Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched the web portal of the Scheme **"Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)".**

- **Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur** is the **National Coordinating Institute** to implement the SPARC programme.

The Objective of Scheme

- 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.
- Under this Scheme, 600 joint research proposals will be awarded for 2 years to facilitate research collaboration between Indian research groups with the best in class faculty and renowned research groups 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 India.

Thrust Areas

- A set of **5 Thrust Areas** which are **Fundamental Research, Emergent Areas of Impact, Convergence, Action-Oriented Research, and Innovation-Driven** and sub-theme areas in each thrust area has been identified.
- A set of **Nodal Institutions (NI)**, from India, for each participating foreign country has been identified.
- The role of an NI is to help and coordinate with willing Participating Indian Institutions to forge an alliance with the Institutions of the concerned participating foreign country.
- **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)**
  - The IPR developed out of the project will be decided as per norms of the participating Institutes. The Indian Institute will get the benefits out of Patents / Royalty, rather than the foreign institute or the individual faculty.
  - All disputes will have Indian jurisdiction. Any special deviation will be resolved by MHRD through the SPARC Liaison cell and approved by the Apex Committee.

Expected Outcomes of SPARC

- Providing the **best international expertise in solving major national problems.**
- Help Indian academicians and researchers **unravel deep and open research problems with the help of the best collaborators abroad.**
- **Enable long-term stay for international faculty,** this simultaneously helps in academic interactions, research collaborations, niche course development.
- Enable a large number of **Indian students to be trained in high-end experimental facilities** available in the **best laboratories in the world.**
- Produce a large volume of educational and research content in terms of **high-quality journal publications, textbooks, research monographs, patents, demonstrable technologies, products** that are jointly authored by Indian and Foreign collaborators.
- Develop strong Bilateral relationships in academics and research with top countries in the world.

- **Improve International Rankings of Indian Institutions through a combination of internationalization, research outcomes and academic interactions.**
- Create a major International Impact for **Catapulting Indian Academics and Research** and help make it **competitive with the best worldwide.**

Impactful Policy Research in Social Science (IMPRESS)

The Ministry for Human Resource Development has launched the web portal of the Scheme "Impactful Policy Research in Social Sciences (IMPRESS)".

- Under the Scheme, 1500 research projects will be awarded for 2 years to support the social science research in the higher educational institutions and to enable research to guide policy making.
- IMPRESS scheme will be used to understand and solve problems facing the society.The scheme will be implemented at a total cost of Rs 414 crore till March, 2021.
- Indian Council of Social Science and Research (ICSSR) will be the project implementing agency.

Objectives of the Scheme

- To identify and fund research proposals in social sciences with maximum impact on the governance and society.
- To focus research on broad thematic areas such as :
  - State and Democracy
  - Urban transformation
  - Media, Culture and Society
  - Employment, Skills and Rural transformation
  - Governance, Innovation and Public Policy
  - Growth, Macro-trade and Economic Policy
  - Agriculture and Rural Development
  - Health and Environment
  - Science and Education
  - Social Media and Technology
  - Politics, Law and Economics.
- To ensure selection of projects through a transparent, competitive process on online mode.
- To provide opportunity for social science researchers in any institution in the country, including all Universities (Central and State), private institutions.
- ICSSR funded/recognised research institutes will also be eligible to submit research proposals on the given themes and sub-themes.

Govt. Notifies Rules on Citizenship

The Home Ministry has notified that the Collectors of certain districts in seven States can accept online applications to grant citizenship to persecuted minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh living in India.

- Citizenship will be granted after the verification reports are received from the States and the Centre.
- The Home Ministry gave powers to the Collectors in Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh,

Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi to grant citizenship and naturalisation certificates to the migrants under Sections 5 and 6 of the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- Recently, Home Ministry also changed the Schedule I of Citizenship Rules, 2009.
- Under the new rules, any person of Indian origin while seeking citizenship for
    - a person married to an Indian citizen,
    - a child born abroad to Indian citizens,
    - a person whose parents are registered as Indian citizens
    - a person whose either parent has been a citizen of independent India
    - will have to make the declaration of their religion.
- The Citizenship Act, 1955, does not have any mention of religion. The Act provide citizenship by five ways: Birth, Descent, Registration, Naturalization, Incorporation of the territory.

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016

- The Citizenship Amendment Bill was proposed for amending the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- By this bill, illegal migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan will be eligible for Indian citizenship.
- These citizens will gain permanent citizenship after six years of residency in India instead of 11 years as mentioned in the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- The registration of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders will get cancelled if they violate any law.

Concerns regarding the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016.

- The Bill discriminates among refugees on the basis of religion does not take note of the refugees in India from among the Muslim community who have fled due to persecution. Thus it is in violation of Article 14 of Indian constitution.
- The Bill allows cancellation of OCI registration for violation of any law. This is a wide ground that may cover a range of violations, including minor offences (e.g. parking in a no parking zone).

Proposed Suggestions

- Checks and balances: It is necessary to curtail the wide powers given to the central government to rescind the OCI card status or put checks and balances in place by appointing a committee or an ombudsman.
- Remove religion as a basis: The concession of six to 12 years of residence to immigrants based only the religion of the migrants can be removed as it is against the idea of secularism.
- Refugees: It is necessary to look into the status of refugees and under what conditions they can obtain citizenship of India, bearing in mind the international migrant crisis. It is necessary to draw a clear demarcation between a refugee and an immigrant.

Way Forward

- Law should have no biases and try its utmost to provide justice and liberty to all. In past India has given shelter to refugees who were being persecuted because of their language (Tamils in Sri Lanka). This bill does not include such minorities. So it is necessary to broaden the scope of the law by including the term 'persecuted minorities' rather than religious minorities.

Illegal Immigrant

- According to the Citizenship Act (1955), an illegal immigrant is defined as a person who enters India without a valid passport or stays in the country after the expiry of the visa permit.
- Also, the immigrant who uses false documents for the immigration process.

Overseas Citizens of India

- OCIs are foreigners who are persons of Indian origin. For example, they may have been former

Indian citizens or children of the current Indian citizen.

- OCIs are entitled to multipurpose, multiple entries, a lifelong visa allowing them to visit India at any time, for any length of time and for any purpose.

Citizenship by Naturalisation

By Naturalisation The Central Government may grant a certificate of naturalization to any person (not being an illegal migrant) if he possesses the following qualifications like:

- he or she is not a subject or citizen of any country where citizens of India are prevented from becoming subjects or citizens of that country by naturalization
- that, if he is a citizen of any country, he undertakes to renounce the citizenship of that country

Article 14: Equality before the law and equal protection of laws. This right is available to both citizens and foreigners (except enemy aliens).

Important Facts for Prelims (26th October 2018)

India wins Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management Award, 2018

- Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) is a non-profit association representing an international network of senior public servants, Heads of Government, leading academics and researchers located in over 50 different countries across the Commonwealth.
- The association is guided by international leaders who believe in the value of networking, knowledge exchange and the promotion of good governance for the betterment of citizens in the Commonwealth countries.
- The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions is an institutional member of CAPAM.
- CAPAM has been announcing its International Innovations Awards (IIA) Programme bi-annually, since 1998.
- The CAPAM Awards celebrate the spirit of innovation in the public service by recognizing organizations that have made significant contributions to improve governance and services in the public sector.
- The initiative entitled **Unnayan Banka- Reinventing Education Using Technology of Banka District, State of Bihar** has been awarded under the Category "Innovation Incubation".
- "Unnayan Banka" is an initiative which envisages "Quality education for all" especially for those at the bottom of the pyramid, using latest technologies. It's a holistic model of overall development of youths from Education to Employability.

Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony

- The Tagore Award for Cultural Harmony for the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 were awarded to a distinguished Manipuri dancer, a Bangladesh-based cultural organisation and an eminent sculptor, respectively.
- The award was instituted by the government during the commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore in 2011. It was conferred first on sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar.
- For 2014, the award was given to Rajkumar Singhajit Singh, a doyen of Manipuri dance who is also

- a teacher, performer and choreographer.
- His choreography has been enriched by elements incorporated from various forms of performing arts of Manipur such as Thang-ta, Nata-Sankirtana, Lai-haraoba and Rasleela.
- His role in keeping the tradition of Manipuri dance alive and vibrant has paid tribute to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, who was deeply influenced by Manipuri dance and made it an integral part of the education curriculum at Visva Bharati University.
- Chhayanaut, an institution devoted to Bengali culture, established in Bangladesh in 1961 won the award for 2015. It has played a leading role in promoting Tagore's works in Bengali culture.
- It was part of the movement for an independent Bangladesh and provided a platform for cultural expression and assertion of Bengali identity.
- It has played significant role in upholding the liberal progressive tradition of universal humanism of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and in promoting the spirit of cultural harmony.
- For 2016, the award was given to sculptor Ram Vanji Sutar, whose first notable work was the 45-feet Chambal monument at the Gandhi Sagar Dam in Madhya Pradesh.
- This gigantic masterpiece carved out of a single block depicts mother Chambal with her two children- Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan symbolizing the brotherhood of the two states.
- His iconic bust of Mahatma Gandhi is one of the most celebrated representations of the Mahatma, as is his bronze bust of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.