



News Analysis (25 Sep, 2021)

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Caste Census

Why in News

Recently, the Union government has filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court claiming that a **caste census of the Backward Classes is administratively difficult and cumbersome.**

The government's assertion came in response to a **writ petition** filed by the State of Maharashtra to gather Backward Classes' caste data in the State while conducting **Census 2021.**

Key Points

- **Government's Stand Against the Caste Census:**
 - **Unusable data:** The Centre reasoned that even when the census of castes were taken in the pre-Independence period, the data suffered in respect of **"completeness and accuracy"**.

It said the caste data enumerated in the **Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC)** of 2011 is **"unusable"** for official purposes as they are "replete with technical flaws".
 - **Not a Ideal Policy Tool:** The government said caste-wise enumeration in the Census was **given up as a matter of policy from 1951.**
 - Further, the Centre explained that a population census was **not the "ideal instrument"** as many people may not register themselves in the census in the **event of hiding their caste.**
 - This may compromise the **"basic integrity" of the census.**
 - **Administratively Difficult:** Besides, the government held that, it is too late now to enumerate caste into the Census 2021.

Planning and preparations for the census exercise started almost four years earlier and the preparations of Census 2021 are almost done.

- **Arguments in Favour of SECC:**

- It will be useful to establish **statistical justification for preserving caste-based affirmative action programmes** or welfare schemes.
It **may also be a legal imperative**, considering that courts want 'quantifiable data' to support the existing levels of **reservation**.
- Comprehensive exercise to enumerate the caste status of all households in the country will **help in identifying poor households and implement anti-poverty programmes**.

Census, SECC & Difference

- **Census:**

- The origin of the Census in India goes back to the **colonial exercise of 1881**.
- Census has evolved and been used by the government, policymakers, academics, and others to capture the Indian population, access resources, map social change, **delimitation exercise**, etc.
- However, as early as the 1940s, W.W.M. Yeatts, Census Commissioner for India for the 1941 Census, had pointed out that "the census is a large, immensely powerful, but blunt instrument **unsuited for specialized inquiry**."

- **SECC:**

- SECC was conducted for the **first time since 1931**.
- SECC is meant to canvass every Indian family, both in rural and urban India, and ask about their:
 - **Economic status**, so as to allow Central and State authorities to come up with a range of indicators of deprivation, permutations, and combinations of which could be used by each authority to define a poor or deprived person.
 - It is also meant to ask every person their **specific caste name** to allow the government to re-evaluate which caste groups were economically worse off and which were better off.
- SECC has the **potential to allow for a mapping of inequalities at a broader level**.

- **Difference Between Census & SECC:**

- The **Census provides a portrait of the Indian population**, while the **SECC is a tool to identify beneficiaries** of state support.
- Since the Census falls under the Census Act of 1948, **all data are considered confidential**, whereas according to the SECC website, "all the personal information given in the SECC is **open for use by Government departments** to grant and/or restrict benefits to households."

Way Forward

- Although SECC has its own concerns, **linking and syncing aggregated Census data to other large datasets** such as the National Sample Surveys may help the governments realize the many socio-economic goals.
- Further, independent of census, **a preliminary socio-anthropological study** can be done at the State and district levels to establish all sects and sub-castes present in the population.
- A caste census may not sit well with the goal of a casteless society, but it **may serve as a means of addressing inequities in society.**

Source: TH

Medical Device Parks Scheme

Why in News

Recently, the **Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers** has launched the **Scheme for "Promotion of Medical Device Parks"** to support the medical devices industry in line with **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

Key Points

- **About:**

The medical device industry is a unique blend of engineering and medicine. It **involves the creation of machines that are used to support life within the human body.**

Medical devices **include Surgical Equipment, Diagnostic equipment** like Cardiac imaging, CT scans, X-ray, Molecular Imaging, MRI and Ultrasound-imaging including hand - held devices; **Life Support equipment like ventilator**, etc. as well as **Implants and Disposables.**

- **Objectives:**

- The **easy access to standard testing and infrastructure facilities** through the creation of world-class common infrastructure facilities via medical device parks.
- To reduce the cost of production of medical devices and the **better availability and affordability of medical devices** in the domestic market.

- **Financial Assistance:**

- The total financial outlay of the scheme is Rs 400 crore and the **tenure of the scheme is from FY 2020-2021 to FY 2024-2025.**

- Financial assistance to a selected Medical Device Park would be **70% of the project cost of common infrastructure facilities.**

In the case of the **North-Eastern States** and the Hilly States, financial assistance would be **90% of the project cost.**

- **Maximum assistance** under the scheme for one Medical Device Park would be **limited to Rs. 100 crores.**

- The Centre has granted **in-principal approval for the parks in Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.**

- **Medical Devices Sector in India:**

- The Medical Devices industry in India is valued at USD 5.2 billion, contributing about 4-5% to the USD 96.7 billion Indian healthcare Industry.

- Medical devices sector in India is very small in size as compared to the rest of the manufacturing industry, though **India is one of the top twenty markets for medical devices in the world and is the 4th largest market in Asia after Japan, China, and South Korea.**

- India currently **imports 80-90% of medical devices** of the USD15 billion market. The US, Germany, China, Japan, and Singapore constitute the five largest exporters of high technology medical equipment to India.

- **Related Initiatives:**

- In **June 2021**, the **Quality Council of India (QCI)** and the Association of Indian Manufacturers of Medical Devices (AiMeD) launched the **Indian Certification of Medical Devices (ICMED) 13485 Plus scheme** to undertake verification of the quality, safety and efficacy of medical devices.

- To boost domestic manufacturing of medical devices and attract huge investments in India, the department of pharmaceuticals launched a **PLI scheme for domestic manufacturing of medical devices**, with a total outlay of funds worth Rs.3,420 crore for the period FY21-FY28.

- The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** has notified that **medical equipment would qualify as 'drugs'** under **Section 3 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act (D & CA), 1940** from 1st April, 2020.

- The Medical Devices Parks have been **set up in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.**

In 2020, **Kerala established MedSpark, one of the first medical device parks** in the country, in Thiruvananthapuram.

- The Government of India **recognised medical devices as a sunrise sector** under the **'Make in India' campaign** in 2014.

Source: TH

Social Accountability

Why in News

Recently, a **State-wide campaign has been launched in Rajasthan** for demanding passage of the **social accountability** law in the next Assembly session.

- **In 2019, a committee under the chairmanship** of the former state election commission, **Ram Lubhaya** was constituted to advise the government on the **drafting of the Social Accountability Bill and draft was submitted by the Committee in 2020.**
- The **Rajasthan Guaranteed Delivery of Public Service Act, 2011** and **The Rajasthan Right to Hearing Act (2012)** have already been around but they were repealed due to some major issues.

Key Points

- **Social Accountability:**
 - It has been defined as an **approach towards ensuring accountability** that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which ordinary citizens and citizen groups participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability.
 - In a **public sector context**, social accountability refers to a **wide range of actions and mechanisms** that citizens, communities, independent media and civil society organizations can use to hold public officials accountable.
 - The **effectiveness and sustainability** of social accountability mechanisms is improved when they are institutionalized. This **involves two things:**
 - The **state as a 'willing accomplice'** in the broader accountability project, needs to render its own "internal" mechanisms in a way that makes it structurally amenable to accountability.
 - The state needs to **identify and adopt mechanisms to facilitate** and strengthen **civic engagement** and citizen voice.
 - **Components of social accountability practice** include collection, analysis and dissemination of information, mobilisation of public support, advocacy and negotiation for change.

Social audit is a tool for social accountability and transparency.

- **Major Principles of Social Accountability:**
 - **Jankari** (Information)
 - **Bhagidari** (Involvement and participation of citizens)
 - **Karyawahi** (Time bound action)
 - **Suraksha** (Protection of Citizens)
 - **Sunwai** (Citizen's right to be heard)
 - **Janta Ka Manch** (Collective Platform)
 - **Prasar** (Report Dissemination)

- **Need:**

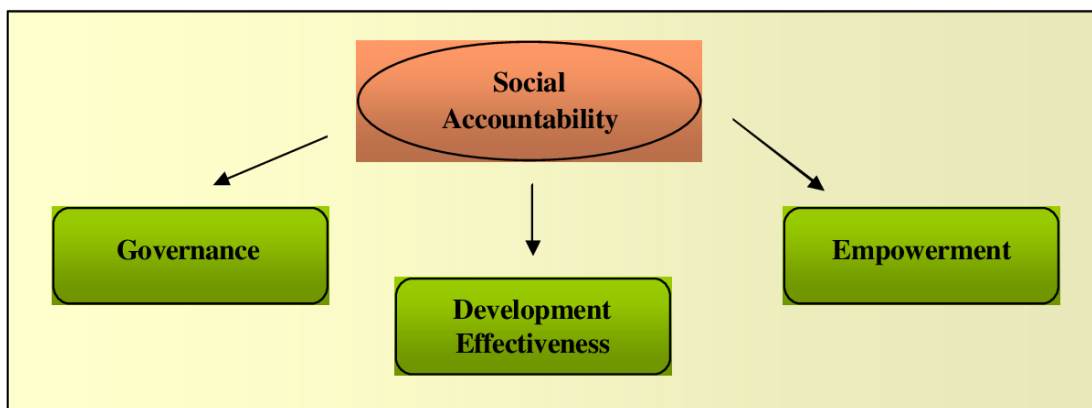
There are countless citizens who are **suffering from an inability to access their rights** and have their complaints redressed in a time-bound manner, while there was “no accountability of errant government officials’.

- **Significance:**

- It **empowers** every person **to hold the government institutions and officials accountable** to them to deliver their rights as citizens.
- It **raises awareness** about the law and takes up a sustained advocacy for passage of the Bill in the next Assembly session.

The **mechanism for redressing grievances** will start from **village panchayats** and involve public hearings at the block level.

- It can **contribute to improved governance**, increased development effectiveness through better service delivery, and citizen empowerment.



Examples of Social Accountability Practices in India:

- Participatory Planning and Policy Formulation (Kerala)
- Participatory Budget Analysis (Gujarat)
- Participatory Expenditure Tracking System (Delhi, Rajasthan)
- Citizens’ Surveys/Citizen Report Cards (Bangalore, Maharashtra)
- Citizen Charters (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka)
- Community Scorecards (Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh)

Source: TH

Report on Climate Indicators & Sustainable Development: WMO

Why in News

Recently, the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** has published a new report on **Climate Indicators and Sustainable Development: Demonstrating the Interconnections**.

- WMO studied seven climate indicators — carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentration, temperature, ocean acidification and heat, sea ice extent, glacier melt and sea-level rise.
- Its release coincides with the United Nations General Assembly annual session and the opening in September 2021 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Action Zone, which is dedicated to accelerating action on the SDGs.



Key Points

- **Aim:**
 - To contribute to the sustainable development agenda and to inspire leaders to take bolder climate action.
- **Importance:**
 - In the face of ongoing climate change, poverty, inequality and environmental degradation, **understanding the connections between climate and international development** is a matter of urgency.
 - Increasing temperatures will result in **global and regional changes, leading to shifts in rainfall patterns and agricultural seasons**. The intensification of El Niño events is also generating more droughts and floods.
- **Rising CO₂ Concentration:**
 - The rising concentration of CO₂ **will impact all of the 17 United Nations-mandated SDGs**.
 - Rising CO₂ concentration **due to human activities** is a key driver of global climate change.

- **Impact on SDGs:**

- Rising CO₂ concentration and increasing global temperatures, if left unchecked, would **negatively impact efforts to combat climate change** under the SDG 13.

This, in turn, would pose a **significant threat to the achievement of the 16 SDGs other than SDG 13, by 2030.**

- This would happen because uncontrolled rising CO₂ emissions would be **indirectly responsible for risks related to the remaining six climate indicators, namely** temperature, ocean acidification and heat, sea ice extent, glacier melt and sea-level rise.
- For instance, rising concentrations of CO₂ in the atmosphere will **lead to reductions in nutrient content, affecting food security** or the SDG indicator 2.1.2.

This would affect the **global goal on tackling poverty, SDG 1**, as well.

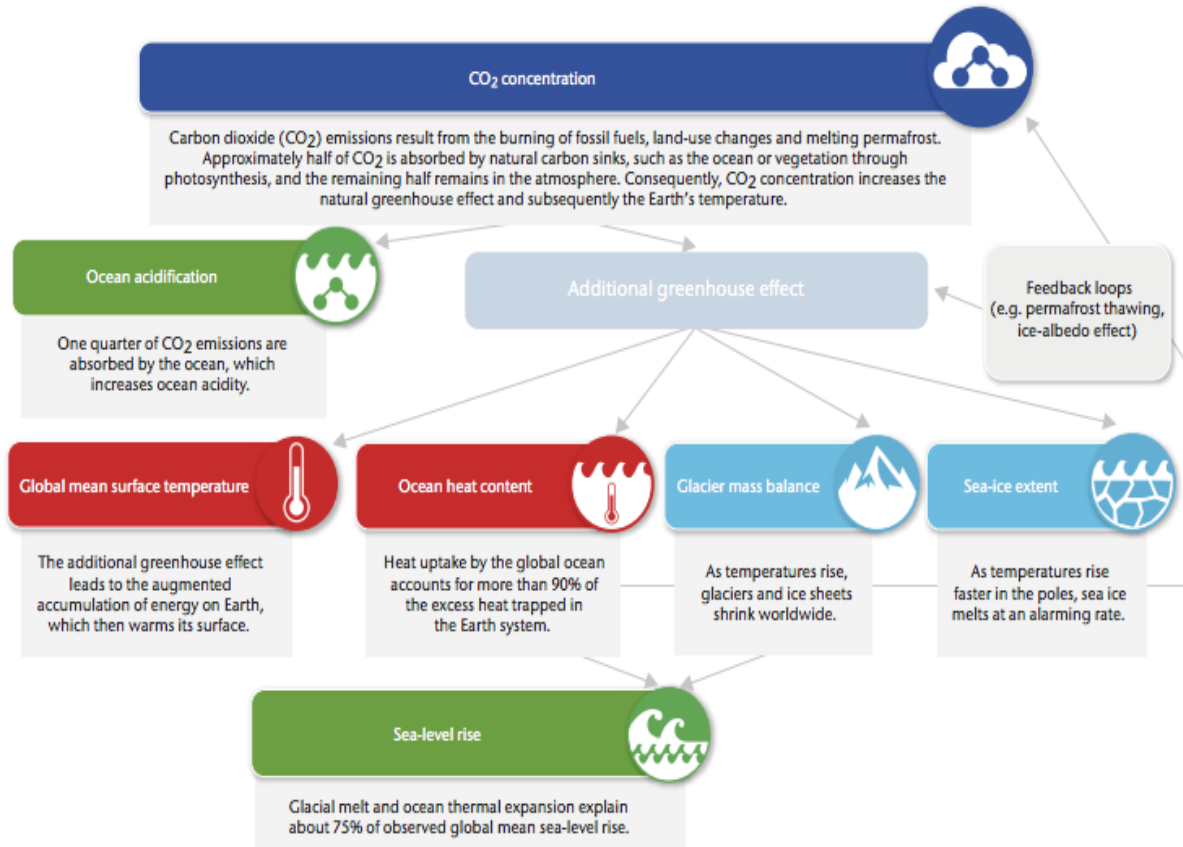
- Rising CO₂ in water would cause **ocean acidification**, directly affecting SDG indicator 14.3.1 which addresses marine acidity.
- Both food insecurity and loss of livelihood may drive conflicts related to resource management, thus **threatening regional peace and stability (SDG 16.1)**.
- Extreme events attributed to rising temperature affect rainfall patterns and groundwater availability, which leads to a **higher risk of water scarcity, directly affecting SDG 6** on access to water and specially the targets.

- **Suggestions:**

To mitigate climate risks, the WMO recommended to work on:

- **Improved education** (SDG 4)
- **Global partnerships** (SDG 17)
- **Sustainable consumption** (SDG 12)

Interconnections between the WMO climate indicators



Source: DTE

Blue Food

Why in News

Recently, a report titled **Environmental performance of blue foods** has stated that the Aquatic or blue foods can be made more environmentally sustainable than they are now.

- The report is published as **part of the Blue Food Assessment (BFA)**.
- The BFA is a **collaboration between** Sweden-based Stockholm Resilience Centre, United States-based Stanford University and the non-profit EAT.

Key Points

- **About Blue Foods and its Advantages:**

- Blue foods are food derived from **aquatic animals, plants or algae** that are caught or cultivated in **freshwater and marine environments**.
- They are found to **rank more highly than terrestrial animal-source foods** in terms of their **nutritional benefits and potential for sustainability gains**.
Many blue food species are **rich in important nutrients** like omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins and minerals.
- On average, the major species produced in **aquaculture**, such as tilapia, salmon, catfish and carp, were found to have **lower environmental footprints** comparable to terrestrial meat.

- **About the Report:**

- The report has uncovered that Blue foods and the waters in which they grow will have **an essential role to play in the shift towards healthy, equitable and sustainable food systems**.
- The production of blue food **generates the fewest greenhouse gas and nutrient emissions** and **uses the least land and water**.
Capture fisheries refers to all kinds of harvesting of naturally occurring living resources in both marine and freshwater environments. These have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through improved management and optimising gear types.
- **Investing in innovation and improving fisheries management** could increase consumption even more and have profound effects on **malnutrition**.
- Promotion of Blue food will help in fulfillment of many **Sustainable development Goals** (SDG 2 - Nutrition and 14 - Sustainable use of marine resources).

Way Forward

- **Small-scale fishers** have a huge part of the global seafood system and are incredibly diverse. Therefore, for sustainable production of blue food systems, small scale fishers need to be strengthened.
- **Enormous diversity of blue foods** carry important nutritional, cultural, economic and environmental value. To realize its potential, policymakers should put in place:
 - **Better governance**, including participation of small producers, women and other marginalized groups,
 - **Better stewardship** of the natural resources on which blue foods rely; and
 - **Investment** in building resilience to climate change.

Source: IE

Plant Discoveries 2020: BSI

Why in News

Recently, the **Botanical Survey of India (BSI)**, in its new publication **Plant Discoveries 2020** has added 267 new taxa/ species to the country's flora.

Earlier, the **United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** demanded an additional USD 200 billion fund flow to developing countries from various sources to manage nature through 2030.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - The **new Discovery to the flora of India** include **119 species of seed plants**, 57 species of fungi, 44 species of lichens, 21 species of algae, 18 species of microbes, five species of bryophytes and three species of fern and fern allies.
 - India has about **45,000 species of plants**, already identified and classified, which account for about **7% of the total plant species** of the world.
 - About 28% of the Indian plants are endemic to the country.
 - Few examples among the new discoveries are:
 - Nine new species of **balsams (Impatiens)** and one species of wild **banana** (*Musa pradhanii*) from Darjeeling.
 - One species each of **wild jamun** (*Syzygium anamalaianum*) from **Coimbatore**.
 - **Fern species** (*Selaginella odishana*) Kandhamal in **Odisha**.
- **Geographical Distribution of Species:**
 - **22% of the discoveries** were made from the **Western Ghats** followed by **Western Himalayas** (15%), **Eastern Himalayas** (14%) and **Northeast Ranges** (12%).
 - The West coast contributed 10% while the East Coast contributed (9%) in total discoveries; Eastern Ghats and South Deccan contributed 4% of each while Central Highland and North Deccan added 3% each.
- **Significance of the Discovery:**

India is a signatory to the '**Convention on Biological Diversity**' (**CBD**) and is committed to work towards a **global strategy of plant conservation**.

 - Every year, **new plant discoveries are compiled and documented by BSI**, which plays a central role to fulfil **India's global commitment** of comprehensive documentation and identification of plant diversity of the country.
 - CBD, a legally binding treaty to conserve biodiversity, has been in force since 1993.

Botanical Survey of India

- **About:**
 - It is the **apex research organization** under the **Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEFCC)** for carrying out taxonomic and floristic studies on wild plant resources of the country. It was **established in 1890**
 - It has **nine regional circles** situated at different regions of the country. However the **headquarter is located in Kolkata, West Bengal.**
- **Functions:**
 - **Exploration, inventorying and documentation** of phytodiversity in general and protected areas, hotspots and fragile ecosystems in particular.
 - **Publication** of National, State and District Floras.
 - **Identification** of threatened and red list species and species rich areas needing conservation.
 - **Ex-situ conservation** of critically threatened species in botanical gardens.
 - Survey and documentation of **traditional knowledge (ethno-botany)** associated with plants.
 - **Develop National database** of Indian plants, including herbarium and live specimens, botanical paintings and illustrations, etc.

Source: TH

National Service Scheme Awards

Why in News

Recently, the President of India conferred the **National Service Scheme (NSS) Awards** for 2019-20.

Key Points

- **About:**

Under NSS Awards 2019-20, 42 awardees in different categories such as University or (+2) Councils, NSS Units and their programme officers and NSS volunteers were conferred with these awards.
- **Establishment:**
 - The NSS Awards were **instituted by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in 1993-94** on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee Year of National Service Scheme.
 - It **recognises and rewards outstanding contributions** towards voluntary community service made by universities or colleges, councils, senior secondary, NSS units and programme officers and NSS volunteers to further promote NSS in the country.

- **Objectives:**
 - To **encourage young NSS student volunteers** to develop their personality through community service.
 - To **encourage the Programme Officers** and the Programme Coordinators of NSS for catering the needs of NSS through the NSS volunteers.
 - To motivate **NSS Volunteers for continuing their selfless service** towards community work.
- **National Service Scheme:**
 - **About:**
 - NSS is a **Central Sector Scheme** that was launched in 1969 with the objective of developing the personality and character of the student youth through voluntary community service. The ideology of NSS is inspired by the ideals of **Mahatma Gandhi**.
 - Its Motto is **Not me but You**.
 - **NSS volunteers:**

They **work on issues of social relevance through regular and special camping activities** – including literacy and education, health, family welfare and nutrition, environment conservation, social service programmes, programmes for the empowerment of women, programmes connected with economic development activities, rescue and relief during calamities, etc.

Source: HT

GI Tagged Feni: Goa

Why in News

Recently, the Goa government's Feni Policy 2021 has paved the way to take the **GI** (Geographical Indication) Certified **Goan Cashew Feni** forward at par with other international Liquors such as **Mexico's tequila, Japanese Sake and Russia's Vodka**.

The Goa government in 2016 classified Feni as the **Heritage Spirit of Goa**.

Key Points

- **Goan Cashew Feni:**
 - It is the first liquor product in the country to obtain ‘**Heritage Drink**’ status and got its GI certification in 2000. Only the cashew feni has been **GI-tagged**.
 - Feni is a brew made from **coconut or cashew fruits** and is synonymous with the **Goan ethos and identity**.
 - Feni was first manufactured in Goa in the 1600s, after the Portuguese imported the **cashew plant from Brazil to India**. There are currently 26 varieties of feni manufactured in Goa.
 - It is used in various cultural traditions, cuisines and is well known for its medicinal value also.
- **Other GI-Tags from Goa:**

Khola red chillies/Canacona Chillies, spicy Harnal Chillies, Myndoli Banana or Moira Banana, and traditional sweet dish Goan Khaje.
- **Geographical Indication (GI) Certification:**
 - **About:**
 - GI is an indication used to identify goods having special characteristics originating from a definite geographical territory.
 - It is used for **agricultural, natural and manufactured goods**.
 - The Geographical Indications of **Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999** seeks to provide for the registration and better protection of geographical indications relating to goods in India.
 - It is also a part of the **World Trade Organisation’s** Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).
 - **Administered By:**

The Controller General of Patents, Designs and TradeMarks- who is the Registrar of Geographical Indications.

The Geographical Indications **Registry is located at Chennai**.
 - **Validity of Registration:**
 - The registration of a geographical indication is valid for a period of 10 years.
 - It can be renewed from time to time for **a further period of 10 years** each.

Source: IE

CIPS Excellence in Procurement Awards 2021

Why in News

Government e Marketplace (GeM) was announced as the winner in the **Best Use of Digital Technology** category at the **CIPS Excellence in Procurement Awards 2021 (CIPS Awards)**.

GeM was shortlisted as a finalist in two additional categories as well, i.e., '**Public Procurement Project of the Year**' and '**Best Initiative to Build a Diverse Supply Base**'.

Key Points

- **CIPS Awards:**

- It is an opportunity to showcase and **celebrate the best work and teams in the procurement profession.**
- The awards are conducted under the aegis of **The Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply (CIPS)**, London.

CIPS is a global **not-for-profit organisation** and professional body dedicated to promoting good practices in procurement and supply management, with a community across 150 countries.

- **GeM:**

- **About:**

- GeM is a **one-stop National Public Procurement Portal** to facilitate online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Central and State Government Departments/Organizations/Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs).
- The procurement of goods and services by **Ministries and the Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)** is mandatory for goods and services available on GeM.
- It also **provides the tools of e-bidding and reverse e-auction** to facilitate the government users achieve the best value for their money.
- At present, **GeM has more than 30 lakh products**, over Rs. 10 lakh crore worth of transactions have happened so far at the portal.

- **Launch:**

Launched in **2016 to bring transparency and efficiency** in the government buying process.

- **Nodal Ministry:**

Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

- **Significance of GoM:**

- Enables **transparent and Cost-effective Procurement**
- Promotes **India's Atmanirbhar Bharat Policy**
- **Facilitates entry of small local sellers** in Public Procurement.
- **Facilitates online marketplace** to aggregate demand from multiple entities for similar products.

Source: PIB

Microchip: Smallest Man-Made Flying Structure

Why in News

Recently, Northwestern University (US) has created an **Electronic Microchip or Microflier** with the capability of flight. It is the **smallest-ever human-made flying structure**.

Key Points

- **About:**



- It is about the size of a **grain of sand** and does not have a motor or engine.
- It **catches flight on the wind** — much like a **maple tree's propeller seed** — and spins like a helicopter through the air toward the ground.

- **Idea Behind the Design:**

- The engineers optimised their design by studying maple trees and other types of **wind-dispersed seeds** and fashioned the micro flier such that when dropped from a height it would fall at a slow velocity in a controlled manner.

This behaviour stabilizes its flight, **ensures dispersal over a broad area and increases the amount of time** it interacts with the air.

- They designed many different types of micro fliers, including one with three wings, resembling the wings on a **tristellateia seed**.

- **Significance:**

- It can be packed with **ultra-miniaturised technology**, including sensors, power sources, antennas for wireless communication and embedded memory to store data.

Miniaturization is the trend to manufacture ever **smaller mechanical, optical and electronic products** and devices.

- It is ideal for **monitoring Air Pollution and Airborne Disease**.

Source: HT
