mobile app and tablets configured for this purpose.
 - This data can then be utilized for various purposes like finding the causes of the accidents and remedial measures to improve the road infrastructure, to record the accidents data for the use of police, health services and other concerned departments.
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Steps to promote Electric Vehicles

Why in news?

Recently Minister of Road Transport & Highways provided information about promotion Electric Vehicles.

Highlights:

- In order to promote electric vehicles, the Government has notified for retro-fitment of hybrid electric system or electric kit to vehicles and has specified the type approval procedure of electric hybrid vehicles.
- The Government has notified that the registration mark for Battery Operated Vehicles is to be on a plate with green background.
- Further, for the promotion of electric mobility in the country, the Government had launched Phase-I of the FAME India Scheme was successfully launched.
- This was initially for a period of 2 years and has subsequently been extended till 31st March 2019. All electric & hybrid vehicles, including public transport, registered under the scheme are being incentivized under the Demand Creation focus area of this scheme.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has commercialized indigenously developed lithium ion battery technology and has selected 14 companies for transfer of technology.
- The NITI Aayog has taken an initiative to provide a Model

Concessionaire Agreement (MCA) document for introducing Electric-Bus Fleet in Cities for Public Transportation on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode on Operational Expenditure (per km basis) Model rather than paying upfront capital cost.



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