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TODAY'S ANALYSIS

(06 January 2025)

TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- **GENETIC ENGINEERING APPRAISAL COMMITTEE**
- **CANADA'S RCIC SCHEME**
- **MCQs**



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GENETIC ENGINEERING APPRAISAL COMMITTEE

- The **Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** has amended the rules governing the **selection of experts** to the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)**.
- The GEAC is the apex technical body responsible for regulating **genetically modified (GM) seeds and crops** in India.
- The amendments are aimed at ensuring that members of this committee maintain **impartiality** and avoid any **conflicts of interest** that could affect their decision-making.
- These changes follow a **Supreme Court ruling** in **July 2023**, which highlighted the importance of addressing potential conflicts of interest in the GM crop approval process.

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE NEW RULES

a) Disclosure of Conflict of Interest:

- An **expert member** appointed to the **GEAC** is now required to disclose any personal or professional **interests** that could conflict with their duties on the committee.
- Experts must disclose any **direct or indirect association** with matters under discussion in the GEAC meetings **before** the meeting takes place.

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b) Recusal Requirement:

- If an expert has a potential conflict of interest, they are required to **recuse themselves** from the meeting unless **specifically requested** by the committee to stay and participate.
- This ensures that the **objectivity** of the decision-making process is not compromised.

c) Professional Affiliation Disclosure:

- All **expert members** must fill out a **declaration form** that details their **professional affiliations** over the **last decade** prior to joining the committee.
- This is designed to provide a full transparency record of any associations that might raise concerns about biases or conflicts.

CONTEXT BEHIND THE JUDGEMENT

a) Supreme Court Order in July 2023:

- The **Supreme Court of India** delivered a **split verdict** on **July 23, 2023**, regarding the approval of **GM mustard** for environmental release.
- In 2022, the **Central Government** granted **conditional approval** for the environmental release of **GM mustard** seeds, which are genetically modified to improve crop yields and resistance to pests.

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- The case raised concerns regarding **scientific integrity** and the possibility of **conflict of interest** in the decision-making processes surrounding the approval of GM crops.
- The split verdict from the Supreme Court did not resolve the issue of the approval but **ordered** that a **national policy** on GM crops should be formulated by the Centre. It also emphasized the need for a transparent system to address issues of **conflict of interest** among experts.

b) Coalition for GM-Free India Allegations (2013):

- The issue of **conflict of interest** gained prominence following allegations by the **Coalition for GM-Free India** in 2013.
- The activist group alleged that one of the members of a **Technical Expert Committee** appointed by the Supreme Court had **direct ties** to **Monsanto**, a multinational agricultural biotechnology company. Monsanto was alleged to have funded the organization of the said expert.
- **Monsanto** was involved in the development of GM crops and agricultural chemicals. In 2018, Monsanto was **acquired by Bayer CropScience**, which continues to engage in similar biotechnology and agrochemical activities.

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- The group argued that such affiliations could **undermine the credibility** of the expert's participation in **GM crop approvals**, particularly when the organization had a vested interest in the approval of GM crops.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AMENDMENT

a) Increased Transparency and Accountability:

- The new rules aim to **enhance transparency** in the GEAC's decision-making process.
- By requiring experts to **disclose any potential conflicts**, the amendments help ensure that decisions regarding GM crops are based solely on scientific evidence and environmental considerations, not on personal or commercial interests.

b) Strengthening Public Trust:

- Public concerns about the safety of **genetically modified organisms (GMOs)** are widespread, especially regarding the environmental and health risks associated with their release.
- The reforms in the selection process of experts will help build public confidence in the **regulatory process** by ensuring that **objective** and **unbiased** decisions are made by the committee.

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c) Addressing Past Allegations:

- The **Coalition for GM-Free India** and other activist groups have been vocal in challenging the approval of GM crops, particularly in the absence of stringent conflict-of-interest guidelines.
- The **Supreme Court's 2023 ruling** and the consequent changes to the GEAC's operating rules seek to resolve these concerns and avoid the perception that the approval process is unduly influenced by corporate interests, especially from companies like **Bayer** (formerly Monsanto).

LEGAL & POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

a) Supreme Court's Directives:

- While the **July 2023 Supreme Court ruling** did not directly approve or reject GM mustard, it made it clear that the government must **formulate a national policy** for GM crops.
- One of the primary concerns raised by the court was the **conflict of interest** among experts involved in the approval process. The court also recommended **improving governance** and **transparency** in the decision-making process.

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b) National Policy on GM Crops:

- The Supreme Court's order directs the government to create a **national policy** on GM crops, outlining the legal and regulatory frameworks under which such crops can be approved, studied, and released into the environment.
- The **policy** is expected to address scientific, environmental, and health concerns while ensuring that **conflicts of interest** are effectively managed.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR GM CROP REGULATION

a) GM Crop Safety and Regulation:

- The **regulation of GM crops** in India has been under scrutiny for years, especially with concerns over their environmental impact, potential for cross-contamination, and long-term health effects.
- The GEAC's approval of GM crops, such as **GM mustard**, has been controversial, with **environmentalists** and **farmers' groups** questioning the need for genetically modified solutions when organic and traditional agricultural practices could suffice.

b) The Role of the GEAC:

- The **GEAC** plays a key role in regulating the approval and release of GM crops in India. It is responsible for assessing the **safety** of GM crops concerning their **environmental** and **health impacts**.

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ABOUT GEAC

- **Full Name:** Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)
- **Functions:**
 - **Primary Role:** Appraisal of activities involving the large-scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinant DNA technologies in research and industrial production, focusing on environmental impact.
 - **Secondary Role:** Appraisal of proposals relating to the release of genetically engineered (GE) organisms and products into the environment, including **experimental field trials**.
- **Governing Body:**
 - Operates under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**.
- **Establishment:**
 - Functions as per the **Rules, 1989**.
- **Composition:**
 - **Chairperson:** Special Secretary/Additional Secretary of MoEF&CC.

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- **Co-Chairperson:** Representative from the **Department of Biotechnology (DBT)**.
- **Members:** Currently consists of **24 members**.
- **Meeting Frequency:** The committee meets **every month** to review applications in the areas mentioned above.



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CANADA'S RCIC SCHEME

- In recent months, changes to Canada's **immigration and study visa rules** have made it more difficult for international students, especially from **India**, to secure **Permanent Residency (PR)**.
- Many students, particularly those from **Punjab**, see PR as their ultimate goal after completing their studies and gaining work experience in Canada.
- However, by the end of **2025**, nearly **7.66 lakh** international students' **Post-Graduation Work Permits (PGWPs)** are set to expire.
- This has left many worried that they will have to leave Canada if they are unable to secure PR before their permits expire.
- In response, **Canada** has introduced a new initiative to help such students: the **Rural Community Immigration Class (RCIC)**.

WHAT IS RURAL COMMUNITY IMMIGRATION CLASS (RCIC)?

- The **Rural Community Immigration Class (RCIC)** is a new immigration program launched by **Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)** in **December 2024**. The program is designed to:

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- **Attract foreign nationals**, including international students, to settle and work in designated **rural communities** across Canada.
- Address **labour shortages**, promote **economic development**, and boost **population growth** in **underrepresented areas**.
- For international students, especially those with **expiring PGWPs** who are struggling to meet the **Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS) score** for PR or secure high-paying jobs, the RCIC offers a **viable pathway** to **Permanent Residency (PR)**.

WHY HAS CANADA OPENED PR COMMUNITIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES?

- The designated **rural communities** are located **outside Canada's major urban centers** like **Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal**. These communities are generally smaller towns that are near larger urban areas (e.g., Ontario, Vancouver, etc.).
- Canada launched this program to **revitalize rural areas** by attracting skilled workers, addressing **labour shortages**, and stimulating **economic development** in these less-populated regions.

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- The RCIC is part of Canada's strategy to **promote long-term residency** and development in regions that need a **population boost**.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The **Rural Community Immigration Class (RCIC)** program has the following eligibility requirements:

a) Education Level:

- Applicants must have completed at least **secondary school** or hold **higher education qualifications** (e.g., **graduation, post-graduation**, etc.).

b) Studies in Designated Communities:

- **International students** who have studied for at least **18 months** in a designated rural community are eligible to apply directly for PR.
- Students who have studied outside these communities may also be eligible but must meet **additional conditions**.

c) Job Offer:

- A **job offer** from a **designated employer** in one of the rural communities is required.
- The job can be in any field, including **non-skilled roles**.

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- The job offer must be submitted to the community, which will then issue a **certificate** to support the PR application.

d) Work Experience:

- Applicants are generally required to have relevant **work experience**. However, for **international graduates** meeting certain criteria, this requirement may be **waived**.

e) Language Proficiency:

- Applicants must meet the **Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB)** requirements, depending on the **NOC TEER level** of the job:
 - **TEER 0-1:** CLB 6
 - **TEER 2-3:** CLB 5
 - **TEER 4-5:** CLB 4

f) Financial Proof:

- Applicants must demonstrate that they have sufficient funds to support themselves and their families for **one year** in the designated community.
- This amount is typically half of the **low-income threshold** for rural areas as per **Statistics Canada**.

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g) Intent to Reside:

- Applicants must show genuine **intent** to live and work in the designated rural community.

BENEFITS OF RCIC PROGRAM

a) Easier Path to PR:

- The RCIC provides a **clearer and easier pathway** to PR for international students who may face difficulties meeting the CRS score or securing high-paying jobs in Canada's major cities.

b) Less Competition in Rural Areas:

- **Rural areas** have **less competition** than major cities, meaning students have a **higher chance** of securing a job offer and transitioning to PR.
- The **job market** in rural areas is less saturated, making it easier to gain employment and settle in the community.

c) Employer Support:

- Many **designated employers** in rural communities assist with the **PR application process**, providing support through documentation and facilitating the overall procedure for the student.

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d) Long-term Residency:

- Successful applicants can **settle in rural areas**, contributing to **economic growth, community development**, and gaining **Permanent Residency** in Canada.

WHY IS THE RCIC PROGRAM SIGNIFICANT FOR INDIAN STUDENTS?

- **Indian students** make up nearly **40%** of all international students in Canada.
- Many face challenges transitioning from **temporary visas** to **Permanent Residency** due to increasing competition and tougher immigration rules.
- The **RCIC program** offers an **alternative pathway** to PR for students who may find it difficult to navigate Canada's regular immigration processes, especially in light of **expiring PGWPs**.
- The program has come at a time when **Indian students** are protesting and expressing dissatisfaction over PR challenges and stricter immigration rules.

Experts suggest that instead of focusing solely on **large cities**, students from India should explore **opportunities in rural communities** through the RCIC program for a smoother transition to PR.

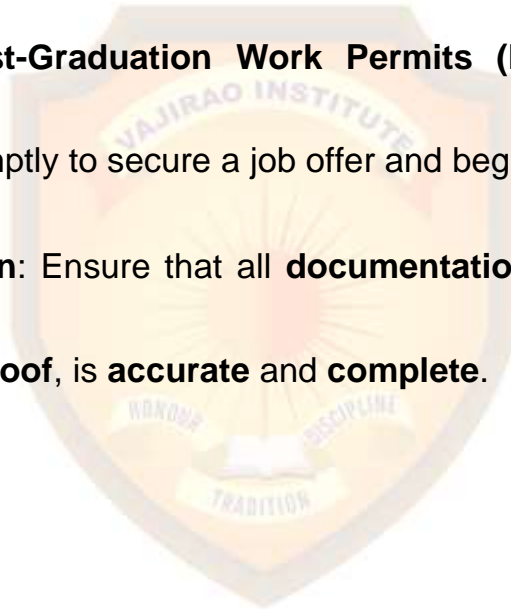
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KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR APPLICANTS

- **Research Participating Communities and Employers:** It's essential for applicants to thoroughly research the communities and the designated employers in those regions to ensure a good fit for their skills and qualifications.
- **Act Quickly:** Since **Post-Graduation Work Permits (PGWPs)** are **time-sensitive**, applicants should act promptly to secure a job offer and begin the PR application process.
- **Complete Documentation:** Ensure that all **documentation**, particularly **proof of intent to reside** and **financial proof**, is **accurate** and **complete**.



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MCQs

1. Consider the following statements and mark the correct one:
 1. The GEAC is the apex technical body responsible for regulating genetically modified (GM) seeds and crops in India.
 2. The GEAC operates under the administrative control of Ministry of Science & Technology.
- (A) Only 1
(B) Only 2
(C) Both 1 & 2
(D) Neither 1 nor 2



Ans. (A)

2. Which of these GM Crop is available for commercial cultivation in India presently?
 - (A) Mustard
 - (B) Cotton
 - (C) Brinjal
 - (D) Both A & B

Ans. (B)

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3. Which of the following is/are the objectives of RCIC?
1. Address labour shortages.
 2. Promote economic development
 3. Boost population growth in underrepresented areas.
- (A) Only 1 & 3
- (B) Only 1 & 2
- (C) Only 2 & 3
- (D) All of the above



Ans. (D)

4. Which of these can be the potential benefits of the RCIC scheme?
1. Easy access to Permanent Residency.
 2. It can lead to long term Residency.
- (A) Only 1
- (B) Only 2
- (C) Both 1 & 2
- (D) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans. (C)

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