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News: National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2022

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- National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) is **launched by Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2015.**
- The 2022 edition saw **IIT Madras topping the rankings in the overall category.**
It is the second consecutive term that IIT Madras is topping.
- Among the universities, **IISc, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jadavpur University and Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham were among the top five.**
- And among the top five colleges in the country are **Miranda House, Hindu College, Presidency College, Loyola College and Lady Shri Ram College for Women.**

- The top five medical institutes are **All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, Christian Medical College, Vellore, National Institute of Mental Health & Neuro Sciences, Bengaluru, and Banaras Hindu University.**
- The top five management institutes are **Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad, IIM Bengaluru, IIM Kolkata, IIT Delhi and IIM Kozhikode.**
- This is the **seventh consecutive edition of NIRF.** The Rankings have been released under various categories, including, **Engineering, Pharmacy, Management and Overall, Research.**
- The rankings for all colleges and universities across the country given by the Ministry were based on **teaching, learning, and resources; research and professional practice, graduation outcome; outreach and inclusivity; and peer perception.**

News: Launch of INS Dunagiri

Project 17 A Frigates

- Project 17A frigates are follow-on of the P17 Frigates (Shivalik Class) with improved stealth features, advanced weapons and sensors and platform management systems.

- A total of seven ships are being constructed, four at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders (MDL), Mumbai and three at Garden Reach Ship Builders Limited (GRSE), Kolkata.

Features

- The main advanced stealth features of P-17A pertain to the smaller Radar cross-section of the ship achieved through the use of a special super structure shape which reduces radar wave reflections.
- Another important feature is regarding the ship's low acoustic noise emanating from propellers, operating machinery like Diesel Generators etc., which hinders sonars on other ships to detect its presence.
- Such stealth features play an important role in improving the ship's survivability in any hostile environment during operations.
- Recently, third ship of the class INS Udaygiri was launched. First ships of the class INS Nilgiri (launched on September 2019) and INS Himgiri (launched on December 2020) is under sea trials.
- The 4th ship of the class INS Dunagiri was launched in July 2022.

News: Belarus to be included in the SCO

- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is likely to add Belarus as its newest member.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent Eurasian political, economic and military intergovernmental organization aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
- SCO was established on 15th June 2001 with its headquarters in Beijing, China.
- Previously it was known as Shanghai-Five. With the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 15th June 2001, the grouping became Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
- India and Pakistan joined as full members in the SCO on 9th June 2017 at Astana summit, Kazakhstan.
- Iran was granted full membership at the 21st summit held virtually on 2021.
- Members of the organisation are Iran, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and China.
- Observers of the group are Afghanistan, Belarus and Mongolia. Belarus recently applied for the membership also.
- Dialogue Partners are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka.

- **Culture** has become an important element of SCO.
- SCO is the **largest regional organization in the world in terms of geographical coverage and population, covering three-fifths of the Eurasian continent and nearly half of the human population.**
- Officially accepted languages in the group are Russian and Chinese.
- Recent meet of Prosecutors General hosted by India, adopted a protocol to **strengthen cooperation in preventing and combating growing menace of human trafficking, especially women and children.**
- Recently, Varanasi has been selected as the SCO region's first "Tourism and Cultural Capital".

Objectives

- **Strengthening mutual trust and neighborliness** among the member states.
- Promoting **effective cooperation in -politics, trade & economy, research & technology and culture.**
- **Enhancing ties in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, etc.**
- **Maintain and ensure peace,** security and stability in the region.
- Establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political & economic order.

- Guiding Principle – **Based on Shanghai Spirit.**
- Internal policy based on the **principles of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for cultural diversity,** and a desire for common development.
- External policy in accordance with the **principles of non-alignment,** non-targeting any third country, and openness.

Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

- **Heads of State Council** – **The supreme SCO body which decides its internal functioning and its interaction with other States** & international organisations, and considers international issues.
- **Heads of Government Council** – **Approves the budget, considers and decides upon issues related economic spheres** of interaction within SCO.
- **Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs** – Considers issues related to day-to-day activities.
- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** – Established to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- **SCO Secretariat** – Based in Beijing to provide informational, analytical & organisational support.

Importance for India

- India's membership of SCO can help in **achieving regional integration**, promote connectivity and stability across borders.

Security

- India through RATS can **improve its counterterrorism** abilities by working toward intelligence sharing, law enforcement and developing best practices and technologies.
- Through the SCO, India can also work on **anti-drug trafficking** and small arms proliferation.
- Cooperation on common challenges of **terrorism and radicalization**.

Energy

- **India being an energy deficient country** with increasing demands for energy, **SCO provides it with an opportunity to meet its energy** requirements through regional diplomacy.
- Talks on the construction of stalled pipelines like the **TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline**; **IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) pipeline** can get a much needed push through the SCO.

Trade

- SCO provides **direct access to Central Asia** – overcoming the main hindrance in flourishing of trade between India and Central Asia.
- SCO acts as an **alternative route to Central Asia**.
- Economic Ties - **Central Asian countries provides India with a market for its IT, telecommunications, banking, finance and pharmaceutical industries.**

Geopolitical

- Central Asia is a part of India's **Extended Neighborhood** – SCO provides India an opportunity to pursue the “**Connect Central Asian Policy**”.
- Helps India fulfil its aspiration of playing an active role in its extended neighborhood as well as **checking the ever growing influence of China** in Eurasia.
- Platform for India to **simultaneously engage with its traditional friend Russia as well as its rivals, China and Pakistan.**

Challenges of SCO Membership for India

- **Pakistan's inclusion in SCO** poses potential difficulties for India.
- India's ability to assert itself would be limited and it **may have to play second fiddle since China and Russia are co-founders of SCO and its dominant powers.**

- India may also have to either dilute its growing partnership with the West or engage in a delicate balancing act - as SCO has traditionally adopted an anti-Western posture.

Wonders of SCO

- India- Statue of Unity
- Kazakhstan- Archaeological Landscape of Tamgaly
- China- Daming imperial palace complex
- Kyrgyzstan- Lake Issyk-Kul
- Pakistan- The Great Mughal's heritage, Lahore
- Russia- The Golden Ring cities
- Tajikistan- Palace of Nowruz
- Uzbekistan- The Poi Kalon complex.

News: Navy decommissions Sindhudhvaj

- The Navy's Kilo class submarine INS Sindhudhvaj was decommissioned from service on Saturday at Visakhapatnam after 35 years in service. With this, the Navy now has 15 conventional submarines in service.

News: Packed curd, paneer, atta to attract 5% GST from today

- Customers will have to pay a 5% Goods and Services Tax (GST) on prepacked, labelled food items such as atta, paneer and curd, besides hospital rooms with rents above ₹5,000, starting from Monday.
- Hotel rooms with tariffs of up to ₹1,000 a day, maps and charts, including atlases, will attract a 12% GST; while cartons and fees charged by banks for the issue of cheques (loose or in book form) will attract 18%.