



6 June, 2023

National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2023

Context: The Minister of State for Education, Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, released the India Rankings 2023.

What is NIRF?

- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was **launched by the Ministry for Human Resource Development (MHRD)**, now known as the Ministry of Education (**MoE**), in **September 2015**. This framework provides a methodology to rank institutions across India based on various parameters.
- The ranking is based on **six parameters** and weightage in brackets:
 - Teaching-learning and resources (0.3)
 - Research and professional practice (0.3)
 - Graduation outcomes (0.2)
 - Outreach and inclusivity (0.1)
 - Perception about the institution (0.1)
- The rankings assess institutions based on **academic excellence, research output, student outcomes, inclusivity, and public perception**.
- **Institutions included in this ranking**
 - A **total of 5,543 unique institutions** participated in India Rankings 2023.
 - These institutions submitted 8,686 applications for ranking in various categories.
 - The increase in institutional participation reflects recognition of the rankings as a fair and transparent exercise.
 - The number of unique applicants has increased from 2,426 in 2016 to 5,543 in 2023.
 - The total number of applications has increased from 3,565 in 2016 to 8,686 in 2023.
 - **100 institutions have been ranked in Overall, Universities, Colleges, and Engineering** since the inception of India Rankings in 2016.
 - The number of ranked institutions in Management and Pharmacy has increased to 100 **each from 2022 onwards**.
 - Subject domains such as **Architecture, Law, Medical, Dental, and Research Institutions** have a restricted number of ranked institutions.
 - **Additional rankings are grouped in rank bands** of 101-150 and 151-200 in some categories.

Key Highlights of Indian Rankings 2023

- **Indian Institute of Technology Madras** retains its **1st position in the Overall Category** for the fifth consecutive year (2019-2023) and in Engineering for the eighth consecutive year (2016-2023).
- Top 100 in the Overall category include 44 CFTIs/CFUs INI, 24 state universities, 13 deemed universities, 18 private universities, 4 agriculture and allied sector institutions, and 3 management institutions.
- **Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru tops the Universities Category for the eighth consecutive year (2016-2023)** and the Research Institutions Category for the third consecutive year (2021-2023).
- **IIM Ahmedabad tops in the Management** subject for the fourth consecutive year (2020-2023).
- All India Institute of Medical Sciences (**AIIMS**), **New Delhi** occupies the top slot in Medical for the sixth consecutive year (2018-2023).
- **National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research, Hyderabad tops the Pharmacy** ranking for the first time, surpassing Jamia Hamdard.

Face to Face Centres



6 June, 2023

- **Miranda House retains the 1st position among Colleges** for the seventh consecutive year (2017-2023).
- **IIT Roorkee stands at 1st position in Architecture** subject for the third consecutive year (2021-2023).
- National Law School of India University, Bengaluru retains its first position in Law for the sixth consecutive year (2018-2023).
- **Five colleges from Delhi are among the top 10 colleges in the ranking.**
- The **Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences** takes the top slot for the second consecutive year.
- **Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi takes the top slot in Agriculture** and Allied Sectors.
- **Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur tops in the Innovation** category.

National Highway Authority of India's (NHA) First Sustainability Report

Context: Highlighting its commitment towards Environment sustainability, NHA's first 'Sustainability Report for FY 2021-22', the report was unveiled by Mr. Nitin Gadkari.

- NHA has reduced **direct emissions by 18.44%** from FY 2019-20 to 2021-22 through decreased fuel consumption.
- Efforts are being made to **transition to clean and green energy sources** to reduce indirect emissions.
- **Greenhouse gas emissions** from energy consumption, operations, transport, and travel **decreased by 9.7%** in FY 2020-21 and 2% in FY 2021-22.
- Energy intensity in operations reduced by 37% in FY 2020-21 and 27% in FY 2021-22.
- Electronic Toll Collection through **FASTag has achieved over 97%** penetration, contributing to a reduced carbon footprint.
- **Recycled materials like fly-ash and plastic** waste are utilized in national highway construction.
- Wildlife crossings across 20 states protect wildlife and reduce man-animal conflict.
- **Plantation drives** have resulted in the planting of around 2.74 crore saplings to offset vehicle emissions.
- **Collaborative partnerships with stakeholders**, including SRLM, Self Help Groups, and **NGOs**, are formed for plantation drives.
- NHA organized a nationwide plantation drive, planting around 1.1 lakh plants in a single day at 114 locations.
- NHA has increased **employment of women and marginalized communities.**
- The Sustainability Report **follows Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines** and is externally assured by a third party.
- The report can enable 'Green Finance' in infrastructure financing as per the Ministry of Finance framework.
- NHA is committed to sustainable and eco-friendly practices, focusing on economic viability, social responsibility, and environmental sustainability.

NHA

- NHA is a **statutory body formed in 1988** under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- It is responsible for the **development, maintenance, and management of national highways in India.**
- NHA **operates autonomously** and **focuses on efficient** and safe highway movement.
- **Toll plaza operation and maintenance** on national highways fall under NHA's purview.
- The authority collaborates with stakeholders for timely and quality project execution.
- It **emphasizes sustainability, safety, and convenience** for road users.

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6 June, 2023

What is Global Reporting Initiative?

GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) is the **independent, international organization** that helps businesses and other organizations take **responsibility for their impacts**, by providing them with the **global common language to communicate** those impacts.

Adverse Possession

Context: The Law Commission in its recent report has said that any change in the law relating to adverse possession cannot be justified.

- Adverse possession is a legal concept based on the **idea that land should not be left vacant but put to use.**
- It **allows a person in possession of land for a specified period to acquire ownership rights**, even if they are not the original title holder.
- The rationale behind adverse possession includes **avoiding prolonged uncertainty of land ownership** and promoting the productive use of idle land.
- The Law Commission's report supports adverse possession, stating that **those who neglect to enforce their rights over a long period should not be allowed to reclaim the land.**
- The concept of adverse possession dates back to ancient times, with its roots found in the **Hammurabi Code.**
- The **Limitation Act of 1963** brought changes to adverse possession, strengthening the position of the true owner and shifting the burden of proof to the claimant.
- The **Supreme Court has recommended changes to the law of adverse possession**, considering it irrational and disproportionate.
- The dissenting opinion suggests striking off the law of adverse possession, citing difficulties faced by true owners and the burden on the court system.
- The present Law Commission has been deliberating afresh on the subject, recognizing the importance of the issue and the pending reference since 2008.

Law Commission

- The Law Commission of India is a **non-statutory body** established by the Government of India for legal research and law reform.
- After Independence, it was **first constituted in 1955** and has since been reconstituted on a regular basis to undertake various law-related studies and make recommendations for legal reforms.
- The primary objective of the Law Commission is to **review and modernize existing laws, identify areas in need of legal reform**, and **propose new legislation** to meet the changing needs of society.
- The Commission consists of a **Chairman, who is usually a retired judge of the Supreme Court** of India, and several members, including legal experts, academicians, and practitioners.

The **recommendations and reports of the Law Commission** hold significant weight but are of **advisory nature**, and often serve as a basis for legislative changes, helping to shape and improve the legal framework of the country.

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NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

"Reopening of Iranian Embassy in Riyadh"

Context:

Iran is set to reopen its embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, after a seven-year closure.



Key Highlights:

- Saudi Arabia severed relations with Iran in 2016 after its embassy in Tehran and consulate in Mashhad were attacked during protests over the execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr.
- Iran's embassy in Riyadh, its consulate in Jeddah, and its representative office to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) will be officially reopened.
- The reconciliation agreement signed in China on March 10 marked a surprising shift in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia after years of discord and backing opposing sides in conflict zones across West Asia.

Reason to reopen embassy in Riyadh:

- The reopening of the Iranian embassy in Riyadh signifies a significant step towards normalizing diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.
- By reopening the embassy, Iran aims to foster better communication, improve bilateral ties and promote mutual understanding with Saudi Arabia.

Iran's diplomatic mission:

Iran's diplomatic mission, headed by Alireza Enayati, will be responsible for representing Iran's interests in Saudi Arabia.

"Satellites & AI for Organic Cotton Certification"

Context:

The European Space Agency (ESA) and Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) are collaborating to use satellite images and artificial intelligence (AI) to certify organic cotton fields in India.



Key Highlights:

- The initiative aims to identify cotton fields that meet organic cultivation standards and support the transition to organic farming.
- ESA's satellite data will be used to train AI models to classify cotton fields in India.
- The project will help GOTS generate accurate estimates of organic cotton yields in specific regions.
- GOTS is an alliance of organizations promoting organic textiles.

Collaboration:

The collaboration between ESA, GOTS and AI company Marple aims to combine satellite data and AI technology to certify organic cotton fields.

Organic cotton yield:

Organic cotton yield refers to the amount of organic cotton produced in a given area or region. It represents the quantity of cotton harvested from fields that adhere to organic farming practices, such as avoiding synthetic pesticides and promoting ecological sustainability.



Objective of collaboration:

The primary objective of the collaboration is to strengthen the integrity of organic cotton certification and prevent fraud in the supply chain. Additionally, it aims to increase the participation of small-scale farmers in the certified organic sector and meet the growing consumer demand for organic cotton within the textile industry.

Face to Face Centres



6 June, 2023

<p style="text-align: center;">"Vaccines Targeting Cancer: New Research"</p>	<p>Context: Recent research shows that mRNA-based vaccines in combination with immunotherapy have shown promising results in reducing the spread of melanoma and improving survival rates for skin cancer patients.</p> <p>Key Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ An experimental mRNA-based vaccine from Moderna and Merck reduced the risk of melanoma spread by 65% in a mid-stage trial when combined with immunotherapy compared to immunotherapy alone. ➤ The customised mRNA vaccine, when given alongside Merck's Keytruda, reduced the risk of death or recurrence of skin cancer by 44% compared to using Keytruda alone. ➤ mRNA technology, which gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, has the potential to develop personalised vaccines that train the immune system to target specific cancer cells in a patient's tumors. ➤ mRNA vaccines, paired with drugs that stimulate the immune system, can selectively target proteins present on tumors, allowing the immune system to kill cancer cells while minimizing damage to healthy tissue. <p>Collaboration: Collaborations between pharmaceutical companies like Merck and Moderna, as well as Pfizer's partnership with BioNTech and Gritstone Bio Inc are combining immune system-activating drugs with mRNA vaccine technology to target various types of cancer.</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;">"Nyaya Vikas Portal: Monitoring CSS Implementation"</p>	<p>Context: The Nyaya Vikas Portal has been developed to monitor the implementation of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for the development of infrastructure facilities for district and subordinate judiciary.</p> <p>Key Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Nyaya Vikas Portal offers stakeholders four efficient ways to log in, ensuring easy access to information. ○ The Department of Justice has been implementing the CSS since 1993-94, providing central assistance to state governments and UT administrations for the construction of court halls and residential units for judicial officers. ○ The scheme has been extended beyond 31.03.2021, with the addition of new features such as Lawyers Hall, Toilet complexes and Digital computer rooms for the convenience of lawyers and litigants. <p>What is Nyaya Vikas Portal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Nyaya Vikas Portal is an online platform created for monitoring the implementation of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for the development of infrastructure facilities for district and subordinate judiciary. It allows stakeholders to access information related to funding, documentation, project monitoring, and approval. <p>Fund Sharing: The funds sharing pattern for the scheme is 60:40 between the Center and states (excluding North Eastern and Himalayan States). For North Eastern and Himalayan States, the pattern is 90:10, while Union Territories receive 100% funding.</p> 

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