WEST: A New I-STEM Initiative

For Prelims: Indian Science Technology and Engineering facilities Map (I-STEM), Women in Engineering, Science, and Technology (WEST), Prime Minister Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) mission

For Mains: Government Initiatives to Promote Women Participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

Why in News?

Recently, a new Indian Science Technology and Engineering facilities Map (I-STEM) initiative called "Women in Engineering, Science, and Technology (WEST)" was launched.

What is WEST Initiative?

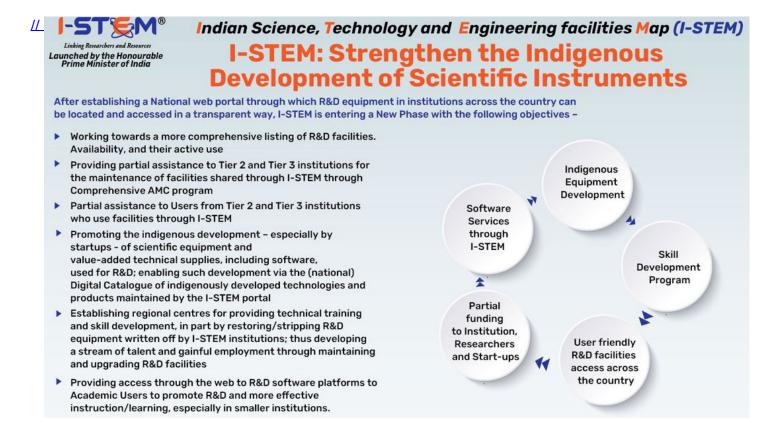
- The WEST programme will cater to women with a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) background and empower them to contribute to the science, technology, and innovation ecosystem.
- Through the WEST initiative, I-STEM shall provide a separate platform to scientifically inclined women researchers, scientists, and technologists for pursuing research in basic or applied sciences in frontier areas of science and engineering.
- Women may join the WEST program and explore opportunities to become stakeholders in various domains and pursue careers in R&D at various levels: technicians, technologists, scientists, and entrepreneurs.
 - Opportunities range from operating scientific equipments and maintaining them, to designing and manufacturing them.
- The Skill Development programmes under the WEST initiative will provide training for women with S&T backgrounds to brush up on their abilities and become engaged "in the field" as lab technicians and maintenance engineers.
- The access to R&D facilities and R&D software platforms (COMSOL, MATLAB, LABVIEW, AUTOCAD) will be available through the I-STEM portal.
- In addition, a digital consortium "Connect Quickly" for online discussion and immediate support has also been established through the I-STEM WhatsApp and Telegram platforms.
- A **dedicated team of women** will ensure the successful implementation of the WEST initiative.

What is I-STEM?

- About:
 - I-STEM is a National Web portal for sharing R&D (Research and Development) facilities.
 - The portal **facilitates researchers to access slots for the use of equipment,** as well as to share the details of the outcomes, such as patents, publications and technologies.
- Launch:
 - Launched in January 2020. It is an initiative of the Office of the **Principal Scientific**

Adviser to the Government of India under the aegis of Prime Minister Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) mission.

• **PM-STIAC:** It is an overarching Council that facilitates the Principal Scientific Adviser's Office to **assess the status in specific science and technology domains,** comprehend challenges in hand, formulate specific interventions, develop a futuristic roadmap and advise the Prime Minister accordingly.



What is the Significance of WEST and Way Forward?

Significance:

- This initiative will also help bring women back into S&T domains after a career break.
- Crucial gaps in the R&D infrastructure of the country will be filled.
- A strong support network for women entrepreneurs in S&T will be built.
- I-STEM shall provide a platform/forum for women researchers to deliberate on achievements, issues, and exchange ideas on taking the country forward through advances in science, technology, and innovation.
- Women can become entrepreneurs to serve as consultants for the operation and maintenance of sophisticated equipment/instruments through the I-STEM platform.
- This would go a long way towards filling a "skills gap", and putting publicly-funded equipment to good use.
- Way Forward:
 - I-STEM must monitor the impact of the initiative by obtaining feedback.
 - Steps must be put in place to increase the wider participation of women in WEST and I-STEM.

Source: PIB

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