



India-EU Trade and Investment Agreements

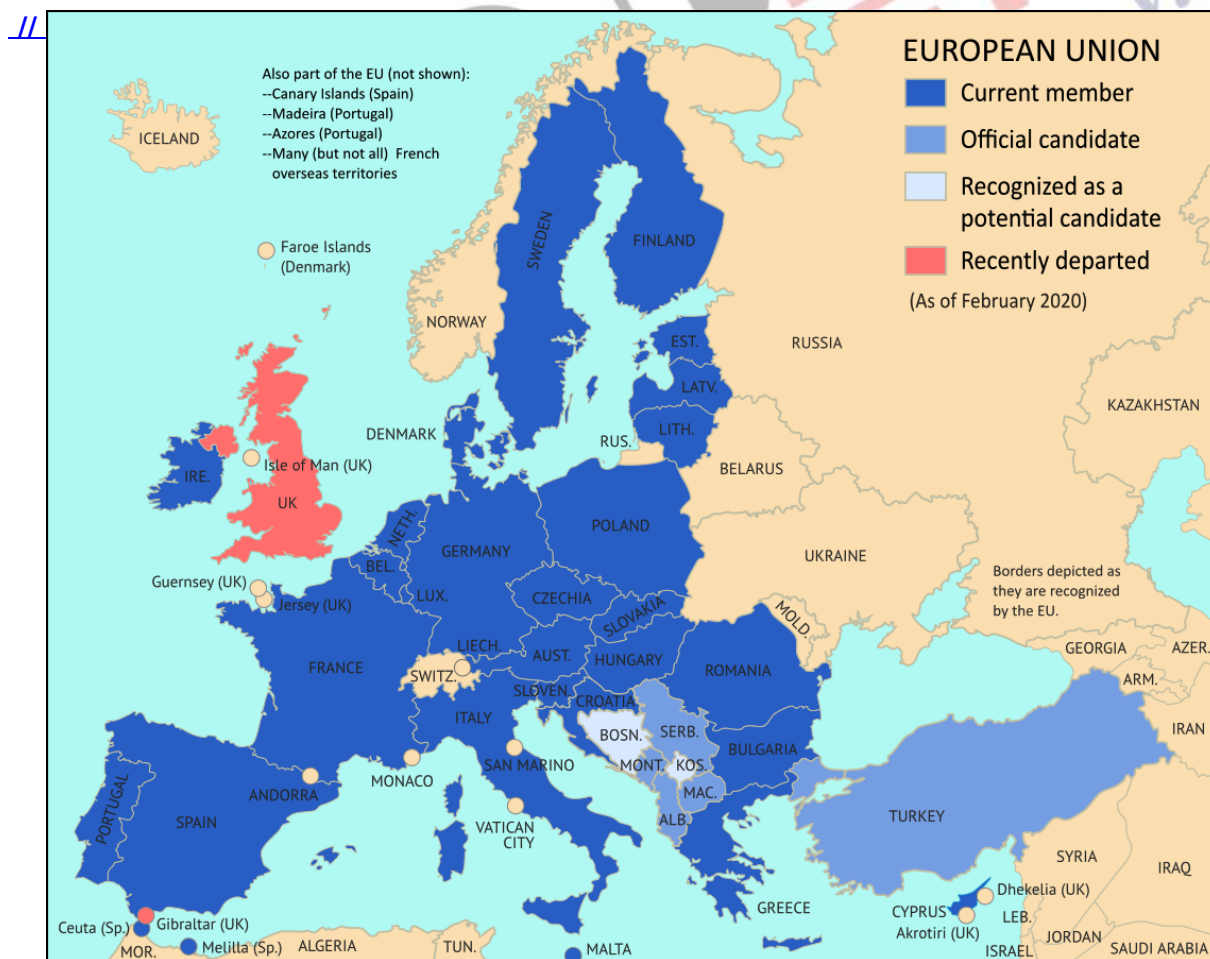
For Prelims: Free Trade Agreement, Data Secure, Non-tariff barriers, India-EU Summit, European Union, Most Favored Nation

For Mains: India-EU Trade and Investment Agreements, Issues leading to Deadlock

Why in News?

Recently, **India and the European Union** concluded the first round of negotiations for India-EU Trade and Investment Agreements in New Delhi.

- **52 technical sessions** covering **18 policy areas** of the **free trade agreement** and **7 sessions** on **Investment Protection** and **Geographical Indicators** were held.
- The **second round of negotiations** is scheduled to take place in **September 2022 in Brussels**.



What is India-EU Trade and Investment Agreements?

▪ About:

- India and EU had launched talks for having a wide-ranging [Free Trade Agreement \(FTA\)](#), officially called broad-based BTIA, long ago in 2007.
- The BTIA was proposed to encompass trade in goods, services and investments.
 - However, the talks stalled in 2013 over differences on market access and movement of professionals.

▪ Scope:

- **India's bilateral trade with the European Union** amounted to over **116 billion dollars in 2021-22.**
- **Despite the global disruptions, bilateral trade achieved impressive annual growth of more than 43% in 2021-22.**
- Currently, the **European Union is India's second-largest trading partner after the US, and the second-largest destination for Indian exports.**
- The EU's share in foreign investment inflows to India has more than doubled from 8% to 18% in the last decade, making the **EU the first foreign investor in India.**

What are the Related Challenges?

▪ Most Favoured Nation:

- EU investment treaty practice illustrates its keenness to include the [Most Favored Nation \(MFN\)](#) provision in its investment treaties.
 - **India is averse to including the MFN provision** in investment treaties.

▪ Fair and Equitable Treatment:

- EU's practice is to include in its investment treaties the **Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET) provision.**
 - FET is an important substantive protection feature that enables foreign investors to hold States accountable for arbitrary behavior.
 - The FET provision is missing in [India's Model Bilateral Investment Treaty](#) and the recent investment treaties that India has signed.

▪ Multilateral Investment Court:

- EU has been battling for a Multilateral Investment Court (MIC) to reform the existing arbitration-based Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) system.
 - Yet, India's official position on MIC is unknown. India hasn't contributed to the ongoing negotiations towards establishing a MIC, which is perplexing for a country that champions a rules-based global order.

▪ Non-Tariff Barriers:

- **Presence of non-tariff barriers on Indian agricultural products in the form of sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures** which are too stringent and enable the EU to bar many Indian agricultural products from entering its markets.
- The **non-tariff barriers in pharmaceuticals that the EU has imposed** include requirements of [World Trade Organisation](#)- Good Manufacturing Practice certification, import bans, antidumping measures and pre-shipment inspection among others.

What is European Union?

▪ About:

- The European Union is a **group of 27 countries that operate as a cohesive economic and political block.**
- **19 of these countries use EURO as their official currency.**
 - **8 EU members (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Sweden) do not use the euro.**
- The EU grew out of a desire to form a single European political entity **to end centuries of warfare among European countries that culminated with World War II** and decimated much of the continent.
- The EU has developed an **internal single market through a standardised system of laws** that apply in all member states in matters, where members have agreed to act as

one.

▪ **Significance of EU for India:**

- The EU works closely with India to **promote peace, create jobs, boost economic growth and enhance sustainable development** across the country.
- As **India graduated from low to medium income country (OECD 2014)**, the **EU-India cooperation also evolved from a traditional financial assistance type towards a partnership with a focus on common priorities.**
- At the 2017 [EU-India Summit](#), leaders reiterated their intention to strengthen cooperation on the implementation of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and agreed to explore the continuation of the **EU-India Development Dialogue.**

Way Forward

- **Geo-Economic Cooperation:** India can pursue EU countries to engage in Indo-pacific narrative, geo-economically if not from security prism.
 - It can mobilise massive economic resources for sustainable development of regional infrastructure, wield political influence and leverage its significant soft power to shape the Indo-Pacific discourse.
- **Finalisation of Indo-EU BTIA Treaty:** India and the European Union have been negotiating a free trade deal, but it is pending since 2007.
 - Therefore, for closer convergence between India and the EU, both should engage in finalisation of the trade deal as soon as possible.
- **Collaborating With Important Players:**
 - [India's partnership with France](#) now has a strong regional anchor in the Indo-Pacific narrative.
 - India is also engaged in negotiations for [a trade pact with the UK.](#)

[Source: PIB](#)

International Day of Cooperatives

For Prelims: International Day of Cooperatives, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)

For Mains: Cooperatives and its Significance, Challenges faced by Cooperatives and way ahead

Why in News?

Recently, 100th International Day of Cooperatives was observed.

- India celebrated the day under the theme **“Building a Self-Reliant India and a Better World through Co-operatives”.**

What is International Day of Cooperatives?

- **Historical Perspective:**
 - The International Day of Cooperatives was **declared by the United Nations General Assembly on 16th December 1992, on the first Saturday of July.**
 - The purpose of this festival is to **promote cooperatives globally and foster an**

environment that will foster their expansion and profitability.

- The occasion highlights the **cooperative movement's contributions to tackling the major issues addressed by the United Nations as well as to enhancing and expanding the alliances between the cooperative movement internationally** and other actors.
- **Significance:**
 - It aims to **raise awareness** of cooperatives and further the values of the movement—
 - **International solidarity,**
 - **Economic efficiency,**
 - **Equality,**
 - **Global peace.**
- **Theme for 2022:**
 - Cooperatives Build a Better World.

What are Co-operatives?

- **About:**
 - **Co-operatives** are people-centered enterprises owned, controlled and run by and for their members to realize their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations.
 - Cooperatives bring people together in a **democratic and equal way**. Whether the members are the customers, employees, users or residents, cooperatives are **democratically managed by the 'one member, one vote' rule**.
 - Members share equal voting rights regardless of the amount of capital they put into the enterprise.
- **Indian Perspectives:**
 - India has the **greatest cooperative movement** in the entire globe. Cooperatives, which currently **account for over 8.5 lakh villages in India**, are essential institutions for **fostering socioeconomic development for inclusive growth in both rural and urban areas**.
 - Some of the well-known **success stories of the cooperative movement in India** include,
 - **AMUL(Anand Milk Union Limited),**
 - **[IFFCO\(Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Limited\),](#)**
 - **KRIBHCO(Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited),**
 - **[NAFED\(National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd\).](#)**

What are the Related Government Initiatives?

- Recently, the **Ministry of Cooperation** was established by the Union Government in July 2021. Following its creation, the ministry has been **actively working on developing a new cooperation policy and programmes**.
- There is an **immense potential for the development and empowerment of farmers, agriculture, and rural areas of the country in the cooperative sector**.
- The **computerization of [Primary Agricultural Credit Societies \(PACS\)](#)** has recently been approved by the Union Cabinet, **strengthening the cooperative sector by enhancing PACS' efficiency, bringing accountability and transparency to their operations, and enabling PACS to diversify their business** and offer a variety of products and services.

What are the Challenges faced by the Cooperatives?

- **Neglected by the Policy Makers:** The role of cooperatives has been overlooked by policymakers at various levels **due to their lack of visibility**.
- **Lack of Awareness:** There is a lack of awareness about business strategies and knowledge about how the market works.
- **Lack of Funding and Capabilities:** Whether public or private sector, both are not showing any amount of confidence in this sector, as there is **little or no financial support for cooperatives**, so this harms their potential.

- **Poor Management:** In some cooperatives, due to the **lack of understanding of the market and poor level of skill set** of workers, many cooperatives underperform and are not able to provide the desired results.

Way Forward

- **Dual Status for Cooperatives:** Cooperatives role in society and economy should be accomplished and further support should be provided by various **stakeholders** including **government, corporates, etc**, by bringing their most significant **competitive advantage** to the table, namely their **dual status as associations and enterprises** (as they are businesses which are run by local communities for example members of a village).
- **Role of Government:** The government needs to work upon **enhancing their capabilities** by providing them with proper **guidance and support** from **market and business communities** so that they can get the desired level of **skill set** and knowledge of running an enterprise.

[Source: PIB](#)

Environment Protection Act, 1986

For Prelims: Environment Protection Act, 1986, Environmental Protection Fund, United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm Conference.

For Mains: Amendments Proposed in the Environment Protection Act, Features of EPA, Drawbacks of Environment Protection Act, 1986.

Why in News?

The **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** proposed **amendments in the [Environment Protection Act, 1986](#)**.

- Incidentally, the **Environment Protection Act provisions will be in force for penal provisions of the [single use plastic ban](#)** which has come into force recently.

What are Key Amendments Proposed in the Environment Protection Act?

- The Ministry has proposed the **decriminalisation of the existing provisions of the EPA, 1986** in order **to weed out fear of imprisonment for simple violations**.
 - It involves **removal of imprisonment as a penalty for the "less severe" contraventions**.
 - However, **serious violations of EPA** which lead to **grievous injury or loss of life** shall be covered under the provision of **Indian Penal Code**.
- Failure or contravention or non-compliance of the provisions of EPA such as submitting reports, furnishing information etc. will now be **dealt by imposing a monetary penalty through duly authorised Adjudicating Officer**.
- Instead of imprisonment, the amendments propose the creation of an **Environmental Protection Fund** in which the amount of **penalty imposed** by the Adjudicating Officer after adjudicating the damage to the environment **shall be remitted**.
 - The Central Government may prescribe the manner in which the Protection Fund shall be administered.

What is the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986?

▪ About:

- The EPA, 1986 establishes the framework for **studying, planning, and implementing long-term requirements of environmental safety** and laying down a system of speedy and **adequate response to situations threatening the environment.**

▪ Background:

- The roots of the enactment of the EPA lies in the [United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held at Stockholm](#) in June, 1972 (Stockholm Conference), in which **India participated, to take appropriate steps for the improvement of the human environment.**
- The **Act implements the decisions made at the [Stockholm Conference](#).**

▪ Constitutional Provisions:

- The **EPA Act was enacted under [Article 253 of the Indian Constitution](#)** which provides for the **enactment of legislation for giving effect to international agreements.**
- **Article 48A** of the Constitution specifies that the **State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.**
- **Article 51A** further provides that **every citizen shall protect the environment.**

▪ Powers of the Central Government:

- EPA empowers the **Central Government** to establish authorities charged with the **mandate of preventing environmental pollution in all its forms and to tackle specific environmental problems** that are peculiar to different parts of the country.
- EPA also empower the Government to:
 - **Plan and execute a nation-wide programme** for the prevention, control and abatement of environmental pollution.
 - **Lay down standards for the quality of the environment** in its various aspects like **emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from various sources.**
- **The Central government as per the Act has the power to direct:**
 - The **closure, prohibition or regulation of any industry, operation or process.**
 - The **stoppage or regulation of the supply of electricity or water or any other service.**

What is the Current Status of Offences and Penalties under EPA?

- Non-compliance or Contravention to any of the provisions of the Act is considered as an offence.

▪ [Cognizance of Offences:](#)

- **No Court shall take cognizance of any offence** under this Act **except on a complaint made by:**
 - The **Central Government or any authority on behalf** of the former.
 - A person who has approached the Courts after a **60-day notice** has been furnished to the Central Government or the authority on its behalf.

▪ Penalties:

- In case of **any non-compliance or contravention of the current provisions of the EPA, or of the rules under this Act, the violator can be punished with imprisonment up to 5 years or with a fine up to Rs 1,00,000, or with both.**
 - In case of **continuation of such violation, an additional fine of up to Rs 5,000 for every day during which such contravention continues** after the conviction for the first such contravention can be levied.
 - If the **violation continues beyond a period of one year** after the date of conviction, the offender can be punished with **imprisonment** for a term which **may extend to seven years.**

What are the Drawbacks of Environment Protection Act, 1986?

▪ Complete Centralisation of the Act:

- A potential drawback of the Act could be its centralization.

- While such wide powers are provided to the Centre and **no powers to the state governments**, the former is liable to its arbitrariness and misuse.
- **No Public Participation:**
 - The Act also says **nothing about public participation** as regards environmental protection.
 - There is a **need to involve the citizens in environmental protection to check arbitrariness and raise awareness** and empathy towards the environment.
- **Incomplete Coverage of Pollutants:**
 - The Act **does not address modern concepts of pollution** such as **noise**, **overburdened transport systems** and **radiation waves** which are also an important cause for the deteriorating environment.

What are the other Initiatives to Protect Environment?

- **India:**
 - [National River Conservation Programme](#)
 - [Green India Mission](#)
 - [National Afforestation Programme](#)
 - [National Coastal Management Programme](#)
 - [National Mission on Himalayan Studies under Climate Change Program](#)
- **International Conventions to which India is a Signatory:**
 - The [Montreal Protocol to the Vienna Convention](#) on Substances that deplete the Ozone Layer, 1987.
 - [Basel Convention](#) on Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes, 1989.
 - [Rotterdam Convention, 1998.](#)
 - [Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants \(POPs\).](#)
 - [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\), 1992.](#)
 - [Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992](#)
 - [UN Convention to Combat Desertification, 1994](#)

UPSC Civil Services Exam, Previous Year Questions (PYQ)

Q. Consider the following statements: (2019)

The Environment Protection Act, 1986 empowers the Government of India to:

1. State the requirement of public participation in the process of environmental protection, and the procedure and manner in which it is sought.
2. Lay down the standards for emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from various sources.

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

Ans: (b)

Exp:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2006 was issued under relevant provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
 - The EIA provides for screening, scoping, public consultation and appraisal of project proposals.
 - One of the most significant determinants of EIA is the procedure of Public Hearing and Public Participation on any developmental project.
 - However, the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986, nowhere mentions public

participation for environmental protection. It is only concerned with government authorities and polluters to protect the environment.

- **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- The EPA, 1986 empowers the Central Government to take all appropriate measures to prevent and control pollution and to establish effective machinery for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of environment and preventing, abating and controlling environmental pollution.
 - Section 3 of the EPA, 1986, empowers the Central Government to lay down standards for emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from various sources having regard to the quality or composition of the emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from such sources.
 - **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.

[Source: IE](#)

Digital India Week 2022

For Prelims: Digital India BHASHINI, Artificial Intelligence

For Mains: Digital India Vision of India, Technology Missions, Government Policies & Interventions, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Government

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister has inaugurated the **Digital India Week 2022** under the [Digital India Programme](#), with the aim to strengthen [Ease of Doing Business](#) and Ease of Living.

- **Theme:** 'Catalyzing New India's Techade'.
 - To transform the nation **into a digitally empowered society** and knowledge economy.
- During the programme, PM launched multiple digital initiatives aimed at enhancing the accessibility of technology, streamlining service delivery to ensure ease of living and giving a boost to startups.

What are the Digital Initiatives?

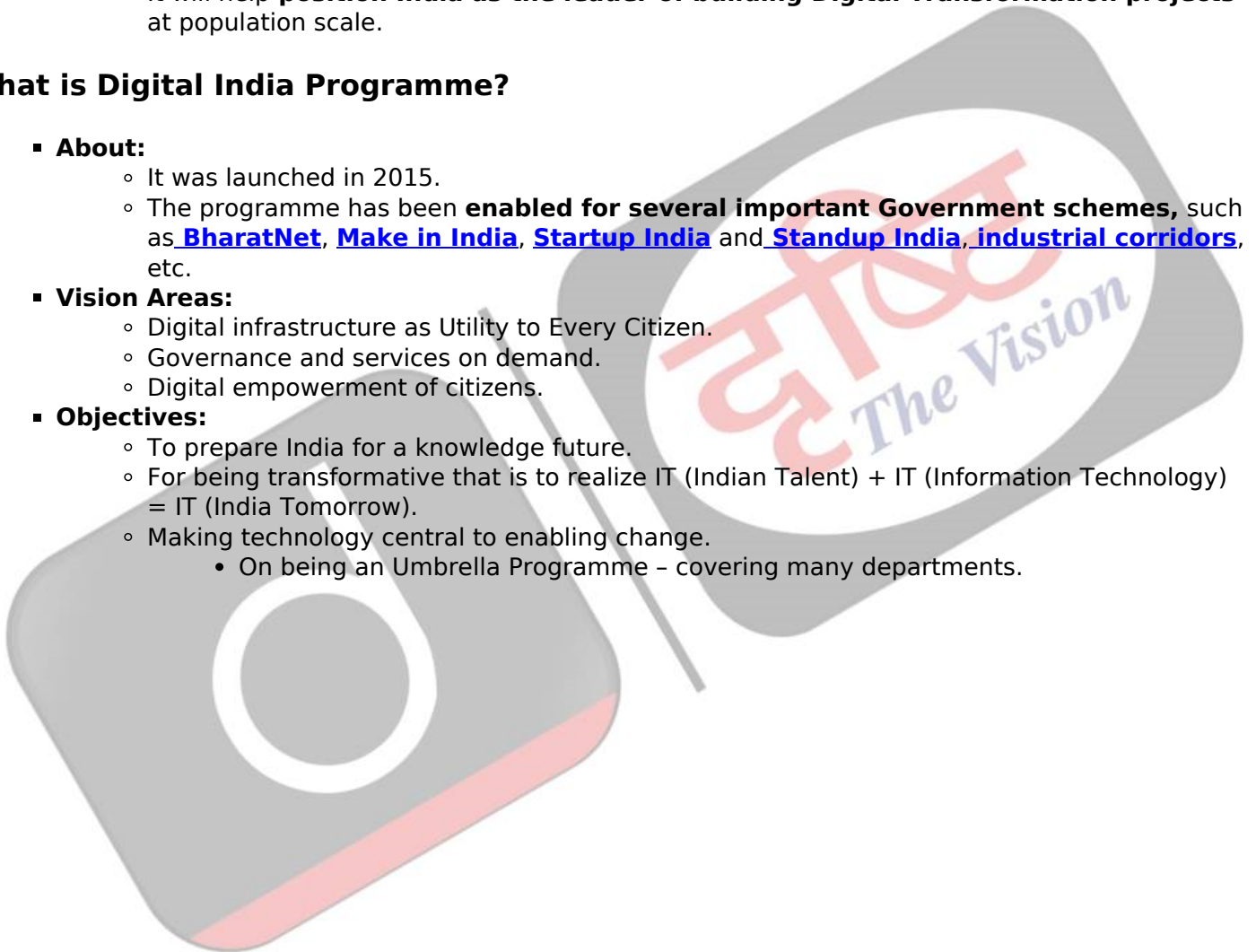
- **Digital India Bhashini:**
 - Digital India BHASHINI is India's [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#) led language translation platform.
 - A Bhashini Platform will make **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and [Natural Language Processing \(NLP\)](#) resources available to [MSME \(Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises\)](#), Startups and Individual Innovators in the public domain.
- **Digital India GENESIS:**
 - Digital India GENESIS' (Gen-next Support for Innovative Startups) is a national deep-tech startup platform to **discover, support, grow and make successful startups in Tier-II and Tier-III cities of India.**
- **My Scheme:**
 - It is a service discovery platform facilitating access to Government Schemes.
 - It aims to offer **a one-stop search and discovery portal where users can find**

schemes that they are eligible for.

- **Meri Pehchaan:**
 - It is National Single Sign On (NSSO) for One Citizen Login.
 - It is a **user authentication service in which a single set of credentials provide access to multiple online applications** or services.
- **Chips to Startup (C2S) Programme:**
 - The C2S Programme aims to **train specialized manpower in the area of design of semiconductor chips** at Bachelors, Masters and Research levels, and act as a catalyst for the growth of Startups involved in semiconductor design in the country.
 - It offers to mentor at the **organisational level and makes available State-of-the-art facilities for design to the institutions.**
- **Indiastack global:**
 - It is a global repository of key projects implemented under India Stack like [Aadhaar](#), [UPI \(Unified Payment Interface\)](#), [Digilocker](#), Cowin Vaccination Platform, [Government e Marketplace](#), [DIKSHA Platform](#) and [Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Mission](#).
 - It will help **position India as the leader of building Digital Transformation projects** at population scale.

What is Digital India Programme?

- **About:**
 - It was launched in 2015.
 - The programme has been **enabled for several important Government schemes**, such as [BharatNet](#), [Make in India](#), [Startup India](#) and [Standup India](#), [industrial corridors](#), etc.
- **Vision Areas:**
 - Digital infrastructure as Utility to Every Citizen.
 - Governance and services on demand.
 - Digital empowerment of citizens.
- **Objectives:**
 - To prepare India for a knowledge future.
 - For being transformative that is to realize IT (Indian Talent) + IT (Information Technology) = IT (India Tomorrow).
 - Making technology central to enabling change.
 - On being an Umbrella Programme - covering many departments.



Nine Pillars of Digital India

● TARGETS ● COST

1 Broadband Highways
Broadband in 2.5 lakh gram panchayats by Dec 2016; Virtual network operators and smart buildings in cities; National Information Infrastructure by March 2017
₹ 47,686 cr

2 Universal Mobile Access
Cover rest of 42,300 villages by FY18
₹ 16,000 cr

4 E-Governance: Reforming Govt through Technology
Simplify forms, create online repositories for school certificates, IDs Integration of services and platforms (Aadhaar, payment Gateway); automate govt workflow; redress grievances

5 E-Kranti - Electronic Delivery of Services
E-education, broadband, free WiFi, online courses. * E-healthcare, online consultation/records/supply. Full coverage in three years; online cash, loan. Information for farmers, financial inclusion e-courts, e-police, e-prosecution

3 Public Internet Access Programme
Common Service Centres in 2.5 lakh villages by March 2017; 15 lakh post offices to offer multiple services
₹ 4750 cr

6 Information for All
Online hosting of information & documents; Govt engages via social media. Little addition resources needed

7 Electronics Manufacturing – Target Net Zero Imports
Focus on semi-conductor fabrication plants, fabless design, set-top boxes, VSATs, mobiles, consumer & medical electronics, smart energy meters, smart cards, micro-ATMs

8 IT for Jobs
Train 1 crore people in towns/villages in five years (new); three lakh agents to run viable businesses delivering IT services (ongoing); five lakh rural IT workforce in 5 years; BPO in every NE state
₹ 200 cr

9 Early Harvest Programmes
Biometric attendance by Oct; WiFi in all varsities secure govt email hotspots in cities with pop > 1 million/tourist centres; ebooks; SMS-based disaster alerts weather info
₹ 900 cr

What are the Acheivements of Digital India Programme?

- Since 2014, more than Rs 23 lakh crore has been transferred to beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfers or **DBT**.
 - Digital platforms like Aadhaar, UPI, Cowin and Digilocker as examples of services that have contributed to the “ease of living” as citizens get services online without going to government offices or approaching middlemen.
- Digital India has **brought the government to the doorsteps and phones** of the citizens. More than 1.25 lakh **Common Service Centres (CSC)** and **Grameen Stores** are now taking e-commerce to rural India.
 - Similarly, property documents for rural properties are being provided by use of technology.
- With the help of **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)**, free ration was ensured to more than 80 crore countrymen.
- Through **Co-WIN Platform**, India has run the **world's largest and most efficient covid vaccination and covid relief program**.

Way Forward

- India's digital revolution will cause a paradigm shift for India and its economy. With the help of public and private partnerships, favourable government policies, innovative reforms, demographic advantage, rising incomes and the rise of India's startup culture, **India can become the fastest-growing digital economy**.

- The digital revolution has already helped the Indian economy to become resilient to the changing time. In the future, India's digital economy is expected to support India achieve its goal of a USD 5 trillion economy.

[Source: PIB](#)

Mekong - Lancang Cooperation

For Prelims: Mekong - Lancang Cooperation, Mekong River, Myanmar Neighbouring Countries

For Mains: India and its neighbourhood, Presence of China in Neighbouring Countries, Significance of International Groupings

Why in News?

Recently, Myanmar's military government hosted the first high - level regional meeting since the Army took power in 2021.

What Do We Know About the Meeting?

- China's Foreign Minister and counterparts from **Mekong** Delta nations attended the meeting.
- Foreign Minister of China along with his colleagues from Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam at the **Mekong - Lancang Cooperation** group meeting.
- It was held in the central city of **Bagan**, a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#).
- The theme of the meeting was **"Solidarity for Peace and Prosperity"**.

What Do We Mean by Mekong - Lancang Cooperation?

- **About:**
 - The grouping is a Chinese led initiative that includes the countries of the **Mekong Delta**, a potential source of regional tensions due to an increasing number of hydroelectric projects that are altering the flow and raising concerns of ecological damage.
- **Issues:**
 - China has built 10 dams along the upper stretch of the Mekong, the part it calls the Lancang.
 - China has been criticized for the dams upstream on the Mekong river which affect water levels and downstream fisheries that are important to several Southeast Asian nations' economies.

MEKONG MAINSTREAM DAMS



What is there to Know about Myanmar's Military Coup?

▪ About:

- In the November 2020 parliamentary election, Suu Kyi's party National League for Democracy (NLD) secured the majority of the seats.
- In the Myanmar's Parliament, the military holds 25% of the total seats according to the 2008 military-drafted constitution and several key ministerial positions are also reserved for military appointees.
- When the newly elected Myanmar lawmakers were to hold the first session of Parliament in 2021, [the military imposed a state of emergency](#) for one year citing massive voting fraud in the parliamentary elections.

▪ India's reaction to the Coup:

- India supports the process of democratic transition in Myanmar.
- Though India has expressed deep concern over developments in Myanmar, cutting off from the Myanmar military is not a viable option as India has significant economic and strategic interests in Myanmar and its neighbourhood.

How has India's Relations with Myanmar Been?

▪ Importance of Myanmar for India:

- Myanmar is geopolitically significant to India as it stands at the center of the India-Southeast Asia geography.
- Myanmar is the only Southeast Asian country that shares a land border with north-eastern India.
- Myanmar is the only country that sits at the intersection of India's ["Neighborhood First"](#) policy and its ["Act East" policy](#).
- As part of India's [SAGAR Vision](#), India developed the Sittwe port in Myanmar's Rakhine state.
- The port is meant to be India's answer to the Chinese-fronted Kyaukpyu port, which is intended to cement China's geostrategic footprint in Rakhine.

▪ Projects in which India is involved Includes:

- Upgradation and resurfacing of the 160 km. long Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemmyo road.
- An Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) project for high-speed data link in 32 Myanmar cities has been completed.
- ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), [Gas Authority of India Limited \(GAIL\)](#) and **ESSAR** are participants in the energy sector in Myanmar.

▪ India and Myanmar's Groupings:

◦ [ASEAN](#):

- Myanmar became a member of ASEAN in July 1997.
- As the only ASEAN country which shares a land border with India, Myanmar is a bridge between India and ASEAN.

◦ [BIMSTEC](#):

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization that was established on 6th June 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration.
- Representatives of the Governments of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand came together in Bangkok, and signed the **'Declaration on the Establishment of the Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BISTEC)'**.
 - Myanmar became a member of BIMSTEC in December 1997.
 - Myanmar is a signatory to the BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement.
- Myanmar is the lead country for the energy sector. Myanmar trades mostly with Thailand and India in the BIMSTEC region.

◦ [Mekong Ganga Cooperation](#):

- Myanmar is a member of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) since its inception in November 2000.
- MGC is an initiative by six countries – India and five ASEAN countries namely,

Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam – for cooperation in the fields of tourism, education, culture, transport and communication.

◦ **SAARC:**

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8th December 1985.
- SAARC comprises of eight Member States:
 - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- Myanmar was given the status of observer in SAARC in August 2008.

Why India Should be Concerned about the Meeting?

- China's presence in Myanmar and growing bonds between China and Myanmar is an issue of deep concern for India as India shares 1600km of boundary with Myanmar
- Ever since the coup, China's economic grip over Myanmar has become tighter with a special focus on projects critical for the [China-Myanmar Economic Corridor](#).
- Moreover, the deadly attack on an [Assam Rifles](#) convoy near the Myanmar border in November 2021 was a reminder about the proclivity of China for creating trouble in the Northeast.

What Should be India's Approach Moving Forward?

- **Cultural Diplomacy:**
 - India's cultural diplomacy through the lens of [Buddhism](#) can be leveraged for strengthening its ties with Myanmar.
 - India's "[Buddhist Circuit](#)" initiative, which seeks to double foreign tourist arrivals by connecting ancient Buddhist heritage sites across different states in India, should resonate with Buddhist-majority Myanmar.
 - This could also build up India's diplomatic reservoir of goodwill and trust with Buddhist-majority countries such as Myanmar.
- **Resolving Rohingyas Issue:**
 - The quicker the [Rohingya](#) issue is resolved, the easier it will be for India to manage its relations with Myanmar and Bangladesh, focusing instead more on bilateral and subregional economic cooperation
- **Other Measures:**
 - India should continue to engage with the present regime in Myanmar working towards mutual development of people of both the countries.
 - It should support sharing experiences in constitutionalism and federalism to assist Myanmar in resolving the prevailing stalemate.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. In the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, an initiative of six countries, which of the following is/are not a participant/ participants?

1. Bangladesh
2. Cambodia
3. China
4. Myanmar
5. Thailand

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2, 3 and 4
(c) 1 and 3
(d) 1, 2 and 5

Ans: (c)

Exp:

- The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) is an initiative by six countries – India and five ASEAN countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam for cooperation in tourism, culture, education, as well as transport and communications. It was launched in 2000 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- Both the Ganga and the Mekong are civilizational rivers and the MGC initiative aims to facilitate closer contacts among the people inhabiting these two major river basins.
- The MGC is also indicative of the cultural and commercial linkages among the member countries of the MGC down the centuries.
- Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer.

[Source: TH](#)

States' Startup Ranking 2021

Why in News?

The results of the 3rd edition of **Ranking of States on Support to Startup Ecosystems** were released by the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

- Earlier, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry released a [Ease of Doing Business \(EoDB\) Ranking](#), which is based on Business Reforms Action Plan (BRAP) report 2020.

What is States' Startup Ranking?

- **About:**
 - The [Start-up India initiative](#) of the Government of India envisages **to build a robust Start-up ecosystem in the country for nurturing innovation and providing opportunities to budding entrepreneurs.**
 - The [Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade \(DPIIT\)](#) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has been conducting the **States' Start-up Ranking Exercise since 2018.**
 - The exercise plays a crucial role in easing the business environment for start-ups in the country.
- **Objectives:**
 - Help bring to fore progress made by the States/ UTs for **promoting Startup ecosystem.**
 - **Foster competitiveness** & propel the States/ UTs to work proactively.
 - Facilitate States/ UTs to **identify, learn and replicate good practices.**
- **Classification:** States and Union Territories are classified into 5 Categories,
 - Best Performers
 - Top Performers
 - Leaders
 - Aspiring Leaders
 - Emerging Start-up Ecosystems.

How about the Rankings 2021?

- **7 broad Reform Areas:**
 - The participants were **evaluated across 7 broad Reform Areas consisting of 26**

Action Points ranging from,

- Institutional Support
- Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Access to Market
- Incubation support
- Funding Support
- Mentorship Support to Capacity Building of Enablers.

▪ **Result:**

- **Gujarat and Karnataka** appeared as the **Best Performers in the States category**.
 - **Meghalaya top among UTs** and North-eastern States category.
- **Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa and Telangana** won the **Top Performers** award among states category.
 - **Jammu and Kashmir appeared** as the **Top Performer among UTs** and NE states category.



What are the Related Initiatives?

- [Open Network for Digital Commerce](#)
- [Fisheries Startup Grand Challenge](#)
- [Start Up India Fund](#)
- [Policy Reforms for Startups](#)
- [Start-up Cells](#)
- [National Startup Advisory Council](#)
- [Aatmanirbhar Bharat ARISE-Atal New India Challenge](#)
- [AIM-iCREST](#)

Source: PIB

Alluri Sitarama Raju

For Prelims: Modern History, Mahatma Gandhi, non-Cooperation Movement

For Mains: Alluri Sitarama Raju and his contribution in Freedom Movement

Why in News?

Prime Minister has unveiled a bronze statue of [Alluri Sitharama Raju](#) in Andhra Pradesh to celebrate 125th birth anniversary on 4th July 2022.

- As part of [Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav](#), Government is giving due recognition **to the contribution of freedom fighters and making people across the country aware** of them.



Who Was Alluri Sitarama Raju?

- **About:**
 - He was an Indian revolutionary involved in the Indian independence movement.
 - He was born in **present-day Andhra Pradesh in 1897 or 1898.**
 - He became a sanyasi at the age of 18, and gained a **mystical aura among the hill and tribal peoples with his austerity, knowledge of astrology and medicine**, and his ability to tame wild animals.
- **Freedom Movement:**
 - At a very young age, Raju channelled the **discontent of the hill people in Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, and Godavari into a highly effective guerrilla resistance** against

the British.

- **Guerrilla warfare** is a form of irregular warfare in which small groups of combatants use military tactics including **ambushes, sabotage, raids, petty warfare, hit-and-run tactics, and mobility, to fight a larger and less-mobile traditional military.**
- Colonial rule **threatened the tribals' traditional podu (shifting) cultivation**, as the government sought to secure forest lands.
- He became involved in **anti-British activities in response to the 1882 Madras Forest Act**, which effectively restricted the free movement of Adivasis (tribal communities) in their forest habitats and prevented them from practicing a traditional form of agriculture known as podu (shifting cultivation).
- Rising discontent towards the British led to the **Rampa Rebellion/Manyam Rebellion of 1922**, in which he played a major part as a leader.
 - The Rampa Rebellion coincided with **Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement**. He persuaded people to wear **khadi** and give up drinking.
 - But at the same time, he asserted that India could be liberated only by the use of force, not non-violence.
- He was nicknamed "**Manyam Veerudu**" (**Hero of the Jungle**) by local villagers for his heroic exploits.
- In 1924, Raju was taken into police custody, **tied to a tree, and shot by a public execution**, effectively ending the armed rebellion.

[Source: IE](#)

Regulating Nitrate absorption in Plants

Why in News?

Researchers from the **National Centre of Biological Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bengaluru (NCBS-TIFR)** discovered a new pathway that regulates nitrate absorption in plants.

Controlling nitrate absorption in plants

A novel pathway has been found, which can use gene editing to achieve this objective



Approach: The researchers used rice and tobacco plants to study the mechanism. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

- Plants mainly absorb nitrogen from the soil in the form of nitrates and ammonium
- An important macronutrient, nitrogen is a part of chlorophyll, amino acids and nucleic acids

- There is a need to regulate and optimise nitrogen intake in plants, so that the excess is not dumped in soil and water

- The hormone auxin is responsible for well-developed roots across all plants, influencing nitrate absorption

ALTERNATE PATHWAY

- The regulatory micro-RNA switch - miR444 - is known to turn off at least five genes

called MADS box transcription factor genes

- A target gene of miR444 called MADS27, has a three-pronged effect: regulating nitrate absorption and root development, and stress tolerance

- Tinkering with MADS27 may help regulate nitrate absorption and engineer abiotic stress tolerance

What is the New Method?

- The researchers investigated a miR444 target gene called MADS27, a transcription factor that has previously received little attention.
 - Transcription factors are proteins involved in the **process of converting, or transcribing, DNA into RNA**. Transcription factors include a **wide number of proteins, excluding RNA polymerase**, that initiate and regulate the transcription of genes.
- The micro-RNA, miR444, activates the **Gene MADS27**, which **regulates nitrate absorption, root development, and stress tolerance, and thus provides a way to control these plant properties**.
 - **The gene MADS27** appears to be an excellent candidate for modification in order to **improve nitrogen use efficiency**, which helps the plant absorb more nitrates, and to **engineer abiotic stress tolerance**.
- This mechanism was studied in both **rice (monocot) and tobacco (dicot) plants** by the researchers. The study was published in the Journal of Experimental Botany.

What is the Importance of Nitrogen?

- Nitrogen is one of the most important macronutrients needed for development of a plant.
 - However, excessive use of nitrates in fertilisers, for example, can result in nitrate dumping in the soil, resulting in nitrate accumulation in water and soil. This **accumulation contributes to soil and water pollution**, as well as increased contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.
- It is a **part of chlorophyll, amino acids and nucleic acids**, among others.
- It is mostly sourced from the soil where it is mainly absorbed in the form of nitrates and ammonium by the roots.
- Nitrates also **influence genome-wide gene expression**, which in turn influences the root system, the biological clock of plants, leaf growth, and so on.

UPSC Civil Services examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Which of the following adds/add nitrogen to the soil? (2013)

1. Excretion of urea by animals

2. Burning of coal by man
3. Death of vegetation

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (c)

- Mammals, including humans, are the primary producers of urea. **Because they secrete urea as the primary nitrogenous waste product, they are called ureotelic animals.** These wastes add nitrogen to the soil. Hence, 1 is correct.
- Coal combustion produces Oxides of Carbon (CO_x), Oxides of Sulphur (SO_x), Oxides of Nitrogen (NO_x) and a variety of byproducts, including fly-ash, flue gas and scrubber sludge. However, it does not directly add nitrogen to the soil. Hence, 2 is not correct.
- When plants and animals die, the Nitrogen compounds in the organic matter re-enter the soil where they are broken down by microorganisms, known as decomposers. This decomposition produces Ammonia, which goes through the nitrification process, i.e., nitrifying bacteria in the soil convert Ammonia into Nitrite (NO₂) and then into Nitrate (NO₃). Hence, 3 is correct. Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer.

[Source: TH](#)

INAS 324 Squadron

Why in News?

Recently, the Indian Navy commissioned a new Indian Naval Air Squadron 324 at eastern Naval Command.

- It will enhance the surveillance capability on the Eastern Seaboard.

What are the Highlights of the INAS 324 Squadron?

- The unit is the Eastern Seaboard's first Naval Squadron to use **indigenously designed** and built **Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) MK III (MR) helicopters**.
- It has been named "**KESTRELS**", which are birds of prey and have good sensory capabilities, symbolising the aircraft's and air squadron's intended role.
- The Squadron's insignia depicts a 'KESTREL' searching over vast blue and white sea waves, representing the Squadron's integral **Maritime Reconnaissance (MR) and Search and Rescue (SAR) role**.
- Its equipped with **ALH MK III helicopters** which have state-of-the-art equipment which includes **modern surveillance radar** and **electro-optical sensors**.

What is Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH)?

- It's an indigenously built helicopter manufactured by **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)**.
 - HAL is a **public sector aircraft manufacturing company**.

- These helicopters are primarily used for **Maritime Reconnaissance (MR) and Search and Rescue (SAR) missions**, but they can also be used for **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations and Special Operations with Marine Commandos**.
- It also has an **airborne Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU)** for use in the **Air Ambulance** role to facilitate the medical evacuation of critically ill patients.

[Source: PIB](#)

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