

Current Affairs & Issues for CSE Interview 2021

**Compiled by
Dr. G. Prasanna Kumar IAS (Retd.)**

Topics Selected for Discussion

- 1. Covid 19**
- 2. AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**
- 3. The Three Farm Laws**
- 4. National Education Policy 2020**
- 5. Strategic Disinvestment of Central Public Sector Enterprises**
- 6. Domicile-based Job Quota**
- 7. Unlawful Conversion of Religion**
- 8. Regulation of Digital Media**
- 9. The Future Group Controversies**
- 10. Maharashtra – Karnataka Border Dispute**
- 11. Privatization of Public Sector Banks**
- 12. Contempt of Court**
- 13. Flash Floods in Chamoli**
- 14. Mission Karmayogi**
- 15. New Vehicle Scrapping Policy**
- 16. Should Mathematics and Physics be compulsory for Engineering admission?**

1. Covid 19

- Large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.
- Zoonotic virus
- Common signs of infection
- Standard recommendations.
- Outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.
- As on 28 March 2021, 1.2 Cr. cases in India, 1.14 Cr. recovered, 1.62 L deaths. World total 12.7 Cr., Recovered 7.21 Cr., Deaths 27.8 L.
- As on 27 March, 5.14 crore administered at least one dose of vaccine in India (3.76% of population), 8.8 million fully vaccinated.
- 31 crore administered at least one dose of vaccine globally (3.98% of population), 11.9 crore fully vaccinated.

1a. Questions Related to Covid 19

1. Which sections of population are most affected? Why?
2. What precautions need be taken to prevent the disease?
3. Why are traditional medicines not effective?
4. Which Government body decides the technical aspects of Covid treatment?
5. What is 'Flattening of Curve'? Has India's curve flattened? Are there any state where the curve is yet to flatten?
6. What is herd immunity?
7. What are the tests to detect Covid 19?
8. How does Lockdown affect the economy? Family Life? Social Life?
9. What laws are available to the Govt to control Covid 19?
10. Which govt body controls vaccines?
11. How do we say one vaccine is better than another?
12. Can you compare the two vaccines in use in India?
13. What is Vaccine Maitri Initiative? What are its outcomes?
14. What is Gavi? Is it a part of WHO?
15. What is meant by 'New Normal'?
16. What steps have been taken by Gol to mitigate sufferings from Covid 19?
17. How do new strains of Corona Virus develop?
18. What are the pros and cons of 'Work from Home'?
19. Are we witnessing a second wave now?

1b. DCGI Guidelines on COVID Vaccines

- On the lines of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Food and Drug Administration (US FDA), the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has issued a new set of guidelines for COVID-19 vaccine candidates in September 2020, focussing on safety, immunogenicity and efficacy parameters.
- According to the guideline, a COVID-19 vaccine candidate should have at least 50 percent of efficacy in the Phase-3 clinical trial for it to be widely deployed. Additionally, the pharma companies developing the vaccines must provide adequate data informing the potential risk of vaccine-associated Enhanced Respiratory Disease (ERD).

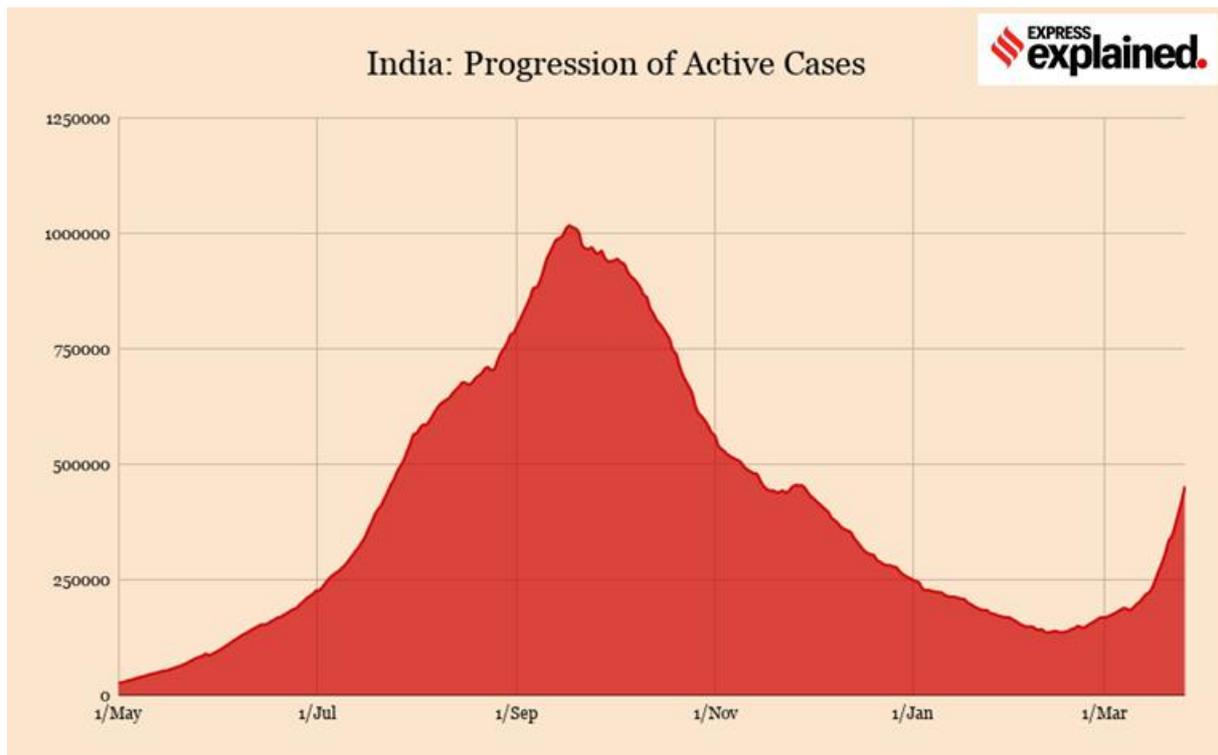
1c. COVID Vaccines in India

- Two vaccines for coronavirus, Oxford University's Covishield, which was developed by the Pune-based Serum Institute, and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, received emergency approval from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) on 3 January 2021.
- Both vaccines have to be administered in two doses and stored at temperatures between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius.
- India launched COVID vaccine drive on 16th January, 2021. The first target group includes healthcare and frontline workers. The second group to receive COVID 19 vaccine will be persons over 50 years of age and persons under 50 years with comorbid conditions.
- The hasty nod for Bharat Biotech International Ltd.'s Covaxin, developed in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research and National Institute of Virology, has raised eyebrows in the scientific and healthcare communities about a "public rollout of an untested product," according to a national network of nongovernment organizations.
- Covaxin was introduced with a caveat that its use will be restricted to "public interest as an abundant precaution, in clinical trial mode, especially in the context of mutant strains.
- The subject expert committee (SEC) has recommended to the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) a restricted emergency use of Covaxin.

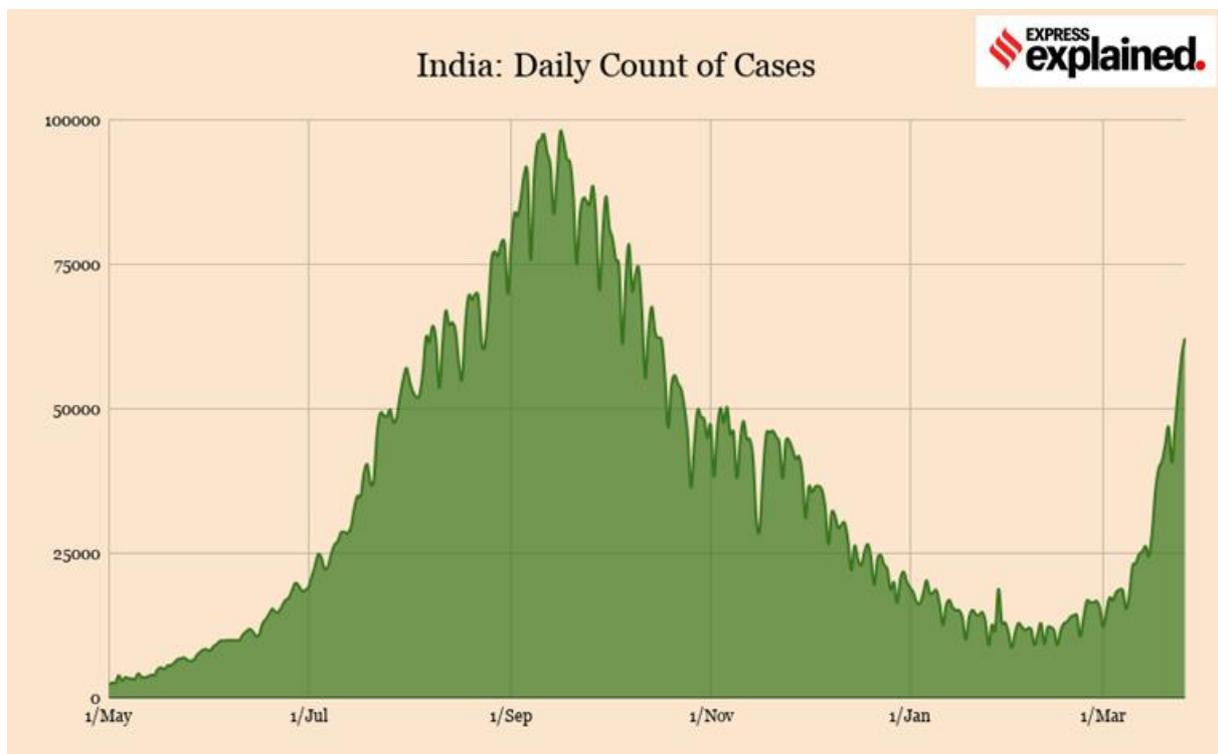
1d. Vaccine Maitri Initiative

- India is engaged in the world's largest vaccination programme for its own citizens. But that hasn't deterred the Government from distributing Indian-made Covishield vaccines to other nations through its gigantic *Vaccine Maitri* (Vaccine Friendship) initiative.
- While more than 5.5 million doses of the vaccine have been distributed in the first week under its 'Neighbourhood First' policy – including the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain in the Gulf – and to countries like Brazil and Morocco, India further plans to gift the vaccine doses to Oman, CARICOM countries, Nicaragua and Pacific Island states.
- India plans to supply 10 million vaccine doses to Africa, 5 lakh doses to Sri Lanka and 1 million doses to UN health workers under GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation) COVAX facility. Commercial exports of the coronavirus vaccine are planned for Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Canada, Mongolia, and other countries.

1e. Second Wave?



Progression of active Covid-19 cases in India



India daily count of Covid 19 cases

- On 26 March 2021, more than 62,000 positive cases were detected in the country. Just ten days ago, this daily count of cases was less than 30,000.
- In July - August last year it had taken 23 days for India to move from 30,000 cases a day to 60,000.
- At the rate at which new infections are getting detected, there seems to be a real threat of the September peak getting surpassed. Till now, the second wave has been powered primarily by Maharashtra. On 26 March, Gujarat and Punjab also notched up their highest single-day numbers ever, but their previous peaks were one-tenth that of Maharashtra.
- The major contributing states are Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu.
- With more and more people getting vaccinated, and a large proportion having already been infected, the expectation is that the second wave would last for a shorter period of time than the first.

1f. Work from Home – Pros and Cons

- One of the things the COVID pandemic has reminded us is we humans are incredibly adaptable. Working from Home is one of the important aspects of the 'new normal'.

There are plenty of advantages to working from home:

- No more crowded buses or trains. No more annoying **traffic jams**.
- Since you **don't have to commute** anymore, you also save a lot of time which could be used for increasing productivity or leisure.
- You can save money on **train/bus tickets and petrol bills**. Not having to use your own vehicle is also a saving.
- Savings on business attire and restaurant bills.
- You can work even if you have a mild fever or cold.
- Many companies allow **flexible working hours**, which helps you to keep your private appointments with doctor, barber etc. without worrying about work.
- The time you save can be usefully spent with your family, leading to better **work/life balance**.
- Reduces **stress levels** and gets you better sleep.
- You can create your own **working environment** that works best for you, even outside your home.
- You don't have to put up with a **boss standing behind** you or bullying colleagues.
- You can enjoy homemade meals and spend some time on workouts.
- It provides the employer the option to provide work to individuals who through **disability** are unable to travel to a workplace.
- National **savings** in terms of energy and fuel.
- During the coronavirus pandemic, when most people in the world had to shift to telecommuting, **global CO2 emissions** decreased significantly during the first few months of lockdown.
- Studies show that telecommuting have modest but beneficial effects on employees' job satisfaction, perceived autonomy, stress levels, manager-rated job performance, and (lower) work-family conflict.
- Telecommuting also **reduces turnover intent**, or the intention to quit one's job. Increased job satisfaction, decreased turnover intent and role stress related to telecommuting partly because of a decrease in work-family conflict.
- Additionally, the increase in autonomy from teleworking in turn increases job satisfaction.

Cons of Work from Home:

- No quick coffee breaks, no lunch together, no exchanging weekend plans with your colleagues. The **lack of social interactions** can be really hard for some people.
- Sometimes it's **hard to separate** private life and business life.
- **Potential distractions** are everywhere when you work from home. It really takes a lot of discipline to focus on your job and actually get things done.
- In the absence of supervision, **productivity** could go down.

- You may miss **colleagues** who share your worries and help you in your work.
- Most companies provide offices with **ergonomic chairs** or even standing desks. When you work from home you might not want to invest that much money into proper home office equipment.
- Limited **communication** options can make collaborations harder.
- Lack of self-discipline may lead to **health problems** such as backpain.
- Jobs that allow workers to use a variety of skills increase workers' internal work motivation. If teleworkers are limited in teamwork opportunities and have fewer opportunities to use a variety of skills, they may have lower internal motivation towards their work. Also, perceived social isolation can lead to **less motivation**.
- Many people view WFH as a "complement rather than a substitute for work in the workplace."
- To overcome the negative aspects of videoconferencing, Microsoft has developed '**Together mode**', which places all the participants on a video call together in a virtual space, such as an auditorium, meeting room or coffee bar, so they look like they're in the same place together. The new feature ditches the traditional grid of boxes, creating an environment that users say has a profound impact on the feel of the video conference and provides more cohesion to the [group](#).



2. AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

- On May 12, 2020, the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, announced a special economic package of ₹20 lakh crore (equivalent to 10 percent of India's GDP) with the aim of making the country independent against the tough competition in the global supply chain and to help in empowering the poor, labourers, migrants who have been adversely affected by COVID. Following this announcement, the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, through five press conferences, announced the detailed measures under the economic package.

The key measures proposed are:

- The **borrowing limits of state governments** will be increased from 3 percent to 5 percent of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for the year 2020-21.
- A new **PSE policy** has been announced with plans to privatise PSEs, except the ones functioning in certain strategic sectors which will be notified by the government.
- All businesses (including MSMEs) will be provided with **collateral free automatic loans** of up to three lakh crore rupees. MSMEs can borrow up to 20 percent of their entire outstanding credit as on February 29, 2020 from banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs). Borrowers with up to ₹25 crore outstanding and ₹100 crore turnover will be eligible for such loans and can avail the scheme till October 31, 2020. Interest on the loan will be capped and 100 percent credit guarantee on principal and interest will be given to banks and NBFCs.
- A fund of funds with a corpus of ₹10,000 crore will be set up for **MSMEs**. This will provide equity funding for MSMEs with growth potential and viability.
- Promoters of MSMEs will be given debt from banks, which will be infused into the MSMEs as equity.
- A **Special Liquidity Scheme** was announced under which ₹30,000 crore of investment will be made by the government in both primary and secondary market transactions in investment grade debt paper of Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)/Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)/Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs). The central government will provide 100 percent guarantee for these securities.
- A special scheme will be launched to facilitate easy access to credit for **street vendors**.
- A special **insolvency resolution** framework for MSMEs under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 will be notified.
- To protect Indian MSMEs from **competition** from foreign companies, global tenders of up to ₹200 crore will not be allowed in government procurement tenders.
- Direct listing of securities by Indian public companies in permissible foreign jurisdictions will be allowed.
- The **definition of MSMEs** will be changed by amending the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006. As per the proposed definition, the investment limit will be increased from ₹25 lakh to ₹1 crore for micro enterprises, from ₹5 crore to ₹10 crore for small enterprises, and from ₹10 crore to ₹20 crore for medium enterprises. A new criteria of annual turnover will be introduced. The turnover limit for Micro, Small and Medium enterprises will be ₹5 crore, ₹50 crore, and ₹100 crore, respectively. The current distinction between manufacturing and services MSMEs (to provide different investment limits for each category) will be removed.

- Certain offences under the Companies Act, 2013 will be **decriminalised**. These include minor technical and procedural defaults such as shortcomings in CSR reporting, inadequacies in Board report, filing defaults, delay in holding of AGM. Several compoundable offences will be shifted to internal adjudication mechanism.
- Farmers will be provided institutional credit facilities at concessional rates through **Kisan Credit Cards**. This scheme will cover 2.5 crore farmers with concessional credit worth two lakh crore rupees.
- An additional fund of ₹30,000 crore will be released as **emergency working capital for farmers**. This fund will be disbursed through NABARD to Rural Cooperative Banks (RCBs) and Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) for meeting their crop loans requirements.
- The Pradhan Mantri **Matsya Sampada Yojana** (PMMSY) will be launched for integrated, sustainable, and inclusive development of marine and inland fisheries.
- An **Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund** of ₹15,000 crore will be set up, with the aim of supporting private investment in dairy processing, value addition, and cattle feed infrastructure. Incentives will be given for establishing plants for export of niche dairy products.
- The government will approve plans worth ₹6,000 crore under the Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) to facilitate job creation for **tribals/adivasis**.
- The **Essential Commodities Act, 1955** empowers the central and state governments control the production, supply and distribution of certain commodities to avoid scarcity in the country. Commodities covered under the Act include edible oil and seeds, pulses, sugarcane and its products, and rice paddy. The Act will be amended to deregulate food items including cereals, edible oils, oilseeds, pulses, onions and potato. This is expected to allow better price realisation for farmers by attracting investments and enabling competition in the sector.
- A central law will be formulated to provide: (i) adequate **choices to farmers to sell** their produce at remunerative prices, (ii) barrier free inter-state trade, and (iii) a framework for e-trading of agriculture produce. Currently, farmers are bound to sell their produce only to the licensees in Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs). The proposed amendments seek to enable free flow of agricultural produce and establish a smooth supply chain providing options of better price realisation to farmers.
- A facilitative legal framework will be created to enable farmers to engage with processors, aggregators, large retailers, and exporters in a fair and transparent manner. Risk mitigation for farmers, assured returns, and quality standardisation will form an integral part of the framework. This is aimed at enabling farmers to predict the price of crops at the time of sowing and will also increase private sector investment in the sector.
- **Migrant workers** will be able to access the Public Distribution System (Ration) from any Fair Price Shop in India by March 2021 under the scheme of **One Nation One Card**. The scheme will introduce the inter-state portability of access to ration for migrant labourers.
- The migrant labour/urban poor will be provided living facilities at affordable rent under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY).
- Restrictions on utilisation of the Indian Air Space will be eased so that civilian flying becomes more efficient.

- World-class airports will be built through PPP mode.
- **FDI limit in defence** manufacturing under automatic route will be increased from 49 percent to 74 percent.
- Make in India initiative will be promoted in the defence sector aiming to make the country independent in terms of production. A list of weapons/platforms will be released which will be banned for import based on a year wise timeline.
- In March 2020, the Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill was passed, which opened up the coal sector for commercial mining. Auctions will be conducted for **allocation of coal mines**.
- The investment in public health will be increased along with investment in grass root health institutions of urban and rural areas. The lab networks are being strengthened in districts and block levels for efficient management of the pandemic. The **National Digital Health Blueprint** will be implemented, which aims at creating an ecosystem to support universal health coverage in an efficient, inclusive, safe and timely manner using digital technology.
- Union Budget allocation for **MGNREGS** will be increased from ₹61,500 crore to ₹1,01,500 crore (65 percent increase) for 2020-21.
- On June 1, 2020 the Union Government **increased MSP** for 14 kharif crops including paddy and bajra, to enable farmers to get 50-83 percent more than the cost of the crop.



2a. Economic Stimulus Package 4.0

- Announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on November 12, 2020.
- **AtmaNirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana**, aimed at incentivising the creation of new employment opportunities during the Covid-19 economic recovery phase.
- The new scheme will benefit any new employee joining employment in EPFO registered establishments on monthly wages less than ₹15,000.
- Establishments registered with EPFO will be eligible for the benefits if they add new employees compared to reference base of employees as in September 2020. In order to avail the benefits, establishments, with up to 50 employees, would have to add a minimum of two new employees.
- The organisations, with more than 50 employees, would have to add at least five employees to avail the benefits. The establishments registering with EPFO after the commencement of scheme will get subsidy for all new employees and the scheme will remain operational till June 30, 2021.
- Government of India will provide subsidy for two years in respect of new employees engaged on or after 1st October, 2020 and up to 30th June, 2021 at following scale:
 - ▶ Establishments employing up to 1000 employees: Employee's contributions (12% of Wages) & Employer's contributions (12% of wages) totalling 24% of wages
 - ▶ Establishments employing more than 1000 employees: Only Employee's EPF contributions (12% of EPF wages)
- The subsidy support to get credited upfront in Aadhaar seeded EPFO Account (UAN) of eligible new employee.

2b. Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme

- In order to reduce India's dependence on China, the government in March 2020 announced the PLI scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing.
- The scheme proposes production linked incentive to boost domestic manufacturing and attract large investments in mobile phone manufacturing and specified electronic components including Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging (ATMP) units.
- The Scheme shall extend an incentive of 4% to 6% on incremental sales (over base year) of goods manufactured in India and covered under target segments, to eligible companies, for a period of 5 years subsequent to the base year as defined.
- The Union Cabinet approved the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for 10 sectors on November 11, 2020. These are pharmaceuticals, automobiles and auto components, telecom and networking products, advanced chemistry cell battery, textile, food products, solar modules, white goods, and specialty steel.

2c. Education Sector under AtmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

- Aimed at holistic development of the students of the country.
- PM **eVidya** will be launched for multi-mode access to digital/online education. This program will include facilities to support school education in states/UTs under the DIKSHA scheme (one nation, one digital platform).
- **DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing)** is a unique initiative which leverages existing highly scalable and flexible digital infrastructures, while keeping teachers at the centre. It is built considering the whole teacher's life cycle – from the time student teachers enrol in Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) to after they retire as teachers.
- The DIKSHA platform offers teachers, students and parents engaging learning material relevant to the prescribed school curriculum. Students can download the DIKSHA application and scan the textbook QR codes for easy access to the lessons.
- **National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission** will be launched by December 2020 to ensure that every child attains learning level and outcomes in grade 5 by 2025.
- HRD ministry is planning to beam 12 Direct to Home (DTH) channels on televisions under the **Swayam Prabha platform**, with one channel dedicated to one class each (One Class, One Channel), as Internet cannot reach everyone.
- The expertise of agencies like the NCERT and the CBSE may be used to develop content and run these channels.
- The Swayam Prabha is a group of 32 DTH channels devoted to telecasting of educational programmes on 24/7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite.
- **'Manodarpan'** initiative – With an aim to provide psycho-social support and counselling to students for their mental health and well-being, Union Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' launched 'Manodarpan' initiative on July 21, 2020.
- Those who need psycho-social assistance or counselling can visit the official website of Manodarpan or call on a helpline number.

2d. Opening up the Defence Sector

- The Government of India in May 2020 announced that the FDI limit in Defence Sector up to **74 percent** from the existing 49 percent through the Automatic Route for companies seeking new defence industrial license and up to 100 percent by Government Route wherever it is likely to result in access to modern technology or for other reasons to be recorded.
- Under 'AtmaNirbhar Bharat' campaign of Govt of India, Ministry of Defence (MoD) in August 2020 prepared a list of **101 items** for which there would be an embargo on the import beyond the timeline indicated against them. This would offer a great opportunity to the Indian defence industry to manufacture these items using their own design and development capabilities to meet the requirements of the Armed Forces in the coming years.
- This list includes some high technology weapon systems like artillery guns, assault rifles, corvettes, sonar systems, transport aircrafts, light combat helicopters (LCHs), radars and many other items to fulfil the needs of our Defence Services.
- An innovation ecosystem for Defence titled **Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX)** has been launched in April 2018. iDEX is aimed at creation of an ecosystem to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging Industries including MSMEs, Start-ups, Individual Innovators, R&D institutes and Academia and provide them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D which has potential for future adoption for Indian defence and aerospace needs.
- Under the iDEX scheme, a maximum of ₹1.5 crore funding is available to a participant for development of a prototype.
- Government had notified the '**Strategic Partnership (SP) Model**' in May 2017, which envisages establishment of long-term strategic partnerships with Indian entities through a transparent and competitive process, wherein they would tie up with global Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to seek technology transfers to set up domestic manufacturing infrastructure and supply chains.
- Government has notified a '**Policy for indigenisation of components and spares used in Defence Platforms**' in March 2019 with the objective to create an industry ecosystem which is able to indigenize the imported components (including alloys & special materials) and sub-assemblies for defence equipment and platform manufactured in India.
- In Feb 2018, Government decided to establish **two defence industrial corridors** to serve as an engine of economic development and growth of defence industrial base in the country. They span across Chennai, Hosur, Coimbatore, Salem and Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu and across Aligarh, Agra, Jhansi, Kanpur, Chitrakoot and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh.
- **Defence Investor Cell** has been created in February 2018 the Ministry to provide all necessary information including addressing queries related to investment opportunities, procedures and regulatory requirements for investment in the sector.
- Under the **Public Procurement Order 2017**, Department of Defence Production has notified list of 24 items for which there is local capacity and completion and procurement of these items shall be done from local suppliers only irrespective of the purchase value.

- **Defence Acquisition Procedure – 2020** was unveiled on 28 September 2020. It will empower Indian domestic industry through Make in India initiative with the ultimate aim of turning India into a global manufacturing hub.
- With the announcement of new FDI Policy, suitable provisions have been incorporated like new category 'Buy (Global – Manufacture in India)' done to encourage foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to setup 'manufacturing or maintenance entities' through its subsidiary in India while enabling requisite protections to domestic industry.

2e. Defence Production & Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) 2020

- To provide impetus to self-reliance in defence manufacturing.
- The policy has laid out following goals and objectives:
 1. To achieve a turnover of ₹1,75,000 Crore including export of ₹35,000 Crore in Aerospace and Defence goods and services by 2025.
 2. To develop a dynamic, robust and competitive Defence industry, including Aerospace and Naval Shipbuilding industry.
 3. To reduce dependence on imports and take forward “Make in India” initiatives through domestic design and development.
 4. To promote export of defence products and become part of the global defence value chains.
 5. To create an environment that encourages R&D, rewards innovation, creates Indian IP ownership and promotes a robust and self-reliant defence industry.
- The strategies include the following:
 - ▶ to build **domestic capabilities for designing, developing and manufacturing** defence equipment. A negative list of weapons will be updated periodically and notified year-wise.
 - ▶ **Indigenization policy** which aims to create an industry ecosystem to indigenize the imported components and sub-assemblies for defence equipment and platform manufactured in India. 5,000 such items are proposed to be indigenized by 2025.
 - ▶ **Investments in the aviation sector** will be encouraged which will help in co-development and strengthening defence ecosystem and will be facilitated in association with the Ministry of Civil Aviation.
 - ▶ By implementing the **nationwide Research & Development capabilities**, future requirements of the services could be met and critical gaps in related technologies would be fulfilled.
 - ▶ **Ordnance factories will be corporatized** to make them competitive and to improve their productivity. Efforts will also be made to create a multi-tier domestic supply chain.
 - ▶ To streamline the **quality assurance process** and to cut down the hold points and reduce the cycle time, an IT platform with an industry interface will be developed.

2f. SRIJAN Portal

- Launched on 14 August 2020.
- Pursuant to 'AtmaNirbhar Bharat' announcement, the Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence, Government of India has developed a portal named, srijandefence.gov.in, as "**Opportunities for Make in India in Defence**". The main objective of the portal is to partner the private sector in indigenization efforts of Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs), Ordnance Factory Board and the Armed Forces. The portal will be a non-transactional online market place platform.
- DPSUs, OFB and the 3 Service Headquarters (SHQs) will display their items on this portal, which they have imported or going to import, each item having sizeable import value. They will also display those items which have been planned/targeted in the coming years, for indigenization.
- The Indian industry will be able to show their interest in those items for which they can design, develop and manufacture as per their capability or through joint venture with Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). The concerned DPSUs/OFB/SHQs, based on their requirement of the items and their respective guidelines & procedures, will interact with the interested Indian industry for indigenization. The interested Indian industry can also interact with concerned DPSUs/OFB/SHQs for their queries related to indigenization through the contact details given under each item.

2g. PM SVANidhi or PM Street Vendors AtmaNirbhar Nidhi

- The COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns have adversely impacted the livelihoods of street vendors. They usually work with a small capital base and might have consumed the same during the lockdown. Therefore, there is an urgent need to provide credit for working capital to street vendors to resume their business.
- PM SVANidhi is a Central Sector Scheme i.e. fully funded by Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs with the following objectives: (i) To facilitate working capital loan up to ₹10,000; (ii) To incentivize regular repayment; and (iii) To reward digital transactions
- The Scheme is available for beneficiaries belonging to only those States/UTs which have notified Rules and Scheme under Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014.
- The vendors, availing loan under the scheme, are eligible to get an interest subsidy @ 7 percent.
- Small Industries Development Bank of India is the technical partner for implementation of this scheme.



3. The Three Farm Laws

- **Farmer's Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020**
- Allows intra-state and inter-state trade of farmers' produce beyond the physical premises of APMC markets. States are prohibited from levying any market fee, cess or levy outside APMC areas.
- **The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020**
- Provides a framework for the protection and empowerment of farmers with reference to the sale and purchase of farm products. The provisions of the Act will override all state APMC laws.
- **Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020**
- Removes commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities.

3a. Current Agitation by Farmers

- Farmers have criticised the legislations for **allowing corporations to enter the agricultural sector**. They are also concerned that this will mark the end of the state procurement and MSP.
- Farmers also want **MSP to be made part of the law** and make it legally binding that there will be no trading below MSP.
- Farmers dependent on mandi-based traders, who may lose business.
- Loss of jobs for mandi workers.
- State governments, which earn an income through transactions at mandis, stand to lose out on tax revenues.
- Small farmers are afraid that they may not have bargaining power over corporates, nor will they be able to sell their produce at far off places.

3b. Govt Stand on Farm Laws

- On 30 December the Centre agreed to “decriminalise” stubble burning by excluding farmers from the ambit of the ‘Commission for the Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance 2020’, and drop those provisions of the draft Electricity Amendment Bill, 2020, which are intended to change the existing mode of subsidy payment to consumers.
- Govt offered clause wise discussion of laws, but not accepted.
- Govt offered to suspend laws for 18 months; not accepted.
- Allegations of conspiracy against the State.
- On 12 January 2021, the Supreme Court of India suspended the farm laws and formed a committee to look into the grievances of protesting farmers.
- The protesting farmers refused to appear before the Committee as they alleged that the Members of the committee set up by the Supreme Court on farm laws are pro-government.

3c. General Causes of Agrarian Distress

- The major causes of agrarian distress include:
 - ▶ Two successive years of drought in 2014 and 2015.
 - ▶ Unfinished agenda of land reforms
 - ▶ Access, adequacy and timeliness of institutional credit
 - ▶ Inadequacy of MSP system to reach all farmers.
 - ▶ Low enrolment, high premium and indifference of insurance companies in implementing the crop insurance schemes.
 - ▶ Slow implementation of irrigation projects.
 - ▶ Inadequate marketing infrastructure and delays in APMC reforms.
 - ▶ Lack of major technological breakthroughs in the farming sector.
 - ▶ Lack of food processing clusters.
 - ▶ Delay in decentralization of procurement of farm produce.
 - ▶ Low productivity.
 - ▶ Half-hearted implementation of M.S. Swaminathan Commission Recommendations.

3d. M.S. Swaminathan Commission recommendations

- **Distribute** ceiling-surplus and waste land among farmers: The share of the bottom half of the rural households in the total land ownership was only 3 per cent and the top 10 per cent was as high as 54 per cent. One of the demands of the agitating farmers today is that they should be made the owner of the land they have been tilling for years.
- **Prevent diversion** of prime agricultural land and forest to corporate sector for non-agricultural purposes.
- Ensure **grazing rights** and seasonal access to forests to tribals and pastoralists, and access to common property resources.
- Establish a **National Land Use Advisory Service**: This would have the capacity to link land use decisions with ecological, meteorological and marketing factors on a location and season-specific basis.
- Set up a mechanism to regulate the sale of agricultural land, based on quantum of land, nature of proposed use and category of buyer
- Give farmers a **minimum support price at 50 per cent profit** above the cost of production classified as C2 by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)

3e. Cost concepts used for calculating MSP

- Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) recommending MSPs of 23 crops.
- Cost A2 – The costs the farmer actually pays out of his/her pocket for buying various inputs ranging from seeds to fertilisers to pesticides to hired labour to hired machinery or even leased-in land.
- Cost A2 +FL - In agriculture, farmers also use a lot of family labour and if their cost is imputed and added to cost A2, that concept is called cost A2+FL.
- Cost C2 - the Comprehensive cost (cost C2), includes imputed costs of family labour, imputed rent of owned land and imputed interest on owned capital.

3f. Doubling Farmers' Income by 2022

- To promote farmers' welfare, reduce agrarian distress and bring parity between income of farmers and those working in non-agricultural professions.
- Doubling farmers' real income till 2022-23 over the base year 2015-16 requires 10.41% annual growth in farmers' income. This can be achieved through
 - Improvement in productivity
 - Saving in cost of production
 - Increase in cropping intensity
 - Diversification towards high-value crops
 - Shifting cultivators to non-farm occupations
 - Improvement in terms of trade for farmers.
- The Agriculture Export Policy, 2018 approved by the Union Cabinet on 6 December 2018 aims at doubling agricultural exports from USD 30 Billion to USD 60 Billion by 2022, diversify the export basket, to provide an institutional mechanism for market access and to enable farmers get the benefit of export opportunities in overseas markets.



4. National Education Policy 2020

- Committee chaired by Dr. K. Kasturirangan
- Focus on **early childhood care, reform the current exam system, strengthen teacher training, and restructure the education regulatory framework.**
- Set up a **National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy.**
- Emphasis on promoting multilingualism and Indian languages; The **medium of instruction** until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language.
- Setting up of a new National Assessment Centre, **PARAKH** (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development).
- Ensuring availability of all resources through school complexes and clusters.
- Setting up of **State School Standards Authority (SSSA).**
- Exposure of **vocational education** in school and higher education system.
- Increase public investment in education, strengthen the use of technology and increase focus on vocational and adult education.
- Major reconfiguration of curricular and pedagogical structure with **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)** as an integral part of school education.
- Extension of Right to Education Act 2009 to cover children of **ages 3 to 18.**
- **5+3+3+4** curricular and pedagogical structure based on cognitive and socio-emotional developmental stages of children.
- Foundational Stage (age 3-8 yrs): 3 years of pre-primary plus Grades 1-2; Preparatory Stage (8-11 years): Grades 3-5; Middle Stage (11-14 years): Grades 6-8; and Secondary Stage (14-18 years): Grades 9-12.
- Massive transformation in **Teacher Education** by shutting down sub-standard teacher education institutions and moving all teacher preparation/education programmes into large multidisciplinary universities/colleges.
- The **4-year integrated stage-specific B.Ed. programme** will eventually be the minimum degree qualification for teachers.
- Increasing GER in higher education to 50%.
- **Restructuring of higher education institutions** with three types of higher education institutions is proposed- Type 1: Focused on world-class research and high quality teaching; Type 2: Focused on high quality teaching across disciplines with significant contribution to research; Type 3: High quality teaching focused on undergraduate education.
- Re-structuring of Undergraduate programs of 3 or 4 years duration and having **multiple exit and entry options.**
- Regulatory system of higher education will ensure that the distinct functions of **regulation, accreditation, funding, and academic standard setting** will be performed by distinct, independent, and empowered bodies.
- **National Research Foundation**, an apex body for creating a strong research culture and building research capacity across higher education.
- **National Higher Education Regulatory Council** as the only regulator for all higher education including professional education.
- Creation of accreditation eco-system led by revamped **National Accreditation Council (NAC).**

- Professional Standard Setting Bodies for each area of professional education and UGC to transform to **Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC)**.
- **General Education Council (GEC)**, which will frame expected learning outcomes for higher education programmes, also referred to as 'graduate attributes'.
- The private and public institutions will be treated on par and education will remain a '**not for profit**' activity.
- Setting up of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (**MERUs**).
- The Centre and the States will work together to increase the public investment in Education sector to reach **6% of GDP** at the earliest.
- Policy initiatives for promoting **internationalization of higher education**, strengthening quality open and distance learning, technology integration at all levels of education, adult and lifelong learning and initiatives to enhance participation of under-represented groups, and eliminate gender, social category and regional gaps in education outcomes.
- Promotion of Indian and **Classical Languages** and setting up three new National Institutes for Pali, Persian and Prakrit and an Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI).

4a. Medium of Education

- The Supreme Court on 3 September 2020 refused to stay the Andhra Pradesh High Court's order striking down the Andhra Pradesh government's decision to make English the medium of education for government school students from Classes I to VI beginning 2020-21 academic year.
- The Court pointed out that Section 29(2)(f) of the Right to Education (RTE) Act says that the medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in a child's mother tongue.
- Article 29 (Protection of interests of minorities) gives all citizens right to conserve their language and prohibits discrimination on the basis of language.
- Article 350A (Facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage) provides that it shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.

Arguments in favour of English as medium of education

- The ability to speak in English qualifies one for many jobs which are not yet available for speakers of regional languages.
- Lack of knowledge of English will be a disadvantage to the students of government schools as compared to those of English-medium private schools in competitive exams.
- Most technical and scientific books are available only in English and much of higher education is also imparted in English. This may hinder the access of students from government schools to STEM and higher education.
- English being the global lingua franca gives the students opportunity to compete at the global level.
- Knowing English is often considered a status symbol.

Arguments against English as Medium of Instruction

- The use of mother tongue makes the process of learning familiar, comprehensible, and approachable for the students. This encourages wholehearted engagement of students in the learning process and boosts their confidence.
- Using mother tongue allows students to express themselves better and communicate their experiences, their multifaceted identities, and their cultures.
- The use of English language often creates a divide between students hailing from backward castes and communities and the 'upper' class. Often, real talent and merit gets suppressed due to an imposed linguistic disability.
- The recently announced New Education Policy states that wherever possible, students till Class 5 in schools should be taught in mother tongue/regional language/local language. It also introduces the Three-Language Formula for primary education, as per the recommendation of Kothari Commission, 1968.



5. Strategic Disinvestment of Central Public Sector Enterprises

- The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) which comes under the Finance Ministry defines Strategic disinvestment as follows: “Strategic disinvestment would imply the sale of a substantial portion of the Government shareholding of a central public sector enterprises (CPSE) of up to 50 percent, or such higher percentage as the competent authority may determine, along with transfer of management control.”
- The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) has drawn up plan for strategic sale in 35 PSUs, including Air India, BPCL, BEML, Scooters India, Shipping Corporation of India Ltd. (SCI), Container Corporation of India Ltd. (CONCOR).
- 25% share with Strategic Partner
- To raise the funds partially for Govt. Expenditures
- To minimize fiscal deficits in union budgets
- Loss making PSUs, Non-essential PSUs
- Inefficiencies in government sector
- “The government has no business being in business”.
- Professional management, Market orientation
- Employees’ protection, Private Monopolies
- Private sector not necessarily more efficient.
- The new Public Sector Enterprise (PSE) policy for Aatmanirbhar Bharat, which was announced on 4 February 2021, classifies public sector commercial enterprises as strategic and non-strategic sector, and would be limited to central public sector enterprises, public sector banks and public sector insurance companies.
- Disinvestment/Strategic Disinvestment Policy has four strategic sectors in which "bare minimum" number of CPSEs will be retained and the rest would be privatised or merged or made subsidiary of another CPSE or closed down.
- The four sectors are
 - ▶ atomic energy, space and defence;
 - ▶ transport and telecommunications;
 - ▶ power, petroleum, coal and other minerals; and
 - ▶ banking, insurance and financial services
- Major port trusts and Airport Authority of India, set up under the Acts of Parliament, would not fall within its ambit.



6. Domicile-based Job Quota

- Andhra Pradesh government was the first state government to create reservations for locals in **private sector jobs** (75 percent) on 23 July 2019.
- Madhya Pradesh - August 2020, Haryana - July 2020, Maharashtra, Gujarat.
- Reluctance of Private Sector, Lack of Enforcement
- **Article 16** - guarantees equal treatment under law in matters of public employment, 16 (2) - prohibits the state from discriminating on grounds of place of birth or residence.
- **Article 16(3)** provides exception - Parliament may make a law “prescribing” a requirement of residence for jobs in a particular state. This power vests solely in the Parliament, not state legislatures.
- In 2019, the **Allahabad High Court** struck down a recruitment notification by the UP Subordinate Service Selection Commission which prescribed preference for women who are “original residents” of UP alone.
- Exercising the powers it has under Article 16(3), Parliament enacted the Public Employment (Requirement as to Residence) Act, aimed at abolishing all existing residence requirements in the states and enacting exceptions only in the case of the special instances of Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and Himachal Pradesh.
- **Article 371D** safeguards the rights of local people in employment and education and was created after agitation in the state of Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana). It was incorporated as the 32nd Amendment of the Constitution in 1974.



7. Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion

- UP Ordinance 27 November 2020
- Conversion of religion is prohibited on the following **grounds**:
 - Misrepresentation
 - Force - show or threat of force or threat of injury
 - Undue influence
 - Coercion – psychological pressure or physical force
 - Allurement – money, material benefit, employment, free education, better lifestyle, divine displeasure etc.
 - Any other fraudulent means defined as impersonation of any kind
 - By marriage
- Any marriage for the sole purpose of unlawful conversion or vice versa, either by the man converting himself or woman converting herself before or after marriage, shall be declared void by the family court. Both **conversion for marriage or marriage for conversion** is illegal.
- Reconversion back to the original religion will not be deemed to be conversion.
- Imprisonment and fine for offence and abetment.
- The offence is cognizable and non-bailable.
- **Lawful conversion** can be done through the following process: (i) Person desiring to convert fills a form giving 60-day notice to district magistrate saying he is doing it without any force, coercion etc. (ii) Religious converter will file a form giving 30-day notice to DM of district where ceremony is to be performed. (iii) District Magistrate will enquire into real intention, purpose or cause of proposed conversion. The conversion that does not follow this process will be null and void.

Issues

- (i) Freedom to practise and propagate any religion, (ii) Inter-community relations, (iii) Targeting a particular religion, (iv) Existing laws to prevent coercive conversion.
- The law denies women their right to take life decisions which have to be guided by their guardians.
- The lawmakers claim that the laws are not against any particular community, but apply to everyone irrespective of religion.
- The laws are not against legal conversion.
- The Allahabad High Court on 18 December 2020 stayed criminal proceedings against a person from Muzaffarnagar who had been booked under Uttar Pradesh's new anti-conversion law a day after it was passed, noting that the couple involved were adults with "a fundamental right to privacy".
- The Supreme Court on 9 February 2021 asserted that adults have the right to choose their life partner while saying that it was high time "society learns to accept inter-caste and inter-faith marriages". The top court made the observations while hearing a case of an inter-caste marriage from Karnataka.



8. Regulation of Digital Media

- In September 2020 the Union government have requested the Supreme Court to frame the guidelines to regulate the digital media. The government said that there is a need to **draw the line** between “freedom of journalism” and “responsible journalism” for digital media first instead of the electronic and print media.
- Petitions have been filed in the court against the “Bindas Bol” show on the **Sudarshan TV**. The show has been accused of defaming the Muslim community joining the prestigious civil services. The petitioner has urged in the court to initiate contempt against the show’s anchor and the channel’s Editor-in-Chief for his tweets that he published after the stay order. Broadcast stayed.
- The Central Government have appealed to the Apex Court not to take any steps to regulate the electronic media like television channels stating that there is already a law on this. The law has been made after the decisions of Parliament and Supreme Court earlier. Such guidelines are required to regulate digital media such as web portals, YouTube channels etc., first since it has a greater reach and wider audience as compared to the mainstream media.
- Electronic media would normally have a **geographical barrier** and would rarely have a global presence. Digital media, on the other hand, has global presence both in terms of content coming from abroad and the content going out from the country. Apart from spreading venomous hatred, deliberate and intended instigation to not only cause violence but even terrorism it is also capable of indulging in tarnishing the image of individuals and institutions.

8a. Twitter – GOI War

- Pop singer Rihanna, Swedish social activist Greta Thunberg and former pornographic actress Mia Khalifa extended their support to the farmers protesting against centre's contentious farm laws.
- In a strongly-worded statement, the MEA described them as part of “vested interest groups” and their support as “sensationalist social media hashtags and comments” which are “neither accurate nor responsible.”
- Vice President Kamala Harris's niece Meena Harris launched a coordinated attack on India saying, “we all should be outraged by India's internet shutdowns and paramilitary violence against farmer protesters.”
- Bollywood celebrities Akshay Kumar, Ajay Devgn, Karan Johar, Suniel Shetty, ‘Bharat Ratna’ Sachin Tendulkar urged people not to fall for false propaganda against India.
- S. Jaishankar, MEA - Motivated campaigns targeting India will never succeed. We have the self confidence today to hold our own. This India will push back.

8b. The Tool Kit Controversy

- As pamphlets and fliers are used in offline protests out on streets, a toolkit is their online equivalent for protests on social media.
- The teen climate activist Greta Thunberg extended support to the ongoing farmers agitation in India and shared a toolkit on her Twitter account on February 4.
- However, shortly after she deleted the toolkit and then shared an updated version of the same document.
- The toolkit shared by Thunberg advised people on how to show support for the farmers protesting against the three contentious farm laws in India.
- The original toolkit called for a digital strike, a Twitter storm on or before January 26 and listed 'carrying out protests outside Indian embassies' as one of the actions people can take to support farm protests.
- The document also consisted of a list of previous actions taken to amplify farmers' voices online. The actions dated back till January 23, and listed several hashtags like #AskIndiaWhy.
- According to the Delhi Police, this toolkit played a significant role in turning January 26 protests violent which left a few hundred police personnel injured.
- The toolkit was not just the work of a handful of activists in India but was created in collaboration with certain Khalistani organisations.
- On 26 January some protesters broke the agreement with the police and took a detour to Red Fort where some of them hoisted a Sikh religious flag.
- On February 14 Delhi Police arrested Bengaluru based environmental activist Disha Ravi for her alleged involvement in preparing the toolkit and her links with Pro-Khalistani elements.
- Delhi Police claimed that Ravi along with lawyer Nikita Jacob and engineer Shantanu Muluk created the toolkit and shared with others to tarnish India's image.
- Jacob and Muluk took pre-arrest bail from Bombay High Court after a Delhi court issued non-bailable warrants for their arrest.

8C. Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021

- The Digital India programme has now become a movement which is empowering common Indians with the power of technology. The extensive spread of mobile phones, Internet etc. has also enabled many social media platforms to expand their footprints in India. Common people are also using these platforms in a very significant way. Some portals, which publish analysis about social media platforms and which have not been disputed, have reported the following numbers as user base of major social media platforms in India:
 - ▶ WhatsApp users: 53 Crore
 - ▶ YouTube users: 44.8 Crore
 - ▶ Facebook users: 41 Crore
 - ▶ Instagram users: 21 Crore
 - ▶ Twitter users: 1.75 Crore
- Disturbing developments in recent years
 - ▶ Persistent spread of fake news
 - ▶ Sharing of morphed images of women
 - ▶ Revenge porn
 - ▶ Misuse of social media for settling corporate
 - ▶ Use of abusive language, defamatory and obscene contents
 - ▶ Blatant disrespect to religious sentiments
 - ▶ Misuse of social media by criminals, anti-national elements
 - ▶ Inducement for recruitment of terrorists,
 - ▶ Financial frauds
 - ▶ Incitement of violence, public order
- The Supreme Court in suo-moto writ petition (**Prajwala case**) vide order dated 11 December 2018 had observed that the Government of India may frame necessary guidelines to eliminate child pornography, rape and gangrape imageries, videos and sites in content hosting platforms and other applications.
- The Rules prescribe due diligence that must be followed by intermediaries, including social media intermediaries.
- Intermediaries shall appoint a **Grievance Officer** to deal with complaints and share the name and contact details of such officer. Grievance Officer shall acknowledge the complaint within twenty four hours and resolve it within fifteen days from its receipt.
- Intermediaries shall **remove or disable access within 24 hours** of receipt of complaints of contents that exposes the private areas of individuals, show such individuals in full or partial nudity or in sexual act or is in the nature of impersonation including morphed images etc. Such a complaint can be filed either by the individual or by any other person on his/her behalf.
- To encourage innovations and enable growth of new social media intermediaries without subjecting smaller platforms to significant compliance requirement, the Rules make a distinction between social media intermediaries and **significant social media intermediaries**.

- Significant social media intermediary with more than **50 lakh registered users**.
- Significant social media intermediary shall have a **physical contact address in India** published on its website or mobile app or both.
- They will appoint a **chief compliance officer, a grievance officer and a resident grievance officer and a nodal person** for round-the-clock co-ordination with law enforcement agencies.
- A significant social media intermediary will also have to publish a **monthly compliance report** in which it will have to furnish details of the number of complaints it received during the month, number of links or content that it took down during the period, the action taken on the complaints received and whether it had proactively taken down any content that was illegal or unlawful.
- Significant social media intermediaries, which operate in the instant messaging domain now, have the additional task of mandatorily identifying the **“first originator of the information”** if such an order is passed by a court of competent jurisdiction or by a government order passed under section 69 of the Information Technology (IT) Act.
- An intermediary upon receiving actual knowledge in the form of an order by a court or being notified by the Appropriate Govt. or its agencies through authorized officer **should not host or publish** any information which is prohibited under any law in relation to the interest of the **sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, friendly relations with foreign countries** etc.
- The OTT platforms would **self-classify the content into five age based categories**- U (Universal), U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+, and A (Adult). Platforms would be required to implement **parental locks for content classified as U/A 13+ or higher, and reliable age verification mechanisms for content classified as “A”**.
- The publisher of online curated content shall prominently **display the classification rating** specific to each content or programme together with a content descriptor informing the user about the nature of the content, and advising on viewer description (if applicable) at the beginning of every programme enabling the user to make an informed decision, prior to watching the programme.
- Publishers of news on digital media would be required to observe **Norms of Journalistic Conduct of the Press Council of India and the Programme Code under the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act** thereby providing a **level playing field between the offline (Print, TV) and digital media**.
- A **three-level grievance redressal mechanism** has been established under the rules **with different levels of self-regulation**.
 - ▶ Level-I: Self-regulation by the publishers;
 - ▶ Level-II: Self-regulation by the self-regulating bodies of the publishers;
 - ▶ Level-III: Oversight mechanism.



9. The Future Group Controversies

- In August 2020, Kishore Biyani's Future Group entered into an **agreement with Reliance Retail**, a subsidiary of the Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) group, to sell its retail, wholesale, logistics and warehousing to the latter.
- As a part of the deal, Future Retail was to sell its supermarket chain **Big Bazaar**, premium food supply unit **Foodhall** and fashion and clothes supermart Brand Factory's retail as well as wholesale units to **Reliance Retail**.
- The Future group was under immense pressure from its lenders, led by the State Bank of India, to manage its debt, and the deal is seen as a bid by the group to cut down on the same. Before the August sale to Reliance, Biyani had been wooing several business groups to sell shares in several companies of Future Group in an attempt to cut down on the debt, but had not seen much success.
- Following the nationwide lockdown in March, to contain the spread of Covid-19, the retail business of Future Group had come under more stress. Sales in many of its premium food sales arm Foodhall and Brand Factory had come to a near halt in the lockdown, which lasted more than two months.
- In 2019, Biyani's Future Retail had signed another deal with global e-commerce giant Amazon. As part of the deal, Amazon had acquired 49 per cent stake in **Future Coupons**, the promoter firm of Future Retail.
- The deal had also given Amazon a 'call' option, which enabled it to exercise the option of acquiring all or part of Future Coupon's promoter, Future Retail's shareholding in the company, within 3-10 years of the agreement.
- After Future's agreement with Reliance, Amazon said the deal was a violation of a **non-competete clause** and a **right-of-first-refusal** pact it had signed with the Future Group. The deal also required Future Group to inform Amazon before entering into any sale agreement with third parties.

Non-competete clause is a restrictive covenant, or covenant not to **compete** (CNC), is a **clause** under which one party (usually an employee) agrees not to enter into or start a similar profession or trade in **competition** against another party (usually the employer).

- On its part, the Future Group has said that it had not sold any stake in the company, and was merely selling its assets and had therefore not violated any terms of the contract.
- Both Amazon and Future Group opted for an arbitration to be decided by the **Singapore International Arbitration Centre**.
- Indian laws allow FDI in multi-brand retail only with stringent conditions such as using 50 percent of the investment for back-end infrastructure, mandatory local sourcing of goods and services and so on. Most crucially, government permission is needed for such investment.
- Amazon invested ₹1,430 crore for a 49 percent stake in Future Coupons (which owned a 9.82 percent stake in Future Retail, giving itself effective veto power over Future Coupons. Thus, Amazon, with a tiny investment, was able to obtain effective veto

powers and control over a multi-brand retail company where FDI is not permitted without government approval.

- On August 12, 2019, Future Retail entered into a shareholders agreement with the KB Group (comprising Future Group founder Kishore Biyani, his family members, and certain private limited companies controlled by Kishore Biyani) and Future Coupons Ltd. This agreement provided special rights to Future Coupons, which held convertible warrants in Future Retail. Crucially, it said that retail assets of Future Retail could not be licensed, transferred or alienated without the approval of Future Coupons. In particular, it gave Future Coupons a veto over sale of Future Retail's assets to competitors, notably Reliance.
- Thus with a tiny indirect stake in Future Retail and no board position in the listed retail company, Amazon gained indirect control over the pioneer in organized retail through Big Bazaar, Easyday, eZone and FoodHall.
- Had the disclosure of these actions been made, the Enforcement Directorate would have been forced to step in. The term control in the Foreign Exchange Management Act (non-debt instrument) Rules clearly covers control rights taken through shareholder agreements. FDI laws in India allow Future Coupons to hold shares of Future Retail only as long as Future Coupons is owned and controlled by Indian residents.
- Similarly, SEBI would have required Amazon to make an open offer to acquire 26 percent of Future Retail from shareholders at an approximate price of ₹550-600 per share.
- That has not happened. Instead, Amazon used a transaction with Future Coupons to stall a scheme of arrangement (the merger of group firms and sale of assets to Reliance Retail for about ₹25,000 crore approximately) which has been considered by the Board of Future Retail to be in the interest of all stakeholders. Reliance agreed to acquire the assets of Future in a slump sale in August 2020.
- Not only did Amazon get an emergency arbitration award in Singapore, it also wrote to SEBI and other authorities to delay the deal. This prompted Future Retail to file a suit against the US company in the Delhi High Court asking for issuance of directions barring Amazon from interfering with its contract with Reliance.
- The Singapore tribunal passed an interim order and favoured the Amazon in October 2020. The court order barred the Future Retail from taking any steps to sell or encumber its assets. The Delhi HC also said, the Singapore tribunal order of asking the Future Retail to not proceed with the deal is enforceable in India.
- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) granted approval to the deal between Future Group and Reliance Retail on 20 January 2021.
- SEBI on 3 February 2021 barred Kishore Biyani, CEO of Future Group, his brother Anil Biyani and a few entities from accessing the securities market for a year for alleged insider trading between March and April 2017.
- SEBI's case against the Biyanis, Future Corporate Resources Pvt Ltd, a Future group company and other related entities, pertains to insider trading in the shares of Future Retail based on unpublished price sensitive information in 2017 when a few companies of the Future group were being restructured.
- The regulator said it found that Future Retail made a public announcement of a scheme of arrangement involving several group companies on April 20, 2017, which resulted in a demerger of a particular business of the company.

- SEBI alleged that the announcement had a positive impact on the shares of Future Retail. A probe by SEBI found that this arrangement had come into existence on March 10, 2017, and Kishore Biyani and others traded in the shares of Future Retail between March 10 and April 20, when they had knowledge of the demerger.
- SEBI barred Kishore Biyani from buying, selling or dealing in securities of Future Retail for two years.
- Kishore Biyani, brother Anil Biyani and promoter entity Future Corporate Resources have approached the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) to challenge SEBI order.
- The Delhi High Court on 1 February 2021 allowed Amazon to oppose before the regulator Future's deal to sell assets to Reliance Retail. But the court said that Amazon's attempt to control Future Retail is violative of FEMA and FDI rules.
- On February 8, a division bench of Delhi HC stayed the single judge's February 2 order which had restrained Future Group from seeking clearance for the deal with Reliance Retail from the regulatory authorities. The division bench had then allowed Future Group to go ahead with seeking clearances. Subsequently, Amazon had appealed against the division bench's order before the Supreme Court which on February 22 though allowed the proceedings for seeking clearances to continue before the National Company Law Tribunal's Mumbai bench, but barred the tribunal from passing a final order till the matter is disposed by it.
- A single-judge bench of Delhi High Court on 18 March 2021 held that the order of the Emergency Arbitrator was valid and capable of being enforced under Indian law. It concluded that the respondents, Future Group entities and promoter Biyanis, who were made a party to the case, had wilfully violated the Emergency Arbitrator's order. Rejecting objections raised by Future Group entities, the court awarded costs against them of ₹20 lakh and ordered attachment of their assets.
- A division bench of the Delhi High Court on 22 March 2021 stayed the operation of the Single-Judge bench order.
- The plea by Amazon Investment Holdings before Supreme Court challenging the Delhi High Court order which had stayed the implementation of status quo direction passed by single-judge of the High Court with respect to the Future- Reliance deal, will be heard in the final week of April.



10. Maharashtra – Karnataka Border Dispute

- Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar sparked off a controversy when he said that Belagavi, Karwar and Nipani needed to be included in Maharashtra. His office released a statement saying, “Late Balasaheb (Thackeray) always dreamt about the overall development of Maharashtra & (to) make a united Maharashtra including Belgaum, Karwar and Nipani.”
- The erstwhile Bombay Presidency had present-day Karnataka districts of Vijayapura, Belagavi, Dharwad and Uttara-Kannada. In 1948, the Belgaum municipality requested that the district be incorporated into the proposed Maharashtra state.
- But with the States Reorganisation Act of 1956, Belgaum and 10 talukas of Bombay State became a part of the then Mysore State. This happened because states were divided on the basis of linguistic and administrative lines.
- Justice Mehr Chand Mahajan Commission Report, August 1967 recommended that 264 villages be transferred to Maharashtra and that Belgaum and 247 villages remain with Karnataka.
- This was immediately rejected by Maharashtra which termed the recommendations as biased and illogical. But the state of Karnataka accepted the report’s recommendations and wanted this to be implemented.
- However, the Central government did not follow this up and left the issue open.
- Maharashtra has continued to demand that 814 villages from Karnataka on the basis of the theory of village being the unit of calculation, contiguity and enumerating linguistic population in each village. Then in 2004, the Maharashtra government moved the Supreme Court seeking resolution of the border dispute under Article 131(b) of the Constitution. This case is still pending in the apex court.
- On 18 January, 2021, Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray reiterated his government’s commitment to incorporate Marathi speaking areas of Karnataka into Maharashtra.
- Kannada and Marathi groups have started targeting vehicles and shops belonging to other language groups. Both state transport undertakings have suspended interstate bus traffic.



11. Privatization of Public Sector Banks

- Budget announcement
- Amendments required in the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1970 and 1980.
- PSB share in loans has fallen to 59.8% in 2020 from 74.28% in 2015.
- As per the RBI's Financial Stability Report, gross NPA ratio of all commercial banks may increase from 7.5% in September 2020 to 13.5% by September 2021 under the baseline scenario (from 9.7% to 16.2% for public sector banks; from 4.6% to 7.9% for private banks).
- Strong banks or weak ones?
- Huge NPAs, Frequent equity injection, Management issues
- New products, technology, market capitalization, Under reporting
- Resistance from employees' unions
- Possibility of finding no buyers for weak banks
- Lack of social commitment



12. Contempt of Court

- On August 31, 2020, the Supreme Court imposed a token penalty of Re. 1 on activist lawyer Prashant Bhushan as punishment in criminal contempt case.
- Contempt of Courts Act, 1971 - Offence of showing disrespect to the dignity or authority of a court. Civil and criminal contempt.
- Civil contempt - wilful disobedience of an order of any court.
- Criminal contempt includes any act or publication which: (i) 'scandalises' the court, or (ii) prejudices any judicial proceeding, or (iii) interferes with the administration of justice in any other manner. 'Scandalising the Court' broadly refers to statements or publications which have the effect of undermining public confidence in the judiciary.
- 21st Law Commission - amending the definition of contempt may reduce the overall impact of the law and lessen the respect that people have for courts and their authority and functioning.
- The UK had abolished the offence in its contempt laws. However, there are two differences in circumstances in India and the United Kingdom, which warranted a continuation of the offence in India. First, India continues to have a high number of criminal contempt cases, while the last offence of Scandalising the Court in the UK was in 1931. Second, the offence of Scandalising the Court continues to be punishable in UK under other laws. The Commission observed that abolishing the offence in India would leave a legislative gap.
- Supreme Court and High Courts derive their contempt powers from the Constitution. The Act only outlines the procedure in relation to investigation and punishment for contempt. Therefore, deletion of the offence from the Act will not impact the inherent constitutional powers of the superior courts to punish anyone for its contempt. These powers will continue to remain, independent of the 1971 Act.
- Art. 129 - The Supreme Court shall be a court of record and shall have all the powers of such a court including the power to punish for contempt of itself.
- Art. 142 (2) - Subject to the provisions of any law made in this behalf by Parliament, the Supreme Court shall, as respects the whole of the territory of India, have all and every power to make any order for the purpose of securing the attendance of any person, the discovery or production of any documents, or the investigation or punishment of any contempt of itself.



13. Flash Floods in Chamoli

- About 150 people were reported missing, several dead, and two hydro power projects and a key bridge severely damaged, by a flood likely set off by a glacial breach that surged through the Rishiganga river in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on 7 February 2021 morning. Among those missing were labourers at two project sites, over 30 staff members and two police personnel.
- The Rishiganga is an offshoot of Dhauliganga, which is a tributary of the Alaknanda river. The glacial burst led to the rising of water levels in the river Rishiganga, which washed away the Rishiganga small hydro project of 13.2 MW. The flash flood also affected the downstream hydro project of NTPC at Tapovan on the river Dhauliganga.
- The cause of the incident being most talked about was what glaciologists call a GLOF, or glacial lake outburst flood, but a fresh satellite assessment done by the Dehradun-based Indian Institute of Remote Sensing (IIRS), which is part of ISRO indicated that a landslide in all likelihood triggered an avalanche, resulting in flash floods.
- Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) – Glacial lakes are common in the high elevation of glacierised basin. They are formed when glacial ice or moraines or natural depressions impound water. There are varieties of such lakes, ranging from melt water ponds on the surface of glacier to large lakes in side valleys dammed by a glacier in the main valley. These lakes normally drain their water through seepage in front of the retreating glacier. The moraine creates topographic depression in which the melt water is generally accumulated leading to formation of glacial lake. When this lake is watertight, melt waters will accumulate in the basin until seepage or overflow limits the lake level.
- Such moraine-dammed lakes appear to be the most common type of glacial lakes. The impoundment of the melt may sometimes be unstable, leading to sudden release of large quantities of stored water. Failure of these ice or moraine dams leading to disastrous destruction events has been documented throughout the world. Flash floods caused by the outburst of glacial lakes, called as Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), are well known in Himalaya where such lakes had often been formed by landslides. GLOFs have immense potential of flooding in downstream areas, causing disastrous consequences due to release of large volumes of water in very short interval of time.
- It is yet to be established what triggered the breach — whether there was an avalanche in the area recently or whether the lake breach was the result of construction, anthropological activities, climate change etc.



14. Mission Karmayogi

- On 2 September 2020 the Union Cabinet approved Mission Karmayogi – National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB).
- The Mission is an endeavour to incarnate civil services into a real Karmayogi who is Creative, Constructive, Pro-active and Technically Empowered to face the future challenges.
- The Programme will be delivered by setting up an Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) – Karmayogi Platform.
- From Rule Specific to Role Specific, Institutionalized Capacity Building Training, Continuous updation of skills, ending the culture of working in silos are some of the key features of this reform process.
- Calibrate all Civil Service positions to a Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies (FRACs) approach and to create and deliver learning content relevant to the identified FRACs in every Government entity.
- Make available to all civil servants, an opportunity to continuously build and strengthen their Behavioural, Functional and Domain Competencies in their self-driven and mandated learning paths.
- Encourage and partner with the best-in-class learning content creators including public training institutions, universities, start-ups and individual experts.
- Undertake data analytics in respect of data emit provided by iGOT – Karmayogi pertaining to various aspects of capacity building, content creation, user feedback and mapping of competencies and identify areas for policy reforms.
- The ultimate aim of Mission Karmayogi is to ensure “Ease of Living” for common man, “Ease of Doing Business” and Citizen-Centricity that is reducing the gap between the government and the citizens.
- Appointing authorities will have readymade data available for choosing the right candidate for the right job.
- Real time evaluation will go a long way in ensuring Accountability and Transparency in Governance.
- Comprehensive reform of the capacity building apparatus at individual, institutional and process levels for efficient public service delivery.
- PM led HR Council to approve and monitor Civil Service Capacity Building Plans.
- Capacity Building Commission to harmonize training standards, create shared faculty and resources, and have supervisory role over all Central Training Institutions.
- Wholly owned SPV to own and operate the online learning platform and facilitate world-class learning content market-place.
- iGOT-Karmayogi platform brings the scale and state-of-the-art infrastructure to augment the capacities of over two crore officials in India. The platform is expected to evolve into a vibrant and world-class market place for content where carefully curated and vetted digital e-learning material will be made available. Besides capacity building, service matters like confirmation after probation period, deployment, work assignment and notification of vacancies etc. would eventually be integrated with the proposed competency framework.



15. New Vehicle Scrapping Policy

- Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari on 18 March 2021 announced the Vehicle Scrapping Policy in Lok Sabha. Making a Suo Motu statement in the Lok Sabha, the Minister said that *“Older vehicles pollute the environment 10 to 12 times more than fit vehicles and pose a risk to road safety”*. He said that *“in the interest of a clean environment and rider and pedestrian safety, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is introducing the Voluntary Vehicle-Fleet Modernization Program (VVMP) or “Vehicle Scrapping Policy” which is aimed at creating an Eco-System for phasing out of Unfit and Polluting Vehicles”*.
- The objectives of the policy are to reduce population of old and defective vehicles, achieve reduction in vehicular air pollutants to fulfil India’s climate commitments, improve road and vehicular safety, achieve better fuel efficiency, formalize the currently informal vehicle scrapping industry and boost availability of low-cost raw materials for automotive, steel and electronics industry.
- The ecosystem is expected to attract additional investments of around ₹10,000 Crore and 35,000 job opportunities.
- The criteria for a vehicle to be scrapped is primarily based on the fitness of vehicles through Automated Fitness Centres in case of commercial vehicles and Non-Renewal of Registration in case of private vehicles. The criteria is adapted from international best practices after a comparative study of standards from various countries like Germany, UK, USA and Japan. A Vehicle failing the fitness test or failing to get a renewal of its registration certificate may be declared as End of Life Vehicle. Criteria to determine vehicle fitness will be primarily emission tests, braking, safety equipment, among many other tests which are as per the Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989.
- The Policy proposes the following—
 - ▶ Commercial vehicles be de-registered after 15 years in case of failure to get the fitness certificate. As a disincentive measure, increased fees for fitness certificate and fitness test may be applicable for commercial vehicles 15 year onwards from the date of initial registration.
 - ▶ Private Vehicles be de-registered after 20 years if found unfit or in case of a failure to renew registration certificate. As a disincentive measure, increased re-registration fees will be applicable for private vehicles 15 year onwards from the date of initial registration.
 - ▶ All vehicles of the Central Government, State Government, Municipal Corporation, Panchayats, State Transport Undertakings, Public Sector Undertakings and autonomous bodies with the Union and State Governments may be de-registered and scrapped after 15 years from the date of registration.
 - ▶ The scheme shall provide strong incentives to owners of old vehicles to scrap old and unfit vehicles through registered scrapping centres, which shall provide the owners with a scrapping certificate. Some of these incentives include:
 - (A) Scrap Value for the old vehicle given by the scrapping centre, which is approximately 4-6% of ex-showroom price of a new vehicle.
 - (B) The state governments may be advised to offer a road- tax rebate of up to 25% for personal vehicles and up to 15% for commercial vehicles.

- (C) The vehicle manufacturers are also advised for providing a discount of 5% on purchase of new vehicle against the scrapping certificate.
- (D) In addition, the registration fees may also be waived for purchase of new vehicle against the scrapping certificate.
- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways will promote setting up of Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facility (RVSF) across India and will encourage public and private participation for opening up of such centres. Efforts are also being made to set up Integrated Scrapping Facilities across India. Some of the identified places include Alang in Gujarat, where it is being planned to develop a highly specialized centre for scrapping, among many other potential centres, where different scrapping technologies can be synergized together.



16. Should Mathematics and Physics be compulsory for Engineering admission?

- The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in March 2021 released its approval process handbook for the academic year 2021-22. News appeared in the media that as per the AICTE handbook, mathematics, and physics would not be compulsory subjects for students aspiring to pursue engineering.
- Currently, standard 12th level maths and physics are mandatory for getting admission in under-graduate programmes in engineering and technology. In the changed rules, maths and physics are part of a list of 12 optional subjects, of which only three are needed for eligibility.
- The universities will offer suitable bridge courses such as mathematics, physics, engineering drawing for students coming from diverse backgrounds to achieve learning outcomes of the programme.
- AICTE clarified that it had permitted higher education institutions to admit students who have not studied Physics and Mathematics in school to streams such as textile, agriculture engineering and biotechnology. However, the regulator noted that PCM remains mandatory for most engineering subjects like computer science.
- AICTE further clarified that the change is not binding on state governments and engineering schools. The flexibility in the eligibility criteria for admission to B.Tech and B.E. courses has been introduced to encourage students from diverse backgrounds to apply and reduce the pressure on students to study topics that are not crucial to their programme. This is in pursuance of the National Education Policy (NEP).
- According to Chairman, AICTE, "Today, classes 11 and 12 are water tight compartments where a student who goes to science stream will study only science. But in NEP, after 15 years of primary school education, the last four years will be generic where the candidate can go for UG studies across disciplines. So far, we have been working only in silos, building walls around us and not seeing beyond our domains. NEP has given a fresh opportunity and we are trying to make use of this. There is a new window being created where students who have not taken physics and maths in school can enter engineering [education](#)."

