Daily Current Affairs

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RDP INDIA 2019

Why in news?

Recently Ministry of Defence had launched a mobile app 'RDP India 2019' on the Republic Day.

About RDP INDIA 2019:

- RDP India 2019' mobile app's intent to make available the highlights of the Republic Day event, not only to the spectators at Rajpath, but also to the general public all over the world.
- This app contains information about the Parade on Rajpath, New Delhi, including Order of the March, details of the tableaux presented by different States and Ministries, children cultural performances, fly past and names of recipients of Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar 2019.
- It was extremely informative to the spectators witnessing the Parade and was widely appreciated. The app also hadthe provision for live streaming of the Parade.
- People who desire to know the theme and ideas depicted in the tableaux and also those who for some reason could not witness the Parade on Rajpath or watch it on TV, can still download the app and gather all information about the event.

Vande Bharat Express

Why in news?

Recently Minister of Railways & Coal announced the name Vande Bharat Express for Train 18, acknowledging its made-in-India status.

Highlights:

- Vande Bharat Express is an Indian semi-high speed intercity electric multiple unit. It was designed and built by Integral Coach Factory (ICF) Chennai under the Indian government's Make in India initiative over a span of 18 months.
- The unit cost of the first rake was given as Rs.100 crore though the unit cost is expected to go down with subsequent production.
- At the original price, it is estimated to be 40% less costly than a similar train imported from Europe.
- Since the launch of Rajdhani trains, Vande Bharat Express is the next major leap for Indian Railways in terms of speed and convenience. It is India's first semi-high speed train equipped with world class passenger amenities.
- It can achieve high speeds (max speed of 160 kmph) due to faster acceleration & deceleration and will reduced journey time by 25% to 45%. Scheduled commute between New Delhi & Varanasi will take approximately 8 hours making it 40-50% faster than the fastest train currently connecting these two cities.
- Vande Bharat Express incorporates many modern features which debut for the very first time on Indian Railways.
- It has been provided with 'State of the Art' passenger amenities like On-board wifi entertainment, GPS based passenger information system, CCTVs, bio-vacuum toilets, rotating chairs in executive class, etc. at par with global standards.
- It also has provision of Divyang-friendly facilities. It will have 16 coaches with Chair Car type configuration with 2 Executive Class Chair Cars and 14 Chair Cars.
- Further, it has intelligent braking system with power regeneration for better energy efficiency thereby making it cost, energy and environment efficient.

National Testing Agency

Why in news?

The National Testing Agency (NTA) is conducting the Common Management Admission Test(CMAT) on-28th January, 2019 for 64,582 registered candidates at 183 centres in 84 cities of 24 States/UTs.

ABOUT NTA:

- National Testing Agency (NTA) has been established as a premier, specialist, autonomous and self-sustained testing organization to conduct entrance examinations for admission/fellowship in higher educational institutions.
- To assess competence of candidates for admissions and recruitment has always been a challenge in terms of matching with research based international standards, efficiency, transparency and error free delivery.
- The National Testing Agency is entrusted to address all such issues using best in every field, from test preparation, to test delivery and to test marking.

OBJECTIVES

- To conduct efficient, transparent and international standards tests in order to assess the competency of candidates for admission, and recruitment purposes.
- To undertake research on educational, professional and testing systems to identify gaps in the knowledge systems and take steps for bridging them.
- To identify experts and institutions in setting examination questions.
- To produce and disseminate information and research on education and professional development standards.

FUNCTIONS

- To identify partner institutions with adequate infrastructure from the existing schools and higher education institutions which would facilitate conduct of online examinations without adversely impacting their academic routine.
- To create a question bank for all subjects using the modern techniques
- To establish a strong R&D culture as well as a pool of experts in different aspects of testing
- To help individual colleges and universities in the field of testing and to provide training and advisory services to the institutions in India. To provide quality testing services to the academic institutions in India.
- To develop a state of the art culture of testing in India by using domestic and international expertise.
- To collaborate with international organizations like ETS to achieve the same.
- To undertake any other examination that is entrusted to it by the Ministries/Departments of Government of India/State Governments.
- To undertake the reforms and training of school boards as well as other bodies where the testing standards should be comparable with the entrance examinations.

NITI Aayog 2.0

Why in news?

Former Finance Commission Chairman Vijay Kelkar has proposed setting up a new 'Niti Aayog' to overcome the challenges faced by the present Niti Aayog.

Highlights:

- Barely less than five years after the government replaced Planning Commission with Niti Aayog, a former senior bureaucrat has called for a revamp of the new body into a new avatar, calling it Niti Aayog 2.0.
- The erstwhile PC was abolished in the spirit of cooperative federalism and a new think tank 'Niti Aayog' was created to facilitate grass root planning and help the government in policy making.
- By its very design, NITI Aayog has differed with its predecessor — the Planning Commission. The former does not have powers to allocate funds, but could only make recommendations to the government.
- Funding is the sole purview of the finance ministry, unlike with the Planning Commission, which could also allocate funds.
- Secondly, it couldn't impose policies for state governments to follow, again something where the Planning Commission had a strong say.
- In his paper, titled 'Towards India's New Fiscal Federalism', Kelkar said that it is desirable that a functionally distinct entity such as the new Niti Aayog 2.0 be created to deal with the structural issues including removal of regional imbalances in the economy.
- It will have the powers for allocating development or transformational capital or revenue grants to the states.
- However, the new Niti Aayog will not approve the annual expenditure programmes of individual states, unlike the Planning Commission.
- The Niti Aayog 2.0 shall be a permanent invitee of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), just like the Planning Commission. This is to enable it to contribute to the highest level of policy making with knowledge-based advice and the national and long term perspective on the policy proposals.
- It should rather strive to be a think-tank with 'praxis' possessing considerable financial muscle and devote its energies to outline coherent medium and long term strategy and corresponding investment resources for transforming India.
- The new Niti Aayog will need around 1.5 to 2 per cent of the GDP every year in resources to provide suitable grants to the states for mitigating the development imbalances.

About NITI Aayog:

- The NITI Aayog also National Institution for Transforming India, is a

policy think tank of the Government of India, established with the aim to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and to enhance cooperative federalism by fostering the involvement of State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach.

- Its initiatives include "15 year road map", "7-year vision, strategy and action plan", AMRUT, Digital India, Atal Innovation Mission, Medical Education Reform, agriculture reforms (Model Land Leasing Law, Reforms of the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Act, Agricultural Marketing and Farmer Friendly Reforms Index for ranking states), Indices Measuring States' Performance in Health, Education and Water Management, Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Rationalization of Centrally Sponsored Schemes, Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Sub-Group of Chief Ministers on Skill Development, Task Forces on Agriculture and op of Poverty, and Transforming India Lecture Series.
- It was established in 2015, by the Government of India, to replace the Planning Commission which followed a top-down model.
- The Prime Minister is the Ex-officio chairman. The permanent members of the governing council are all the state Chief Ministers, along with the Chief Ministers of Delhi and Puducherry, the Lieutenant Governor of Andaman and Nicobar, and a vice chairman nominated by the Prime Minister.
- In addition, temporary members are selected from leading universities and research institutions. These members include a chief executive officer, four ex-official members and two part-time members.

Functions:

- To evolve a shared vision of national development priorities sectors and strategies with the active involvement of States in the light of national objectives.
- To foster cooperative federalism through structured support initiatives and mechanisms with the States on a continuous basis, recognizing that strong States make a strong nation.
- To develop mechanisms to formulate credible plans at the village level and aggregate these progressively at higher levels of government.

- To ensure, on areas that are specifically referred to it, that the interests of national security are incorporated in economic strategy and policy.
- To pay special attention to the sections of our society that may be at risk of not benefiting adequately from economic progress.
- To design strategic and long term policy and programme frameworks and initiatives, and monitor their progress and their efficacy. The lessons learnt through monitoring and feedback will be used for making innovative improvements, including necessary mid-course corrections.
- To provide advice and encourage partnerships between key stakeholders and national and international like-minded Think tanks, as well as educational and policy research institutions.
- To create a knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurial support system through a collaborative community of national and international experts, practitioners and other partners.
- To offer a platform for resolution of inter-sectoral and inter departmental issues in order to accelerate the implementation of the development agenda.
- To maintain a state-of-the-art Resource Centre, be a repository of research on good governance and best practices in sustainable and equitable development as well as help their dissemination to stake-holders.
- To actively monitor and evaluate the implementation of programmes and initiatives, including the identification of the needed resources so as to strengthen the probability of success and scope of delivery.
- To focus on technology upgradation and capacity building for implementation of programmes and initiatives.

Global Pact for the Environment

Why in news?

The First Substantive Session on a Global Pact for the Environment took place at UN Headquarters in Nairobi in January 2019.

Highlights:

- Currently, there are around 1,500 environmental frameworks, treaties, agreements and bodies, resulting in what many Member States consider to be a fragmented environmental law landscape.
- This in turn can make cooperation and communication between the various bodies of environmental law difficult and often inefficient.
- The proposed global pact aims to create coherence, clarity and consensus in international environmental law by creating a legally binding instrument for all countries, outlining rules and principles on international environmental law. This would be the first international instrument that covers all environmental areas.

Discussions and country reflections included:

- Consideration of new and emergent principles (such as intergenerational equity, environmental democracy and earth system approaches), including some already incorporated in regional environmental instruments, and consideration of principles in need of updating or qualification
- The merits of an overarching normative framework for international environmental law, and the respective merits of specialization in multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs)
- Links between implementation of international environmental law and means of implementation
- Links between the mandate of the ad-hoc working group, Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals
- Whether the case has begun to be made for bringing all international environmental law principles into a new international instrument (the global pact)