

NEWS TODAY

MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CELEBRATES 5 YEARS OF DIGITAL INDIA

- Digital India is an umbrella programme that covers multiple Ministries and Departments with a vision to **transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.**

➤ It was launched on **July 1, 2015.**

- **It is centred on 3 key vision areas:**

➤ **Digital Infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen** which includes availability of high speed internet, easy access to common service centres etc.

➤ **Governance and service on demand** like seamlessly integrated services across departments etc.

➤ **Digital empowerment of citizens** through universal digital literacy, universally accessible digital resources etc.

- **Key achievements**

➤ **Direct Benefit Transfer to the tune of Rs 11.1 lakh crore** has been disbursed for 426 schemes which led to saving of Rs 1.7 lakh crore.

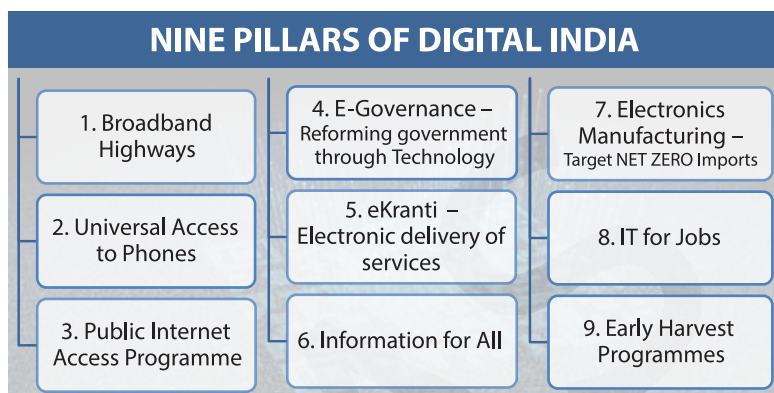
➤ **Job creation:** Direct 1.7 Cr. and Indirect at least 8.5 Cr.

➤ **Number of e-Services has increased** from 2,463 in 2014 to 3,858 till May 2020.

➤ **Daily average electronic transactions have increased** from 66 lakh in 2014 to 16.3 crore in 2020.

➤ **Initiatives like** Aadhar Enabled Payment Systems, PMGDISHA for making rural areas digitally literate, DigiLocker etc and **initiatives during COVID-19** like Aarogya Setu App, Ayush Sanjivani Mobile app etc.

NINE PILLARS OF DIGITAL INDIA



ACCELERATE VIGYAN (AV) SCHEME LAUNCHED BY SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING RESEARCH BOARD (SERB)

- Primary objective of this **inter-ministerial scheme** is to give more thrust on **encouraging high-end scientific research and preparing scientific manpower.**

➤ It will **initiate and strengthen mechanisms of identifying research potential, mentoring, training and hands-on workshop** on a national scale.

- **Benefits:**

➤ It will seek to **garner the social responsibility of the scientific community** in the country.

➤ It is expected to **promote R&D in India.**

➤ Currently, India stands **third in the world** in both **scientific publications and number of Ph.D.'s awarded** in Science and Engineering.

- **Components of AV:**

➤ **ABHYAAS:** To enable and groom potential PG/PhD students by developing their research skills in selected areas across different disciplines or fields.

➤ **It has two components:** High-End Workshops (KARYASHALA) and Research Internships (VRITIKA).

➤ **SAMMOHAN programme:** To encourage, aggregate and consolidate all scientific interactions in the country under one common roof.

➤ It has two parts: SAYONJIKA and SANGOSHTI.

- SERB is a statutory body under Department of Science and Technology with a mandate of **supporting basic research in emerging areas of Science & Engineering.**

US SANCTIONS ON HUAWEI & ZTE, POSSIBLE IMPACT ON INDIA

- Recently, US formally designated Chinese telecom vendors Huawei Technologies Company and ZTE Corporation, all their affiliate firms, as **“national security threats”.**

➤ Both of them have been accused of being close to the Chinese government and spying for them by sharing data of US citizens.

- This decision could **put pressure on friendly allies** like India, to take similar actions.

- **Possible impacts:**

➤ Ban could result in an **increase of up to 30% in cost of telecom equipment.**

➤ Around 25% of the India's telecom hardware industry relying on these Chinese companies for the procurement of network hardware.

➤ This could impact countries all over the world who are gearing up to launch **5G services including India.**

➤ Earlier Huawei got **nod from Indian Telecom Ministry to participate in 5G spectrum trials.**

- Recently, India had also **banned Chinese apps on the grounds** that they are engaged in activities which is prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order.

MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS INVITES BIDS FROM PRIVATE SECTOR TO RUN PASSENGER TRAINS

- This is the **first initiative of private investment for running Passenger Trains** over Indian Railways (IR) network.

➤ Project would entail private sector investment of about Rs 30,000 crore.

- **Objective is to**

➤ **introduce modern rolling stock** (railway vehicles) with reduced maintenance, transit time & boosting job creation.

➤ provide safety, world class travel **experience to passengers.**

➤ **reduce demand supply deficit** in the passenger transportation sector.

- **Project details**

➤ 109 Origin Destination pairs of routes through **introduction of 151 modern Trains.**

➤ Majority of Trains to be **manufactured in India.**

➤ Trains shall be designed for a **maximum speed of 160 kmph.**

- **Role of Govt & Private entity:**

➤ **Private entity** shall be responsible for:

→ financing, procuring, operation and maintenance of the trains.

→ payment to IR fixed haulage charges, energy charges etc.

➤ **Government will deploy guards and engineers** who will operate these trains, maintain track infrastructure etc.

➤ Concession Period for the project shall be **35 years.**

- **Bibek Debroy panel**, set up to suggest ways to overhaul the Indian railways, has recommended private companies be allowed to run passenger trains.

SOLAR POWER TARIFF HITS RECORD LOW, SPARKS WORRY ABOUT COAL'S FUTURE

India's solar power tariffs hit a record low of Rs 2.36 per unit during a bid conducted by Solar Energy Corporation of India Ltd.

> **Lower solar power tariff will provide benefits** like meeting carbon emission reduction targets, cheaper alternative to coal-fired power plants etc.

• **Possible reasons for low solar tariffs:**

> **Falling solar equipment cost** due to fall in demand amid COVID-19.

> Reduction in the capital cost due to **technological improvement** and optimised manufacturing processes.

> Government initiatives, like **renewable purchase obligations (RPO), relaxed Land-Ownning Criteria** etc.

⇒ **RPO** refers to the obligation imposed by law on some entities to either buy electricity generated by specified 'green' sources, or renewable energy certificates from the market.

⇒ **Land certainty provided** due to Solar Park Policy guidelines by Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.

> **Increasing Competition** among private players.

• Also, according to Central Electricity Authority (technical arm of Ministry of Power) **solar-based power generation will surpass coal by 2030** in overall energy mix of country.

> It has indicated that share of solar power will increase to 35% by 2029-30 and **share of coal-based power generation is expected to decrease to 32%**.

POWERING IT UP

% share	2020	2030
Hydro	12.4	7.4
Coal+lignite	56.0	32.6
Gas	6.9	3.0
Nuclear	1.9	2.32
Solar		34.2
Wind	22.7*	17.1
Biomass		1.2
Small hydro		0.6
Pump storage	NIL	1.2

*Current total renewable energy contribution, including solar, small hydro, wind, and biomass

Source: Central Electricity Authority

ALSO IN NEWS

World Bank's (WB) MSME Emergency Response program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under this, WB approved a \$750 million loan to address the immediate liquidity and credit needs of some 1.5 million viable MSMEs impacted by COVID-19. It will help MSME sector by unlocking liquidity, strengthening non-banking financial companies and small finance banks and enable inclusive access to financing. The loan has a maturity of 19 years, including a 5-year grace period. WB has till now committed \$2.75 billion to support India's emergency COVID-19 response, including the new MSME project.
RBI unveils Special Liquidity Scheme (SLS) for NBFCs and HFCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheme aims to help non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) and housing finance companies (HFCs) to improve their liquidity position and avoid any potential systemic risks to the financial sector. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > There is a worry that some of the liquidity-constrained NBFCs may default on their liabilities. Under this scheme, a special purpose vehicle (SPV) will purchase short-term debt up to ₹30,000 crore from eligible NBFCs and HFCs, which will utilise the proceeds solely for the purpose of extinguishing existing liabilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > SBI Capital Markets, a unit of State Bank of India, has set up a SPV to manage this operation.
Current Account turned surplus in Fourth Quarter of 2019-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current account turned surplus as a surge in private transfers and software services income helped. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Last time India's current account turned positive was in March quarter of 2006-07. Current Account represents a country's current transactions including exports, imports, interest payments, private remittances and transfers.
Gaps between India-China across education parameters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Human Resource Development has highlighted the gap between India and China across several education-related parameters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Gross enrolment ratio in higher education in 2018: China (50.6) and India (28.06). > Researchers per lakh population: China (111) and India (15). > Patents filed: China (13,81,583) and India (46,582). > Research and innovation funding: China (2.10%) and India (0.69%).
Environment Ministry reconstituted Central Zoo Authority (CZA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CZA is a statutory body chaired by the Environment Minister and tasked with regulating zoos across the country. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Apart from the chairman, it consists of 10 members and a member-secretary. It also lays down guidelines and prescribes rules under which animals may be transferred among zoos nationally and internationally.
India's first lichen park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It has been setup in Kumaon's Munsiyari area, Uttarakhand. It has been developed with an aim to conserve, protect, and cultivate lichens and to create awareness among locals regarding their importance. Lichen is a composite organism that emerges from algae or cyanobacteria living among the filaments of fungi. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > They are in symbiotic relationship between algae and fungi. > They need clean air to grow as they perish when the air is polluted.
Khalistan movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centre designated nine persons associated with Khalistan movement as terrorists under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Under the recently amended UAPA, individuals can be designated as terrorists. Khalistan movement is a separatist movement seeking to create a homeland for Sikhs by establishing a sovereign state, called Khalistan, in the Punjab region.

Note: Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has allowed **candidates to change their centres** for the 2020 Civil services & Indian Forest Services examination (both preliminary & Mains).

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