

Platform of Platforms (POP) under eNAM (GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

Why in news?

- Recently, the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, launched the **Platform of Platforms (POP)** under the **National Agriculture Market (e-NAM)** on the sidelines of the State Agriculture and Horticulture Ministers' Conference in Bengaluru.
- Equity grant of over Rs 37 crore was also released to 1,018 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) that will benefit about 3.5 lakh farmers.



Key Highlights:

- With the introduction of POP, **farmers will be facilitated to sell the produce outside their state borders.**
- This will **increase farmers' digital access to multiple markets**, buyers and service providers and bring transparency in business transactions with the aim of improving price search mechanism and quality commensurate price realisation.
- 41 service providers from different platforms are covered under POP facilitating various value chain services like trading, quality checks, warehousing, fintech, market information, transportation etc.
- The PoP will create a digital ecosystem, which will benefit from the expertise of different platforms in different segments of the agricultural value chain.

Stakeholders:

- **e-NAM integrates the platform of Service Providers** as "Platform of Platforms" which includes **Composite Service Providers** (Service Providers who provide holistic services for trading of agricultural produce including quality analysis, trading, payment systems and logistics), **Logistics Service Provider**, Quality Assurance Service Provider, Cleaning, Grading, Sorting & Packaging Service Provider, Warehousing Facility Service Provider, Agricultural Input Service Provider, Technology Enabled Finance & Insurance Service Provider, Information Dissemination Portal (Advisory Services, crop forecasting, weather updates, capacity building for farmers etc.) and other platforms (e-commerce, international agri-business platforms, barter, private market platforms etc.).

What POP offers?

- The inclusion of various service providers not only adds to the value of the e-NAM platform, but also gives the users of the platform options to avail services from different service providers.

- It enables farmers, FPOs, traders and other stakeholders to access a wide variety of goods and services across the agricultural value chain through a single window, thereby giving more options to the stakeholders.
- Moreover, while selecting a good quality Goods/Service Provider, it saves the time and labour of the stakeholders.

Equity grant to Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs):

- He also released an equity grant of more than Rs 37 crore to 1,018 FPOs under the CSS which will benefit about 3.5 lakh farmers leading to the goal of setting up of 10 thousand FPOs.
- The Producer Members' equity, supplemented by a similar equity grant from the Central Government, would strengthen the financial base of the FPOs and help them to avail loans from financial institutions for their projects and working capital requirements for business development.
- Under the scheme, upto Rs. 18 lakh financial aid per FPO will be provided for a period of 3 years. In addition, a loan of Rs. 2,000 for each farmer member of the FPO within a limit of Rs.15 lakh per FPO will be available.
- There is also a provision of project loan or equivalent grant from any eligible lending institution of up to Rs.2 crore per FPO.

International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)
(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Why in news?

- An India-bound cargo sent from Russia using the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** reached the Sarkhas railway station in Iran recently.
- From the railway station, the cargo will go to Bandar Abbas port in southern India and then come to India via the Arabian Sea.



What is INSTC?

- INSTC is a **7,200 km-long transportation network** offering the shortest connectivity route to its member states.
- It was established on **September 12, 2000, by Iran, Russia and India**. The corridor encompasses sea, road and rail routes.
- The main purpose of the corridor was to reduce carriage costs and transit time between India and Russia. The transit time is expected to reduce to almost half, once the corridor becomes fully functional.
- The agreement has been **ratified by 13 countries namely**, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Armenia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Ukraine.
- **INSTC links the Indian Ocean to the Caspian Sea via the Persian Gulf.**

Why India supports INSTC?

- India supports the corridor to reduce transit cost and time. Europe-bound shipments that take 45-60 days to reach Europe, via Suez Canal, can be delivered in 23 days using INSTC.
- The corridor will **improve India's economic engagement with gulf countries** like Iran and Iraq. India has also been pushing for boosting regional connectivity. It is already working with Iran to develop the Chabahar port.
- India has proposed to include the port in the framework of the INSTC. At a connectivity conference in Tashkent in 2021, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar projected the Chabahar Port as a key regional transit hub including Afghanistan.

Energy:

- Also, the route may help **India is fulfilling its energy needs**. The improved connectivity along with RBI's latest rupee settlement announcement may help the country import oil from Iran.
- Once a leading importer of Iranian oil, India stopped buying the commodity after the USA imposed sanctions on Iran in 2018.
- India may also provide humanitarian aid to crisis-stricken Afghanistan through INSTC.

INSTC's challenges

- Central Asia has a major security threat in the form of the Islamic State (IS), a terrorist organisation.
- The issue of differential tariffs and customs in the region is a major challenge that India needs to overcome.

CAATSA waiver for India to purchase S-400 missile system from Russia

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Why in news?

- The US House of Representatives passed a legislative amendment that approves an India-specific waiver for punitive CAATSA sanctions for its purchase of the S-400 missile defence system from Russia.
- The legislative amendment was passed by voice vote as part of an en bloc (all together as a single unit) amendment during floor consideration of the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA).

Details:

- Authored and introduced by Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna, the amendment urges the Biden administration to use their authority to provide India with a **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAASTA)** waiver to help deter aggressors like China.

ICET:

- The legislation says that the **United States-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET)** is an essential step to developing closer partnerships between governments, academia, and industry in the two countries to address the latest advances in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, aerospace, and semiconductor manufacturing.
- Such collaborations between engineers and computer scientists are vital to help ensure that the United States and India, as well as other democracies around the world, foster innovation and facilitate technological advances which continue to far outpace Russian and Chinese technology.

About CAATSA:

- CAATSA is a tough US law that authorises the US administration to impose sanctions on countries that purchase major defence hardware from Russia in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US presidential elections.
- The law was brought in 2017 and provides for punitive actions by the US government against any country engaged in transactions with the Russian defence and intelligence sectors.



Background:

- In October 2018, India signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems, despite a warning from the then-Trump administration that going ahead with the contract may invite US sanctions.
- The S-400 is known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system.
- The US has already imposed sanctions on Turkey under the CAATSA for the purchase of a batch of S-400 missile defence systems from Russia.
- Following the US sanctions on Turkey over the procurement of S-400 missile systems, there were apprehensions that it may impose similar punitive measures on India.

Way Forward:

- The US waiver to India under CATSAA law shows that there is no relationship of greater significance to US strategic interests than the US-India partnership.

Four labour codes **(GS Paper 2, Governance)**

Why in news?

- The **Code on Wages** (passed in Parliament in August, 2019), the **Industrial Relations Code**, the **Code on Social Security**, and the **Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions** (all passed on September 22 and 23, 2020 in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha) have **not yet been implemented**.

Where does it stand?

- The government says the delay in implementation is due to the delay in framing rules by the States.

- As **labour is a concurrent subject**, both the States and the Centre will have to prepare rules for the codes. The Centre had also offered help to the States so that the codes can be implemented from July 1, 2022.
- Union Minister for Labour, recently said that only a few States have not yet framed the rules. According to a recent report, 24 States have so far published draft rules to all four codes.



What is the process?

- The States are publishing draft rules and inviting comments from stakeholders on those draft rules. The Centre had also published draft rules for certain sections of the four codes.
- The trade unions have been asking the Centre to stop this piecemeal approach and release the complete rules of four codes.
- Since the **four labour codes are an amalgamation of 29 Central laws** and **about 100 State** laws that are similar to various Central laws, drafting, publishing and holding consultations with stakeholders is taking considerable time.
- There are also complaints by the Opposition-ruled States that the codes are “poorly drafted”.
- The Opposition had objected to the way the three codes were passed in Parliament in just two days without much discussion.

What the Centre wants to do?

- The Centre intends to implement the four codes together.
- The **SP Mukherjee committee**, which is working towards the issue of minimum wages, is yet to complete its task. Setting a national minimum wage is important in the implementation of the Code on Wages.
- The Centre had recently said that the ambit of Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) will be expanded to all districts within two years.
- Social security for unorganised workers is a promise in the Code on Social Security and expansion of ESIC network is an unavoidable step for this purpose.

What lies ahead?

- The trade unions are warning about more protests if the codes are implemented. They say that the Centre will have to repeal it the way it repealed the three farm laws.
- The Centre, too, is worried about the political fallout of its implementation and thus, this could also be a possible reason for the delay.

- The employers are worried that further increase in the salary bill will hamper their profits in a recession-hit economy and they expect the government to hold more discussions.