

FROM APRIL, INDIA PLANS ITS OWN CAR CRASH-TEST RATINGS

In News:

- Recently, the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRT&H), Government of India, published a draft standard car assessment programme - **Bharat New Car Assessment Programmes (NCAP)**.
- Under Bharat NCAP, which is proposed to be rolled out from next April, automobiles in India shall be accorded '**Star Ratings**' based on their performance in crash tests.

The new car assessment program:

• About Bharat NCAP:

- It is proposed in the Draft General Statutory Rules (GSR) Notification of the MoRT&H.
- It is a testing protocol, wherein automobiles in India shall be accorded Star Ratings based upon their performance in crash tests.
- The proposed assessment will allocate Star Ratings from 1 to 5 stars.
- It will be a voluntary programme under which the cost of a new car for the purpose of assessment shall be borne by the respective vehicle manufacturer or importer.
- It will be rolled out from April 1, 2023.

• Features:

- While India has mandatory crash test norms for cars, the Bharat NCAP rating will be of superior standard and will be aligned with global crash-test protocols.
- Unlike in other countries where the NCAP are carried out by non-government entities, there will be a Bharat NCAP Authority in India.
- The authority will also host the safety ratings of all new car models on a website for public knowledge.
- These safety ratings will be based on three vehicle features - Adult Occupant Protection (AOP), Child Occupant Protection (COP) and Safety Assist Technologies (SAT).

• Need:



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- In India, a total number of 3,66,138 road accidents have been reported in 2020, claiming 1,31,714 lives and causing injuries to 3,48,279 persons.
- The Bharat NCAP's safety ratings will help car buyers to make decisions wisely before purchasing a car and giving a boost to road safety in India.
- **Significance:**
- Bharat NCAP will serve as a consumer-centric platform, allowing customers to opt for safer cars based upon their Star-Ratings.
- This will promote a healthy competition among original equipment manufacturers in India to manufacture safer vehicles.

Global New Car Assessment Programme (Global NCAP):

- It is a major project of the Towards Zero Foundation which is a United Kingdom registered charity.
- It serves as a platform for cooperation among new car assessment programmes worldwide and promotes the universal adoption of the United Nations (UN) most important motor vehicle safety standards worldwide.
- Global NCAP has adopted a Road Map for Safer Vehicles 2020 which provides a recommended timetable for UN Member States to apply the most important UN vehicle safety regulations.

PARAMESWARAN IYER, WHO HELPED IN SWACHH BHARAT ROLLOUT, REPLACES KANT AS NITI CEO

In News:

- The Appointments Committee of the Union Cabinet recently approved the appointment of retired civil servant Parameswaran Iyer as the new CEO of Niti Aayog.
- Iyer, who was instrumental in the implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission, will succeed Amitabh Kant, whose six-year tenure is coming to an end.

NITI Aayog:

- National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on 1 January 2015.

- It was constituted to replace the Planning Commission, which had been instituted in 1950.
- This step was taken to better serve the needs and aspirations of the people.
- It is the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, providing directional and policy inputs.
- Apart from designing strategic and long-term policies and programmes for the Government of India, NITI Aayog also provides relevant technical advice to the Centre, States and Union Territories.
- An important evolutionary change, NITI Aayog acts as the quintessential platform to bring the States to act together in national interest and thereby fosters cooperative federalism.

Composition:

- **Chairperson:** The Prime Minister (PM) of India
- **Governing Council:**
 - It is chaired by the PM and comprises Chief Ministers of all the States and Union Territories with legislatures and Lt Governors of other Union Territories.
 - It is constituted/reconstituted by the **Cabinet Secretariat.**
- **Full time organisational framework:**
 - **Vice Chairperson:** Appointed by the PM, s/he enjoys the rank of a Cabinet Minister.
 - **Full-Time Members:** Enjoys the rank of a Minister of State.
 - **Part-Time Members:** Maximum 2.
 - **Ex-Officio Members:** Maximum of 4 members of the Union Council of Minister to be nominated by the PM.
- **Chief Executive Officer (CEO):** Appointed by the PM for a fixed tenure, s/he enjoys the rank of Secretary to the Government of India.
- **Special Invitees:** These will be experts with relevant domain knowledge to be nominated by the PM.

Objectives:

- **To foster cooperative federalism** through structured support initiatives with the States on a continuous basis, recognizing that strong States make a strong nation.

- **To formulate credible plans** at the village level and aggregate these progressively at higher levels of government.
- **To ensure that the interests of national security** are incorporated in economic strategy and policy.
- **To design strategic and long-term policy** and programme frameworks and initiatives and monitor their progress and their efficacy.
- To pay special attention to the sections of our society that may be at risk of not benefiting adequately from economic progress.
- **To focus on technology upgradation and capacity building** for implementation of programmes and initiatives, etc.

Functions:



Performance of NITI:

- **As an action Tank:** By collecting fresh and new ideas and sharing them with the government at the Central and State level, it ensures that there is no inactivity in any organisation or institution.
- **Improving innovation:** A commendable work has been done by the **Atal Innovation Mission** (established under NITI Aayog), which has helped in improving the innovation ecosystem in India.
- **Bringing greater responsibility in the system:** Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO) has been established by the NITI Aayog, which collects performance data of various Ministries on a real-time basis.
 - These data are then used at the highest policy-making levels to improve performance and establish accountability.
- **Some important initiatives of NITI Aayog:** Some of the initiatives like Ayushman Bharat, water conservation measures, approach towards artificial intelligence, have been conceptualised in NITI Aayog and respective Ministries are taking them forward.

- POSHAAN ABHIYAAN by NITI Aayog is cutting across the silos within the government and helping in reducing malnourished children in India.

NITI Aayog: Promoting Federalism

• Cooperative Federalism

- NITI has provided a platform for direct issue-based interaction between States and Central Ministries thereby helping quick resolution of outstanding issues.
- The NITI Forum for North East has been constituted and tangible sectoral proposals are being implemented by the States in partnership with the North East council.
- NITI has designed some major initiatives for island development which are being implemented under the overall guidance of the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- It is also envisaged that like the NITI Forum for the North East, other regional councils of contiguous States could be formed.
 - The first step has been taken by forming the **Himalayan States Regional Council** and forming a **coalition of all thirteen central universities in these states**.

• Competitive Federalism

- It promotes competitive federalism principally through pushing its sectoral indices which are put out in the public domain.
 - The indices on water, education, health, innovation, export preparedness, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have attracted significant positive attention.
- It has also introduced a competition element in ‘Aspirational Districts Program’ by focusing on governance improvement on the ground.
 - These districts have shown significant improvement in indicators pertaining to health and nutrition, education etc.
- Besides, several best practices in governance have emerged from these districts which are now being scaled up and replicated at the block level in some states.

Challenges:

- The NITI Aayog cannot transform a deeply unequal society into a modern economy that ensures the welfare of all citizens. This is evident in the **rising inequality in India**.
- NITI Aayog has no influence over private or public investment.

- NITI Aayog does not appear to have an impact on long-term policy decisions. For example, the Goods and Services Tax.
- NITI Aayog frequently provides uncritical support for government-sponsored schemes and programmes. However, it should keep an intellectual distance from the government.

Way ahead:

- NITI Aayog should concentrate on policy implementation rather than just policy recommendations.
- It should also be focusing on reforms and informing the government about where it will face consequences for failing to implement its policies and where it is falling short.

U.S. SUPREME COURT OVERTURNS ABORTION RIGHT

In News:

- The US Supreme Court took the dramatic step of overturning the landmark 1973 Roe vs Wade ruling.
- The 1973 Roe vs Wade ruling has been the basis for legal abortions across America for nearly half a century.

Background:

- In 2018, the Republican-majority legislature of the state of Mississippi banned most abortions after 15 weeks.
 - It was much before foetal viability, and sooner than was allowed by Roe case.
- This law was challenged in lower court, which in turn struck it down, ruling that it “unequivocally” violated the constitutional rights of women.
- Finally, the 2018 law reached the Supreme Court. The judgement of which was pronounced recently.

In Focus: Major SC judgement of US concerning abortion

Roe v. Wade Ruling (1973)

- The case is sometimes referred to simply as “Roe”, the listed name of the 22-year-old plaintiff.
 - Wade was the defendant Henry Wade, the Dallas County (Texas) district attorney at the time.

- The ruling struck down laws that made abortion illegal in several states, and ruled that abortion would be allowed up to the point of foetal viability.
 - Foetal viability is the time after which a foetus can survive outside the womb.
 - Foetal viability is often seen as the point at which the rights of the woman can be separated from the rights of the unborn foetus.
 - Foetal viability was around 28 weeks (7 months) at the time of the ‘Roe’ judgment.
 - However, experts now agree that advances in medicine have brought the threshold down to 23 or 24 weeks (6 months or a little less).
 - Newer studies show this could be further pegged at 22 weeks.
- In this case, the Court ruled that the Constitution of the U.S. protects a pregnant woman's liberty to choose to have an abortion without excessive government restriction.

Planned Parenthood v. Casey case, 1992

- In this case, the Supreme Court revisited and modified its rulings in Roe v. Wade judgement.
- The Court reaffirmed that a woman's right to choose to have an abortion is constitutionally protected.
- However, it rejected Roe's trimester framework in favour of a foetal viability (the time after which a foetus can survive outside the womb) threshold.
- It also overruled the strict scrutiny criteria for considering abortion restrictions.

Significance of these judgements

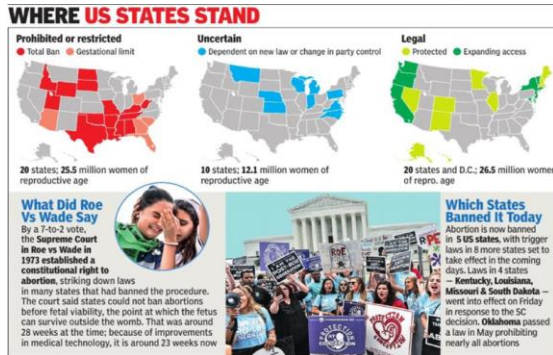
- **Strengthened the concept of personal liberty**
 - These judgements recognised the concept of personal liberty as enshrined in the Fourteenth Amendment against government interference with intensely personal decisions.
- **Social and ideological clash over the issue of abortion**
 - It also resulted in a social and ideological struggle (between Democrats [pro-abortion] and Republicans [conservative, anti-abortion]).
 - This has further polarised the country's already divided society and politics.

News Summary

- The United States Supreme Court has overturned by a 6-3 majority ‘Roe v. Wade’, the court’s landmark 1973 judgment that made abortion a constitutional right.

Where does US stand after this verdict?

- By erasing abortion as a constitutional right, the ruling restored the ability of states to ban it. Now states are free to enact their own laws on this matter.



Abortion rights in major countries of the world



Abortion laws in India

- Abortions in India is controlled by the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) act 1971.
 - Initially, the MTP act said that abortion can be permitted up to 20 weeks of pregnancy.
 - Through an amendment in 2021, the ceiling for abortions was raised to 24 weeks.
 - However, this was done only for special categories of pregnant women such as rape or incest survivors, that too, with the approval of two registered doctors.
 - In case of foetal disability, there is no limit to the timeline for abortion.
 - However, this is allowed by a medical board of specialist doctors set up by the governments of states and union territories.
 - In 1994, the PCPNDT (Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques) Act was enacted to prevent misuse of the MTP Act.



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