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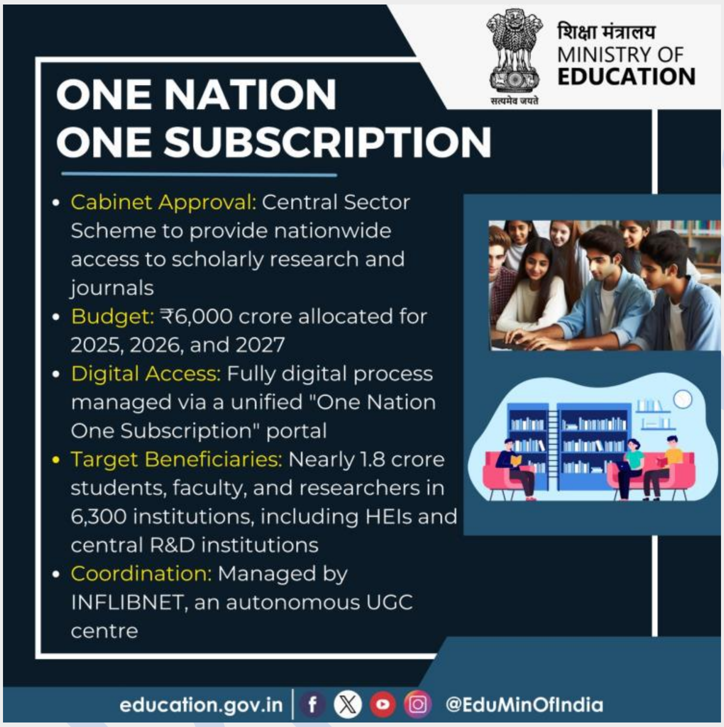
1. First phase of 'One Nation One Subscription' approved: How the scheme can improve govt institutions' access to journals

Overview



The Union Cabinet recently approved a budgetary allocation of Rs 6,000 crore for an initiative called 'One Nation One Subscription' (ONOS) which the Centre hopes will help India's higher education institutions (HEIs) access academic resources for the better.

Aiming to centralise journal subscriptions for nearly 6,300 government-run institutions, ONOS seeks to provide equitable access to 13,000 scholarly journals under a single platform.

Here's a breakdown of the current system, the Cabinet's approval, and the roadmap for this initiative.

How do HEIs currently access journals?

Currently, HEIs can access journals through 10 different library consortia which are under the administrative control of various ministries. A library consortium is a group of two or more libraries that have agreed to cooperate to fulfil certain similar needs, usually resource sharing. For instance, INFLIBNET Centre (Information and Library Network Centre) in Gandhinagar is an Inter-University Centre of the University Grants Commission under the Ministry of Education (India) which oversees the UGC-Infonet Digital Library Consortium, providing access to selected scholarly electronic journals and databases in different disciplines.

Apart from this, HEIs also subscribe to several journals individually. According to government estimates, roughly 2,500 HEIs can access 8,100 journals through the above networks and individual subscriptions.

What does the ONOS scheme offer?

Through the ONOS scheme, the Centre aims to consolidate the disaggregated approach to journal access for all government HEIs. ONOS will enable state and central government HEIs to access thousands of journals on one platform, which will be active from January 1, 2025.

This common platform will host 13,000 journals published by 30 international publishers including Elsevier Science Direct (including Lancet), Springer Nature, Wiley Blackwell Publishing, Taylor & Francis, IEEE, Sage Publishing, American Chemical Society, and American Mathematical Society, among others. All institutions will only need to register on the platform to access these journals. INFLIBNET has been designated as the implementing agency for this initiative. The central government negotiated one subscription price for each of the 30 different publishers and approved Rs 6,000 crore for three calendar years — 2025, 2026 and 2027.

What is the need for ONOS?
The ONOS scheme has been justified on four grounds.

First, it would expand access to the best scholarly journals for 55 lakh to nearly 1.8 crore students, faculty, and researchers across roughly 6,300 government universities, colleges, research bodies, and Institutions of National Importance (INIs), including those in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.

Second, it would avoid duplication of journal subscriptions across different library consortia and individual higher education institutions and hence reduce excess expenditure on overlapping resources.

Third, a single subscription for all central and state government HEIs would provide better bargaining power when negotiating with publishers. Citing an example, a source in the central government said, "We have been meeting with representatives of different publishers over the last two years, and during this time, we have worked to negotiate the best price. As a result, the initial cost of Rs 4,000 crore per year for 13,000 journals has been reduced to Rs 1,800 crore."

Fourth, the Centre will gain insights into the extent to which journals are being accessed and downloaded by the government higher education ecosystem, according to the official. "This will not only help in long-term planning but also allow us to encourage inactive institutions to fully utilise the platform and promote its benefits among their teachers, students, and researchers," the officer said.

When was ONOS conceptualised?
The initiative originates from the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasised research as a cornerstone for achieving excellence in education and national development. "If India is to become a leader in these disparate areas, and truly achieve the potential of its vast talent pool to again become a leading knowledge society in the coming years and decades, the nation will require a significant expansion of its research capabilities and output across disciplines," the NEP 2020 states. The policy strongly recommended the establishment of a National Research Foundation (NRF) to seed, fund, nurture, and promote research and

development (R&D) while fostering a culture of innovation across India's higher education ecosystem.

In 2022, the central government took a concrete step toward this goal by forming a core committee of secretaries, chaired by the Principal Scientific Advisor. This committee then constituted a cost negotiation panel to carry out robust negotiations with journal publishers for the ONOS initiative. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) was established early this year.

What happens next?

The next step is for the central government to negotiate Article Processing Charges (APCs) with journal publishers. APCs, also known as publication fees, are charges authors must pay to publish in certain journals. Scientific journals have various ways of generating income to cover publishing, editorial, operational, peer-review, and other functional costs. Open-access journals typically charge a specific fee for article processing, known as the APC.

According to government estimates, authors in India paid nearly ₹380 crore to journal publishers as APCs in 2021. Similar to how the government negotiated a single subscription rate for all government-run higher education institutions (HEIs), it now aims to do the same for APCs. The Centre believes this approach will reduce overall costs. To achieve this, subject-specific groups of experts from participating ministries will be formed to negotiate with journals on APCs for research papers.

As for whether ONOS will also cover private HEIs, the government has not yet made a decision, sources said.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: Indian Express

2. Trump plans tariffs on Canada, Mexico, China: What does it mean?

Introduction

President-elect Donald Trump has pledged to impose tariffs on the United States' three largest trading partners — Canada, Mexico, and China — as soon as he takes office on January 20. In 2023, the three countries together bought more than $1 trillion of US exports and provided nearly $1.5 trillion of goods and services to the US, according to a report by The New York Times.

Experts believe that the new tariffs can have serious implications not only for the US but also for global supply chains and companies that do business with some of the world's largest economies.

How high can Trump's tariffs get?

Trump announced that he would sign an executive order imposing a 25% tariff on all Mexican and Canadian imports and an "additional" 10% tariff on Chinese goods on the first day of his administration.

However, it remains unclear if these proposed tariffs would be in addition to tariffs that Trump talked about during his campaign trail — Trump had said he would impose tariffs of 60% or more on imports of Chinese goods and suggested he would enforce a tariff of 1,000% or higher on vehicles imported from Mexico.

Why does Trump want to impose these tariffs?

Trump said, the tariffs will stay in place for Mexican and Canadian goods until the "invasion" of drugs and undocumented migrants comes to an end.

Trump also accused China of shipping illegal drugs to the US. "Representatives of China told me that they would institute their maximum penalty, that of death, for any drug dealers caught doing this but, unfortunately, they never followed through", he said.

According to some Trump allies, the president-elect hopes to use the threat of tariffs as a bargaining chip in future negotiations with foreign countries.

What can be the implication?

In the short term, the tariffs would make it expensive for companies in Canada, Mexico, and China to export goods to the US. Experts suggest that these companies would pass on the extra costs to customers, which would result in higher prices.

Mexico's auto industry could be severely affected as it is home to manufacturing plants for Honda, Nissan, Toyota, Mazda and Kia, as well as several Chinese auto part suppliers. Tech companies such as Foxconn, Nvidia, and Lenovo which have server facilities and factories in Mexico would also be hit.

Canadian media reported that even a 10% tariff could result in $21 billion (Canadian $30 billion) a year in economic costs.

In the long term, American industries which ship parts, materials and finished goods across US borders can also be impacted.

The costs could be particularly high for the industries that depend on the tightly integrated North American market, which has been knit together by a free-trade agreement for over three decades... It could also invite retaliation from other governments, which could put their own levies on American exports.

This could, in turn, lead to a rise in prices in the US and other parts of the world.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations
Source: Indian Express

3. PAN 2.0: What is the project, why you need to upgrade your PAN card

Introduction

The 10-digit alphanumeric Permanent Account Number (PAN), issued by the Income Tax Department, is set for an upgrade, with a QR code to be incorporated in all new and old cards, a completely online application process, a merger of all existing identification numbers to make PAN as the common identifier for businesses, in addition to a data vault system for data protection and cybersecurity purposes.

The Union Cabinet approved the PAN 2.0 Project recently for PAN to be made the "the common identifier for businesses" and to make PAN as the "single source of truth and data consistency".

With the upgrade, PAN is expected to become a strong source of identification and information for the authorities, as it is already linked to the other identification number of Aadhaar.

The existing PAN holders, which are around 78 crore in number, can upgrade their PAN cards. The number or PAN will remain the same for existing users, but the card will need to be upgraded, which the government said would be free of cost for the users.

What is the PAN 2.0 Project?

The PAN 2.0 Project of the Income Tax Department, with a financial implication of Rs 1,435 crore, was approved by the Union Cabinet recently. Under the project, the existing PAN system will be upgraded completely, the IT backbone will be revamped and PAN will be made as a common business identifier for all digital systems of specified government agencies, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

"There were repeated demands from the industry to have a common business identifier. They used to say they don't want different (identification) numbers, a single number would be beneficial. The project will make efforts to make PAN as the common business identifier. All PAN/ TAN/ TIN will be clubbed under this system," Vaishnaw said.

What are the features of PAN 2.0?

Apart from the QR-code feature for all new and existing PAN cards, the PAN 2.0 project aims to set up a unified portal along with a "mandatory PAN data vault system" for all entities using PAN data. This is being done for data protection and cybersecurity purposes.

"One of the most important features would be a PAN data vault system. The PAN related information is used by many entities such as banks, insurance companies. We give details of PAN at various places. So, those (entities) who take details of PAN, they will have to keep PAN data safely, mandatorily through the data vault system," Vaishnaw said.

There will also be a unified portal as the existing software is nearly 15-20 years old, Vaishnaw said. "It'll be completely paperless, online. A lot of focus will be on the grievance redressal system," he said.

The PAN 2.0 project will enable technology-driven transformation of taxpayer registration services with an aim to improve ease of access and service delivery, an official statement said. This will be an upgrade of the current PAN/TAN 1.0 eco-system consolidating the core and non-core PAN/TAN activities as well as PAN validation service.

What does this mean for individuals and businesses?
Existing users will have the option to upgrade for the PAN 2.0 card. The details about the application process and the timeline are yet to be released by the Income Tax Department.

The QR-code feature on new and old PAN cards will mean an enhanced level of integration of financial transactions with the tax department. The QR code was introduced in PAN in 2017. The PAN 2.0 project intends to continue with this feature with enhancements, tax officials said. Around 78 crore PAN cards have been issued so far, out of which 98 per cent belong to individuals.

For businesses, this would mean a seamless, common system for filing various tax challans and returns.

What are the existing identification numbers of PAN and TAN?
A 10-digit alphanumeric number, PAN, enables the Income Tax Department to link all transactions of a person with the department. These transactions include tax payments, Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) / Tax Collected at Source (TCS) credits, returns of income, specified transactions. PAN, thus, acts as an identifier for the person with the tax department. Once PAN is allotted, it remains the same forever. It is mandatory to quote PAN on filing of income tax return.

TAN stands for Tax Deduction and Collection Account Number, which is a 10-digit alphanumeric number issued by the Income Tax Department. TAN needs to be obtained by all persons responsible for deducting or collecting tax at source. It is compulsory to quote TAN in TDS/TCS return, any TDS/TCS payment challan, TDS/TCS certificates.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance
Source: Indian Express