UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 14-09-2023

Shri Dharmendra Pradhan launches Skill India Digital

Skill India Digital will enable skilling for all, anywhere, anytime - Shri Dharmendra Pradhan

Skill India Digital is at the intersection of two of the most important components of PM Shri Narendra Modi's vision for New India - Skill India & Digital India - MoS Rajeev Chandrasekhar

To ensure that every Indian has access to quality skill development, relevant opportunities and entrepreneurial support, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister for Education and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship today launched Skill India Digital (SID), a comprehensive digital platform aimed at synergizing and transforming the skills, education, employment, and entrepreneurship landscape of India. The platform embodies the aspirations and dreams of millions of Indians who seek better opportunities and a brighter future as it extends industry-relevant skill courses, job opportunities, and entrepreneurship support. The event was also graced by Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Minister of State, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship & Electronics, IT.

SID is the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for skilling, education, employment, and entrepreneurship ecosystem of India. Driven by the vision to make skill development more innovative, accessible, and personalized in its embodiment, focusing on digital technology and Industry 4.0 skills, the state-of the- art platform will be a breakthrough in accelerating skilled talent hiring, facilitating lifelong learning and career advancement. The platform aligns perfectly with the vision articulated in the G20 framework for building DPI and the digital economy to promote digital skills and digital literacy. It is also a comprehensive information gateway for all government skilling and entrepreneurship initiatives – a go-to hub for citizens in pursuit of career advancement and lifelong learning.

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Speaking on the launch, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan said that Skill India Digital is a state-of-the-art platform to bring all skilling initiatives together. He said that the consensus on India's advocacy for global digital public infrastructure as well as for addressing skills gaps was the centrepiece of India's successful G20 Presidency. Taking another leap towards creating digital public infrastructure, MSDE has created an open-source platform to address the skilling needs of India's diverse demography. Skill India Digital is one more step towards harnessing our demographic dividend and establishing India as a global skills hub, he added. A revolution in learning and skill development, Skill India Digital will enable skilling for all, anywhere, anytime, he added.

Just a few days after the success of G20 summit, Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that one of the most significant agreements in the Summit was on DPIs. Skill India Digital is certainly one of the most important DPIs for the youth and is at the intersection of two of the most important components of PM's vision for New India - Skill India & Digital India. These are powerful schemes where the sole objective is to ensure skilling the youth with future ready skills. This will help in creating many opportunities. In this post covid world there is tremendous awareness about digital skills. Skill India Digital will enable Entrepreneurship and future-ready workforce, he added.

Following elements will enhance SID platform and provide numerous benefits:

- Aadhaar/ AI based Facial Authentication
- Digital Verifiable Credentials (DVC)
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) Recommendations
- Aadhaar based eKYC
- Digital Learning
- Citizen-Centric Approach
- Mobile-First Approach
- Scale and Speed
- Security Measures
- Interoperability
- WhatsApp Chatbot
- Ease of Doing Business

Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar, MoS, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship & Electronics, IT interacted with the technology team actively involved in building the Skill India Digital platform which has been built to accelerate transformation and empowerment in the country. Each section of the platform meets diverse citizen needs.

Skill India Digital started its journey with a commitment of being user-friendly. It aims to remove existing obstacles by offering an easy-to-use interface which is adaptable to various devices. This is ensuring that people from diverse backgrounds could access the platform effortlessly, regardless of the technology they had. In a country with many languages, Skill India Digital is bridging the gaps by supporting multiple Indian Languages, fostering

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inclusivity and a diverse learning environment for all the users. A major breakthrough for secure access came with Aadhaar-based eKYC. This robust verification process is the foundation of Skill India Digital, ensuring only genuine participants benefit from its offerings. The platform's mobile-first approach adapted to the modern era's reliance on smartphones which ensures uninterrupted learning experiences through handheld devices, transforming traditional learning methods and allowing users to engage with the platform's resources anytime and anywhere.

In the current digital landscape, Skill India Digital has pioneered a ground-breaking approach to showcasing individual's skills and qualifications. This innovation comes in the form of Digitally Verified Credential, a crucial component that has fundamentally transformed the way qualifications are exhibited and recognized. Skill India Digital has harnessed the power of digital technology to offer a solution that is secure, tamper-proof, and verifiable. At its core, the Digitally Verified Credential empowers users to confidently present their qualifications, experiences and certifications in a digital format that carries an inherent layer of authenticity.

Furthermore, Skill India Digital has extended this transformative concept through the introduction of Digital CVs via personalized QR Codes. With a simple scan, potential employers or partners can access a digital portfolio summarizing an individual's skills, qualifications, experiences, and achievements. In the realm of Skill India Digital (SID), the integration of timely updates has evolved into an indispensable aspect of users' experiences. One of the key strengths of Skill India Digital lies in its comprehensive approach to training and skill development. The platform is designed to encompass all training programs initiated by both Central and State governments, as well as various departments. By integrating government training programs into Skill India Digital, the platform endeavors to create a unified and centralized hub for skill development initiatives. This approach is rooted in the recognition that various government entities are actively involved in fostering skill enhancement across diverse sectors and regions.

The implementation of these features within a Skill India Digital skilling platform will revolutionize the skilling landscape in India, offering enhanced accessibility, personalized learning experiences, streamlined verification processes, and improved career guidance. It will enable learners to acquire relevant skills, stay updated with industry trends, and contribute to India's workforce development effectively.

During the event, several MoUs were exchanged with leading organizations to advance digital skilling, fostering industry participation, and enhancing learner engagement, including AICTE, CBSE, NIELIT, Infosys, Microsoft, AWS (Amazon), RedHat, Wadhwani Foundation, UNICEF, Future Skills Prime, SAP, Tech Mahindra Foundation.

From personalized learning and secure authentication to business facilitation and national convergence, Skill India Digital stands as a beacon of innovation and progress. Its journey continues to inspire and empower, leaving an enduring impact on Indian education and skill development.

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Cabinet approves signing of an MoU between India and Armenia on cooperation in the field of sharing successful Digital Solutions implemented at Population Scale for Digital Transformation

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Hon'ble Prime Minister approves the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 12th of June 2023 between the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology of the Republic of India and the Ministry of High-Tech Industry of the Republic of Armenia on Cooperation in the field of sharing successful Digital Solutions implemented at Population Scale for Digital Transformation.

The MoU intends to promote closer cooperation and exchange of experiences and digital technologies-based solutions (viz. INDIA STACK) in the implementation of digital transformational initiatives of both the country. MoU envisages improved collaboration leading to employment opportunities in the field of IT.

The MoU shall come into effect from the date of signature of the Parties and shall be remain in force for a period of 3 years.

Both G2G and B2B bilateral Cooperation in the field of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) will be enhanced. The activities contemplated in this MoU would be financed through their administration's regular operating allocations.

MeitY is collaborating with a number of countries and multilateral agencies for fostering bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the ICT domain. Over the period, MeitY has entered into MoUs/MoCs/Agreements with its counterpart organizations/ agencies from various countries to promote cooperation and exchange of information in the ICT domain. This is in consonance with the various initiatives taken by Government of India such as Digital India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Make in India etc. to transform the country into a digitally empowered

society and knowledge economy. In this changing paradigm, there is an imminent need for exploring business opportunities, sharing of best practices and attracting investments in the digital sector with the objective of enhancing mutual cooperation.

Over the last few years, India has demonstrated its leadership in implementation of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and has successfully provided delivery of services to public even during COVID pandemic. As a result, many countries have evinced interest in learning from India's experiences and entering into MoUs with India for learning from India's experiences.

India Stack Solutions are DPls developed & implemented by India at population scale to provide access & delivery of public services It aims to provide meaningful connectivity, promote digital inclusion, and enable seamless access to public services. These are built on open technologies, are interoperable and are designed to harness industry and community participation which foster innovation. However, each country has unique needs and challenges in building DPI, although the basic functionality is similar, allowing for global cooperation.

OPERATION POLO

13th September marks the 75th anniversary of Operation Polo, the military action launched by the Indian Army on September 13, 1948, to integrate the princely state of Hyderabad.

The Nizam of Hyderabad was dithering on joining India ever since Independence on August 15, 1947.

The military offensive in Hyderabad state was termed as 'Police Action' at the time by the then home minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the Nizam's forces surrendered to the Indian Army by September 18.

Operation Polo was launched in the context of the Nizam of Hyderabad's desire to keep his state independent after India gained independence in 1947.

He took advantage of India's focus on the Kashmir conflict with Pakistan, which diverted resources and attention away from Hyderabad.

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In November 1947, the Nizam signed a standstill agreement with India, which meant that there would be no immediate integration of Hyderabad into India, and the existing conditions would continue for a year.

However, there were several reasons that led to the launch of Operation Polo on September 13, 1948:

Increasing Tensions: The Nizam's administration in Hyderabad took advantage of the standstill agreement to increase the strength of its irregular force known as the Razakars. These Razakars, led by Maj Gen SA El Edroos, were causing problems for the predominantly Hindu population in the state.

Cross-Border Raids: The Razakars were conducting cross-border raids and creating tensions along the state's borders.

Overtures to Pakistan: The Nizam was making overtures to Pakistan, hinting at the intention to establish an independent country within India's borders.

Threat of Secession: The Nizam's actions and the presence of the Razakars posed a threat to the unity of India, and there was a fear of Hyderabad attempting to secede from India.

As a result of these developments, the Indian government decided to take action against Hyderabad to remove the threat of secession and to ensure the state's integration into India.

In terms of military strength, the Nizam's forces numbered less than 25,000, and only a fraction of them were well-trained.

The Razakars, though numerous, were not a formidable military opposition. The Nizam had boasted of a much larger force, but this turned out to be an empty claim, and Hyderabad's resistance crumbled within the first two days of the offensive.

Operation Polo was conducted primarily by Maj Gen Jayanto Nath Chaudhuri's 1 Armoured Division, with subsidiary thrusts from the north, south, and east of the state.

The operation was a success, and the Nizam announced a ceasefire on September 17, with the formal surrender taking place on September 18.

Maj Gen Chaudhuri became the Military Governor of Hyderabad, and the state was integrated into India.

Hyderabad State: Hyderabad was one of the largest princely states in British India, ruled by the Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan. The population was predominantly Hindu, but the Nizam was a Muslim ruler.

Controversial Status: The Nizam wanted to maintain Hyderabad's independent status, even as India gained independence in 1947. The Nizam's aspirations for independence were complicated by his predominantly Hindu population's desire to merge with the Indian Union.

Communal Tensions: Communal tensions between the Hindu majority and the Muslim ruling elite, led by the Razakars (a private militia), further escalated the situation. The Razakars were

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accused of atrocities against Hindus, which intensified the demand for Hyderabad's integration into India.

Sardar Patel's Diplomacy: The Indian government, led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, sought to peacefully integrate Hyderabad into India through negotiations, but these efforts failed due to the Nizam's reluctance.

Operation Polo

Planning and Execution: In September 1948, the Indian government decided to use military force to bring Hyderabad into the Indian Union. The operation was led by Lieutenant General J.N. Chaudhuri, and the Indian Army moved swiftly to encircle Hyderabad.

Military Campaign: The military campaign was relatively short-lived. Indian forces faced limited resistance from the Nizam's army and the Razakars. The Indian Army advanced rapidly, capturing key cities and towns.

Nizam's Surrender: Realizing the futility of resistance, the Nizam surrendered on September 17, 1948. He signed an Instrument of Accession, officially integrating Hyderabad into the Indian Union.

Aftermath

Integration: The successful conclusion of Operation Polo marked the integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union, ensuring the end of princely rule in India. The state was reorganized into Andhra Pradesh and parts of Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Resettlement: Many Razakars and officials of the Nizam's government were arrested and tried for their roles in the violence and atrocities during the conflict.

Legacy: Operation Polo remains a subject of historical debate. Critics argue that the Indian government's use of force was heavy-handed, while proponents contend that it was necessary to prevent further communal violence and to secure Hyderabad's integration into India.

Cultural Integration: Hyderabad's integration into India brought together people from diverse linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. It marked the beginning of a process of cultural assimilation and integration.

UJJWALA YOJANA

Context: The government has decided to extend the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) scheme for three more years from 2023-24 to 2025-26. This will enable 75 lakh more households to get LPG connections under the scheme. The total number of PMUY beneficiaries will reach 10.35 crore by the end of the extension period.

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), commonly known as the Ujjwala Scheme, is a government initiative launched by the Government of India in May 2016.

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It was introduced to provide clean cooking fuel (LPG - Liquified Petroleum Gas) to women living below the poverty line (BPL) and in rural households across the country.

The primary goal of the scheme is to improve the health and well-being of women by replacing traditional and unhealthy cooking methods, such as using firewood or cow dung, with clean and efficient LPG.

Key features of the Ujjwala Scheme

Targeted Beneficiaries: Focusing on women from below the poverty line (BPL) households, especially in rural areas, ensures that the scheme reaches those who are most in need. Women in these households often bear the brunt of health issues caused by traditional cooking methods and can benefit the most from clean cooking fuel.

Financial Assistance: Providing financial assistance to cover the initial cost of an LPG connection is essential in making the transition to clean cooking fuel financially viable for beneficiaries. It removes a significant barrier for those who may not have the upfront resources to invest in the necessary equipment.

Economical Pricing: Subsidized LPG cylinders make it affordable for beneficiaries to purchase refills, ensuring that they continue to use clean cooking fuel in the long term. The Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system ensures that subsidies are delivered directly to beneficiaries, reducing the risk of leakage and corruption.

Safety Measures: Educating beneficiaries about the safe use of LPG is crucial in preventing accidents and health hazards. Safety instructions, training, and pamphlets play a vital role in ensuring that beneficiaries are aware of best practices for handling and using LPG.

Loan Facility: Offering a loan facility to cover the cost of the stove and initial cylinder makes the scheme accessible to those who might not qualify for direct financial assistance but still need support. The option to repay the loan in instalments ensures affordability.

Significances of the Ujjwala Scheme

Health Benefits

The focus on reducing indoor air pollution and associated health issues is of paramount importance. In many households using traditional cooking methods, women and children are exposed to high levels of harmful smoke and pollutants. These pollutants can lead to respiratory diseases, eye problems, and other health issues.

By promoting clean cooking fuel like LPG, the Ujjwala Scheme significantly improves the health and well-being of women and children, reducing the incidence of respiratory ailments and other health problems.

Empowerment

Providing women with access to LPG not only benefits their health but also empowers them in several ways. It reduces their daily workload by eliminating the need to collect firewood or other biomass fuels, allowing them to reallocate their time to more productive activities, such

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as pursuing education, participating in income-generating activities, or engaging in community development.

Empowered women contribute positively to their households and communities, enhancing overall socio-economic development.

Environmental Impact

The transition from biomass-based cooking to LPG has environmental benefits as well. Traditional cooking methods often rely on wood, crop residues, or cow dung, leading to deforestation and land degradation.

By using LPG, households reduce their reliance on biomass fuels, which helps combat environmental degradation, preserve forests, and mitigate the release of greenhouse gases. This has positive implications for both local and global environmental sustainability.

Challenges associated with the Ujjwala Scheme

Coverage: While the Ujjwala Scheme has achieved widespread implementation, reaching all eligible beneficiaries, especially those in remote and underserved areas, remains a challenge. Geographical and infrastructural barriers can hinder access to LPG cylinders.

Refill Rates: Encouraging beneficiaries to continue using LPG and regularly purchasing refills can be a persistent challenge. Financial constraints often deter households from buying refills at the market price, which can lead to a return to traditional cooking methods.

Safety Concerns: Ensuring the safe use of LPG is crucial to prevent accidents and health hazards. Ongoing education and monitoring are required to address safety concerns. This includes not only providing safety instructions but also conducting regular safety checks and inspections to ensure that LPG connections and equipment are in good condition.

Way Forward

Expanded Coverage

Continuing efforts to expand the coverage of the Ujjwala Scheme is essential to reach remote and economically disadvantaged areas. This expansion should be accompanied by investments in infrastructure and logistics to overcome geographical barriers and ensure that clean cooking fuel is accessible to all eligible beneficiaries, regardless of their location.

Promote Refill Usage

Encouraging beneficiaries to use LPG regularly and purchase refills is critical for the sustainability of the scheme. Strategies to promote refill usage could include providing subsidies or discounts for refills, creating incentives for timely refills, and offering convenient refill distribution points in rural and underserved areas.

Sustainability

While LPG is a cleaner cooking fuel compared to traditional methods, promoting sustainable and energy-efficient cooking practices alongside LPG can further reduce environmental

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impact. This could involve educating beneficiaries about efficient cooking techniques and the use of energy-efficient stoves to maximize the benefits of clean cooking.

Continuous Education

Conducting regular awareness campaigns is crucial to ensure that beneficiaries are informed about the benefits and safe usage of LPG. These campaigns should not only focus on the health and environmental advantages but also emphasize the economic and time-saving benefits of using clean cooking fuel. Continuous education can reinforce positive behaviour and encourage the sustained use of LPG.

Libya's catastrophic flooding

More than 5,000 people are known to have died and thousands more are missing after devastating floods swept through the **Libyan port city of Derna**.

Entire neighbourhoods disappeared into the sea as a huge tsunami-like torrent of water swept through the city.

Geographical location of Derna

Derna is a port city in eastern Libya. It is located on the **Mediterranean coast** between Benghazi and Tobruk.

It is also located at the eastern end of the Jebel Akhdar, or "green mountains".

The city is bisected by the Wadi Derna, a seasonal river that flows from the highlands to the south.

News Summary: Libya's catastrophic flooding

More than 5,000 people were killed, about 10,000 went missing, and 30,000 were displaced in Libya after torrential rains caused flooding.

The flooding burst dams, swept away buildings, and destroyed nearly a quarter of the eastern port city of Derna.

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What caused this catastrophic damage to Derna?

Experts suggest three key factors coalesced into one catastrophe, causing the most devastating floods to have hit North Africa in almost a century.

These three factors are - extreme weather, vulnerable geography, and crumbling infrastructure.

Extreme Weather

Libya's eastern region, witnessed extreme rainfall from Sept 10 to 11.

Eg., in Derna, the average monthly rainfall in the whole of September is under 1.5 mm. However, it exceeded 150 mm in about two days.

The rains were accompanied by strong winds of up to 80 kph.

The water was brought by **Storm Daniel** which reached Libya on September 10.

Formed in Greece, this storm is also responsible for causing floods and deaths in Spain, Turkey and Bulgaria earlier this month.

Before reaching Libya, Daniel transitioned into what is known as a **'medicane**,' or tropical-like cyclone that occasionally forms over the Mediterranean Sea.

The storm became stronger as it drew energy from the abnormally warm waters.

The Mediterranean has been 2 to 3 degree Celsius warmer this year than in the past.

Medicanes are known to be weak storms that don't last long.

But higher sea surface temperatures help them become stronger and last longer.

It unloaded excessive rainfall over northeastern Libya, where rain flowing down the mountainous terrain overwhelmed dams.

Vulnerable geography

The floods seem to have caused the most destruction in Derna.

One reason behind the city's widespread damage is its location.

It is situated at the end of a valley and bisected by the Wadi Derna, a seasonal river that flows from mountains to the south (towards the sea) and is normally protected from flooding by dams.

The unusually heavy rain overwhelmed two crucial dams and destroyed several bridges.

Crumbling infrastructure

The collapse of the two dams in Derna highlights the dilapidated infrastructure of Libya.

The country has been gutted by a war between two rival factions for more than a decade

In Tripoli, Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah leads Libya's internationally recognised government.

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In Benghazi, the rival prime minister, Ossama Hamad, heads the eastern administration, which is backed by powerful military commander Khalifa Hiftar.

In the tussle for power, focus on socio-economic issues, including maintaining and developing infrastructure has been put on the backburner.

Moreover, as flooding is quite rare in the region, Libya wasn't prepared to face the calamity.

There are no flood-resilient structures or roads in the country, especially in Derna.

Any sort of early-warning system regarding such disasters also doesn't exist.

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