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GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

1. UGC draft norms moot biannual admissions

Context: The University Grants Commission published the Draft UGC (Minimum Standards of Instructions in the Award of UG and PG Degrees) Regulations, 2024 on Thursday allowing enrolment of students in higher education institutions (HEIs) twice a year. The regulations also allow students to join two undergraduate or postgraduate programmes simultaneously and make UG and PG aspirants eligible for admission in any discipline of their choice, besides offering a multiple entry-exit option. Undergraduate students in India will soon have the flexibility to complete their degrees earlier or extend them beyond the standard duration.

Key points

- **Overview:** The University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Accelerated Degree Programmes (ADPs) and Extended Degree Programmes (EDPs), aligning with the learner-centric objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

- **National Credit Framework (NCrF):** The National Credit Framework (NCrF) enables learners with varying learning abilities to move through the curriculum at rates faster or slower than the standard duration of a programme by earning the required credits.
 - *Unified credit accumulation and transfer* - NCrF allows the seamless accumulation and transfer of credits across disciplines, including skill and vocational education. It provides an enabling, non-regulatory framework for educational institutions.
 - *Flexibility for students* - Credits can be earned through diverse activities, such as Classroom teaching and laboratory work; Research projects, sports, yoga, performing arts, and social work; Internships, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships. This approach enables students to tailor their academic paths based on interests and career goals.
 - *Alignment with modern needs* - NCrF addresses the skill mismatch by equipping students with competencies for emerging jobs and self-employment. Encourages HEIs to adapt to economic and technological advancements.
- **Impact on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs):** *Multidisciplinary education and research* - NEP 2020 advocates the establishment of multidisciplinary education and research universities (MERUs) as hubs for intellectual growth.
- **UGC Initiative:** *Accelerated Degree Programmes (ADPs)* - Students with exceptional academic performance can graduate earlier by earning additional credits per semester. A three-year programme can be completed in five semesters, and a four-year programme in six or seven semesters.

Extended Degree Programmes (EDPs) - Students facing personal, financial, or academic challenges can extend their degree duration by up to two semesters. Fewer credits per semester are required for extended timelines.
- **Benefits of the UGC Initiative:** *For students* - Supports those pursuing interdisciplinary or professional courses and students balancing education with other commitments. Provides flexibility to tailor academic journeys based on individual needs and learning abilities.

For institutions - Encourages a flexible and modern approach to higher education, aligning with global trends.

Equivalence with standard degrees - Degrees completed through ADPs or EDPs will be treated on par with those of standard duration for employment, academic, and recruitment purposes. Government departments, private organisations, and recruiting agencies like UPSC and State Service Commissions will recognise these degrees equally.
- **Conclusion:** By enabling students to accelerate or extend their academic timelines, the initiative empowers them to navigate their educational goals more effectively while maintaining academic equivalence and credibility.

GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

2. Bhutan and India discuss Gelephu, hydel power plans

Context: India and Bhutan on Thursday discussed bilateral projects in the fields of electricity and urban planning during the visit of the King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk and Queen Jetsun Pema. Mr. Wangchuk met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and both sides reiterated continued collaboration on multiple fronts including in the Gelephu Mindfulness City project and hydropower. The two sides on Thursday also discussed the hydel power projects including the 1020-MW Punatsangchhu-II hydro power project and expressed satisfaction as it was nearing completion.

Key points

- **Overview:** The two countries reiterated the importance of cooperation in the hydropower sector, and their commitment to advancing it, including through finalizing modalities urgently for new projects, including reservoir hydro projects.
- **Showcasing India's Green Hydrogen Advancements:** India showcased its progress in green hydrogen technology by presenting a hydrogen-fueled bus, highlighting the country's advancements in sustainable mobility.
- **Hydropower Cooperation:** Hydropower cooperation is a cornerstone of India-Bhutan relations. India has helped construct four major hydroelectric projects (HEPs) in Bhutan. Recently, Bhutan has been permitted to sell 64 MW Basochhu HEP's electricity in India's Day Ahead Market (DAM).
- **Cooperation in New and Emerging Areas:**
 - Space Cooperation* - A significant new area, with the India-Bhutan SAT, launched in November 2022. The satellite aids in natural resource management and has a digital repeater serving the amateur radio community.
 - Fin-tech* - Launches include the RuPay Card (2019, 2020 phases) and the Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) app (2021) to enable cashless payments and cross-border interoperability.
- **Significance of Bhutan for India:**
 - Strategic Location* - Bhutan's location between India and China makes it crucial for India's security. It acts as a buffer state, preventing direct Chinese access to the Indian territory.
 - Shared Heritage* - India and Bhutan share deep cultural and historical ties, primarily through Buddhism. This cultural connection enhances mutual understanding and people-to-people relations.
 - Biodiversity Conservation* - Bhutan's rich biodiversity is of ecological significance, and India's involvement in conservation efforts supports regional environmental goals.
- **Significance of the project:** The Gelephu hydel power project is a key part of Bhutan's plan to create a carbon-neutral economic hub and regional development center.
 - Hydropower* - Bhutan exports a significant amount of hydropower to India, and the Gelephu hub could increase this energy exchange. This would provide a renewable energy source for Assam and support its growing demand for clean energy.
 - Green infrastructure* - The Gelephu Smart City's focus on green infrastructure will promote sustainable development in the region. Assam could benefit from technology transfer and green collaborations.
 - Economic hub* - The Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) is a 1,000 square kilometer carbon-neutral economic hub that focuses on sustainable industries like IT, education, and healthcare. It's designed to be an investment destination and health and wellness center.
 - Regional development* - The GMC is aligned with Bhutan's Gross National Happiness philosophy and aims to drive regional development and job creation. It's also intended to connect South Asia to Southeast Asia.
- **Conclusion:** The GMC is a special administrative zone with separate, investor-friendly laws. It's expected to incorporate advanced safety and environmental features, including a passive decay heat removal system.

GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

3. Bangladesh's deepening crisis

Context: Bangladesh is currently experiencing a fresh wave of political instability. At present, the nation is contending with political violence, atrocities against minorities and economic challenges, including soaring inflation, energy shortages, and a growing balance of payments deficit. The country is navigating a complex and dynamic geopolitical landscape, particularly a deteriorating law and order situation created by the emboldened fundamentalist elements. The interim government that now runs Bangladesh in collaboration with the Army, faces huge challenges in gaining legitimacy and public trust. This could lead to further unrest, particularly among the dissatisfied groups.

Key points

- **Overview:** With the newfound strength, fundamentalist groups have escalated their plans for the radicalization of Bangladesh, thereby challenging the secular structure of the country. This has resulted in their fresh ideological clash with Bangladeshi nationalism.
- **Status of minorities in Bangladesh:** The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) presents its annual report on violence against religious and ethnic minorities recording over 1,000 cases of human rights violations in a year and resulting in the death of 45 people. According to the BHBCUC, 70-75 percent of the violence is centered on land grabbing, often under the influence of political parties and with the complicity of government agencies. The latest census in 2023 found that 90 percent of the total population of 170 million in Bangladesh are Muslims, with Hindus still making up the largest minority group at 8 percent, while Christians represent less than 1%.
- **Implications of the Bangladesh crisis on India: Security Challenge** - The Bangladesh crisis comes just three years after President Ashraf Ghani's government fell in Kabul and the Taliban regained control over Afghanistan after about two decades, giving an advantage to Pakistan and causing unease for India.
Border management - India shares around 4096 km of land border with Bangladesh which is still not completely fenced.
Rise in Radicalisation and Terrorism - Some of the radical organizations in Bangladesh have links with the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) other terrorist outfits based in Pakistan as well as with the Pakistan Army's spy agency InterServices Intelligence (ISI), which might like to expand its activities in the eastern neighbour of its arch-enemy India.
India's access to Northeast - India has extended three lines of credit to Bangladesh since 2016 amounting to \$8 billion for the development of road, rail, shipping and port infrastructure. Any disruption in Indo-Bangladesh ties could restrict India's access to northeast, which is connected to mainland India through 'Chicken's Neck' between West Bengal and Assam.
- **India's approach: Support Democracy** - India's explicit support to Muhammad Yunus and the interim government can help restore law & order and protect citizens' rights, including minorities, in Bangladesh.
Support to Minorities - A five-member committee led by a senior Border Security Force (BSF) official has been set up to communicate with Bangladesh authorities to ensure the safety and security of Indian nationals, Hindus, and other minority communities living there.
Geopolitical Move - India should ensure that Pakistan and China may not take advantage of the Bangladesh crisis to harm India. India should use its Geopolitical influence involving US, UK, and European nations to support Bangladesh's economic stabilization and counter extremist influences.

QUICK FACTS: BHARATIYA VAYUYAN VIDHEYAK BILL GETS NOD IN RAJYA SABHA

It will replace the 90-year-old Aircraft Act, 1934 (for the control of the manufacture, possession, use, operation, sale, import and export of aircraft). The Rajya Sabha passed the Bill on Thursday. The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on July 31 and was passed by the Lower House on August 9. The most significant change in the Bill is that the radio telephone operator restricted certificate and licence testing process, which was hitherto conducted by the Department of Telecom for aviation personnel, including aircraft maintenance engineers, flight dispatchers, and pilots, has been moved to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. This will ensure a single-window clearance process as aviation personnel can now secure all their certificates from one authority.

GS 3: ECONOMY, ECOLOGY, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, DEFENCE, SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

4. Power of science

Context: IISF-2024, which concluded at IIT Guwahati on Tuesday, celebrated India's scientific achievements, underscoring the critical role of science and technology in shaping the nation's future. The four-day event witnessed a wide-ranging display of innovation, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing, with participants from the scientific community as well as planners, policy makers, academia and students coming together to explore the transformative power of science. The success of IISF as a platform for inspiration and collaboration needs to be taken to the next level for advancing India's global scientific leadership.

Key points

- **Overview:** The 10th edition of the India International Science Festival (IISF) took place at IIT Guwahati from November 30 to December 3, 2024, marking a significant milestone as the festival reaches the Northeast for the first time.
- **India International Science Festival (IISF):** India International Science Festival is a collaborative endeavour between the Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Department of Space and Department of Atomic Energy in partnership with Vijnana Bharati – a science movement spearheaded by scientists of the nation with swadeshi spirit.
Primary Objective - To commemorate the world of science, making it accessible to all. To engage the general populace with science in an enjoyable and entertaining manner, thereby contributing to health, prosperity and meaningful life.
Significance - By means of its inventive programs and initiatives, IISF extends opportunities for people and scientific community, both within the country and internationally, to come together, collaborate and partake in the gratification of advancing scientific pursuits towards betterment of India and humanity.
- **(IISF), 2024 the 10th edition:** *Aim* - To acknowledge the achievements of science enthusiasts and inculcate scientific temper among young students and spread the same among the Indian citizens. IISF 2024 will have a total of 17 themes to showcase scientific achievements offering diverse benefits to participants and the public.
Central Theme - Science and Technology Public Outreach in Amrit Kaal. India International Science Festival aims to offer a myriad of benefits to people by serving as an educational and inspirational platform.

Organiser - The event is coordinated by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India, and Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA).

- **Empowering the Region and Youth:** The event reserves 30% of registrations for participants from the Northeast, providing opportunities for local talent to engage with renowned scientists and innovators. Young minds will have a chance to participate in competitions and experience cutting-edge innovations, sparking new aspirations in science and technology.
- **Collaborative Efforts:** IISF-2024 is being organized by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in coordination with several ministries and Vijnana Bharati. With India's rapid progress in areas like space exploration and digital technology, the festival reaffirms the nation's commitment to becoming a scientific and manufacturing powerhouse.

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5. Expedite NOCs for steel consignments, significant challenges being faced

Context: The Engineering Export Promotion Council (EEPC) on Thursday expressed concerns over restrictions on steel shipments at Indian ports and urged the government to expedite the issuance of No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for steel consignments, alongside implementing other measures to support Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the steel sector. EEPC members have pointed out that Quality Control Committee meetings are not being held as frequently as required, leading to delays in the issuance of NOCs for steel consignments and these delays are causing substantial disruptions to business operations.

Key points

- **Overview:** The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) noted that India's steel industry focuses on low-margin products while relying on imports for specific applications. The report highlights the need for a balanced approach that addresses the needs of both large producers and small steel-using industries.
- **Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI):** Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) is a research Group focused on Climate Change, technology and trade. GTRI aims to create high-quality and jargon-free outputs for governments and industry from the perspective of development and poverty reduction.
- **Steel Import Monitoring System' 2.0 portal:** It features API integration with multiple government portals, enhancing quality control and streamlining processes for improved efficiency and effectiveness. The portal boasts a robust data entry system, ensuring consistent and authentic data, which promotes transparency and accountability. Integration of various databases enable stakeholders to locate areas of risk and, thereby, permit better risk management.
- **Significance of the Indian steel sector:**
 - Contribution to GDP* - The steel sector contributes about 2% to India's GDP and accounts for about 7% of its industrial output. The sector also generates employment for about 2.5 million people directly and indirectly.
 - Support to infrastructure development* - The steel sector plays a vital role in building and maintaining India's infrastructure such as roads, bridges, dams, airports, ports, etc. The sector also supports the development of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power.
 - Enhancement of national security* - The steel sector provides strategic materials for India's defence and aerospace sectors such as armour plates, bulletproof vests, missiles, rockets, satellites, etc. The sector also helps in reducing India's dependence on imports for critical defence items.

- **Government initiatives to support the sector:** The government has taken several steps to support and promote this sector, such as-
 - **Steel Scrap Recycling Policy** - The Steel Scrap Recycling Policy, which was announced by the Government of India in November 2019, aims to promote the scientific processing and recycling of ferrous scrap from various sources, such as end-of-life vehicles (ELVs), white goods, construction and demolition waste, etc.
 - **Vehicle scrapping centres** - One of the key features of the policy is the establishment of vehicle scrapping centres across the country, which will facilitate the collection and recycling of ELVs.
 - **National Steel Policy 2017** - The National Steel Policy 2017 (NSP 2017) is a strategic plan to boost the growth and development of the steel industry in India. It was launched by the Minister of Steel in 2017.
 - **DMI & SP Policy** - One of the initiatives taken under the policy is the Policy for providing preference to Domestically Manufactured Iron and Steel Products (DMI & SP Policy) in government procurement.
- **Conclusion:** The Indian steel industry has a huge potential to contribute to the nation's growth and development. By overcoming its challenges and embracing its opportunities, the industry can secure a robust and sustainable future for itself and for the country.

Q. The steel sector is a vital part of India's economy, contributing to its industrial growth, employment generation and foreign exchange earnings. However, the sector also faces several challenges, such as environmental concerns, high production costs, low innovation and competitiveness, and trade barriers. How can the steel sector overcome these challenges and enhance its role in India's development? What are the best practices and policies that can support the sector's growth and sustainability? (প্রশ্নঃ ইস্পাত খণ্ড ভাৰতৰ অৰ্থনীতিৰ এক গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ অংশ, যিয়ে ইয়াৰ ঔদ্যোগিক বিকাশ, নিযুক্তি সৃষ্টি আৰু বৈদেশিক মুদ্রা উপাৰ্জনত অৰিহণা যোগায়। অৱশ্যে, খণ্ডটোৱে কেইবাটাও প্ৰত্যাহ্বানৰ সন্মুখীন হৈছে, যেনে পাৰিপাৰ্শ্বিক উদ্বেগ, উচ্চ উৎপাদন ব্যয়, কম উদ্ভাৱন আৰু প্ৰতিযোগিতামূলকতা, আৰু বাণিজ্যিক বাধা। ইস্পাত খণ্ডই কেনেকৈ এই প্ৰত্যাহ্বানসমূহ অতিক্ৰম কৰিব পাৰে আৰু ভাৰতৰ উন্নয়নত ইয়াৰ ভূমিকা বৃদ্ধি কৰিব পাৰে? খণ্ডটোৰ বিকাশ আৰু স্থায়িত্বক সমৰ্থন কৰিব পৰা সৰ্বশ্ৰেষ্ঠ অনুশীলন আৰু নীতি কি কি?)

QUICK FACTS: PSLV-C59 PLACES PROBA-3 SATELLITES INTO DESIGNATED ORBIT WITH PRECISION

After being rescheduled for a day as an anomaly was detected, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Thursday successfully launched the PROBA-3 (Project for Onboard Autonomy) mission of the European Space Agency aboard a Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle-C59 rocket. The vehicle took off with a powerful roar precisely at 4.04 p.m. from the first launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.