

A Decade of India's Act East Policy (AEP)

- The **Act East Policy (AEP)** was introduced during the Prime Minister's visit to **Myanmar** for the **East Asia Summit and the ASEAN + India Summit** in November 2014.
 - It represents an evolution of **the Look East Policy initiated in 1992**.
- **About Act East Policy (AEP):** AEP focuses on strengthening India's ties with the extended neighbourhood in the **Indo-Pacific region (IPR)**, with a particular emphasis on ASEAN countries.
- **Objective:** Promote economic cooperation, cultural ties, and strategic relationships in the IPR by improving connectivity.
- **Key Principles of Act East Policy (AEP)**
 1. **Strategic Security Cooperation:** Develop and enhance strategic security and relations in the Indo-Pacific region.
 2. **Economic Ties and Connectivity:** Strengthen India's economic connections with the region through increased trade and investment.
 3. **Cultural Ties:** Boost historical cultural connections with countries in the region.
 4. **Four C's of Act East Policy:** Culture, Commerce, Connectivity, Capacity Building
- **Achievements under AEP**
 - **Strategic Launch Pad:** AEP has enabled India to assert its position in the IPR, such as supporting the Philippines in the South China Sea dispute.
 - **Stronger Partnerships:** AEP has helped forge stronger strategic partnerships with countries like **Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Japan**, and established closer ties with **BIMSTEC** and the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.
 - **Northeastern Integration:** Greater integration of Northeastern states with ASEAN to reduce economic isolation. For instance, the **India-Japan Act East Forum** promotes development and connectivity in the region.
- **Roadblocks to AEP**
 - **Chinese Influence:** China's deep economic integration with ASEAN countries poses a challenge.
 - **Economic Performance:** India's economic performance, including a trade deficit of **\$43.57 billion**, has been a hurdle.
- **Way Forward**
 - **Review ASEAN FTA:** Assess and review the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement.
 - **Promote Tourism:** Enhance tourism initiatives.
 - **Semiconductor Mission:** Collaborate with Singapore and Malaysia to advance the Indian Semiconductor Mission.

CBSE Launches SAFAL Test Cycle 2024

- The **Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)** has launched the **SAFAL (Structured Assessment For Analyzing Learning)** test cycle for 2024 with the aim to reduce exam stress and identify learning gaps for timely remedial action.
- **Structured Assessment For Analyzing Learning (SAFAL)**
 - **Competency-based Assessment:** SAFAL is designed for Grades 3, 5, and 8 to evaluate core concepts, application of knowledge, and higher-order thinking skills.
 - **Key Features:**
 - Focuses on core concepts, moving away from rote learning.
 - Provides diagnostic information to aid in the development of learning outcomes.
 - Emphasizes continuous improvement rather than promotion to the next grade.
 - Assesses students' proficiency at four levels: Below Basic (2 years below grade), Basic (1 year below grade), Proficient, and Advanced (current grade).
 - No additional classes or special preparation required for students.

Tell Umm Amer

- **Saint Hilarion Monastery (Tell Umm Amer) in Palestine on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger**
- **About Tell Umm Amer:**
 - **Founder:** Saint Hilarion, one of the earliest monastic sites in the Middle East, established in the 4th century.
 - **Location:** strategic position at the crossroads of major trade and communication routes between Asia and Africa.

Gaganyaan Mission

- The Union Government informed Parliament that one of the four astronauts in training for the Gaganyaan mission will travel to the **International Space Station (ISS)** in collaboration with **NASA**.
- **About the Gaganyaan Mission:**
 - **Goal:** To demonstrate India's ability to send humans to space by launching a crew of three astronauts into a 400 km orbit for a three-day mission and bringing them back safely to Earth.
 - **Launch Vehicle:** The mission will utilize the Human Rated LVM3 (HLVM3).
 - **Significance:** Successfully launching Gaganyaan will position India as the fourth country, after the US, Russia, and China, to send humans into space.

Digitalisation Exposes Consumers to New Risks: RBI Report

- In the **Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) for 2023-24**, released on Monday, the RBI said digitalisation-induced changes in the behaviour of consumers and financial intermediaries can have implications for monetary policy.
- **Key Highlights of the report:**
- **Consumer Risks:**
 - **Impulsive Spending and Data Breaches:** Digitalisation improves access to financial services but also increases risks like impulsive spending, herd behavior, and data breaches.
 - **Herd Behavior:** Observing large groups engaging in financial activities can lead to mass buying or selling of stocks and potential bank runs.
 - **Data Breaches:** The average cost of data breaches in India in 2023 was \$2.18 million, with phishing and stolen credentials being common attacks.
- **Impact on Monetary Policy:**
 - **Behavioral Changes:** Digitalisation-induced changes in consumer and financial intermediary behavior can affect monetary policy.
 - **Complex Financial System:** A more interconnected financial system can pose risks to financial stability.
 - **Credit Shifting:** Credit supply shifting from banks to less-regulated entities can weaken monetary policy effectiveness.
 - **Central Bank Models:** Central banks need to incorporate digitalisation in their models to ensure effective monetary and financial stability.
- **Boost to Trade and Payments:**
 - **External Trade:** Digitalisation can enhance India's trade in goods and services, especially modern services not reliant on geographic proximity.
 - **Remittance Costs:** Digital payment systems can reduce remittance costs, increasing savings for recipients.
- **Cross-border Payment Initiatives:**
 - **Project Nexus:** RBI joined Project Nexus to enable instant cross-border payments, linking India's UPI with systems in Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.
 - **UPI and PayNow Integration:** India's UPI integrated with Singapore's PayNow for faster, cost-effective remittances. An agreement was also signed to link India's UPI with UAE's Instant Payment Platform.
- **Policy Measures and UPI Growth:**
 - **Proactive Policy Measures:** RBI is taking steps to benefit from digitalisation while managing its risks.
 - **UPI Growth:** UPI transactions grew from 12.5 billion (2019-20) to 131 billion (2023-24). Currently, UPI handles nearly 14 billion transactions monthly, with 424 million users in June 2024.
- **Digital Trade Policies:** Crucial for new opportunities, building trust, and regulating data security and cybersecurity.
- **Internationalisation of the Rupee:** Digitalisation supports the international use of the rupee, backed by comprehensive policies.

Ideas4LiFE Initiative

- Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav launched the **Ideas4LiFE initiative at IIT Delhi**.
- This initiative invites students, research scholars, faculty, and innovators to submit ideas and innovations that promote environmentally friendly lifestyles.
- The **Ideas4LiFE** initiative **encourages** participation in the global **Mission LiFE** for environmental sustainability.