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Unveiling the Global Currents

BRICS 2023 SUMMIT-HIGHLIGHTS

MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS AUGUST'23

CONTENTS

A CRISIS OF ACADEMIC ETHICS IN INDIA

> **Relevant for GS4: Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Work culture**

EXPLAINER: *The article discusses the growing concern of academic ethics in India and highlights the need for addressing issues related to plagiarism, fraudulent research practices, and academic misconduct to maintain the integrity of the education system.*

WHY IN NEWS?

- In this article author discusses India's potential in academic and scientific research but highlights prevalent unethical practices such as data manipulation and plagiarism.
  - Many Indian institutions lack ethical codes and unethical behavior often goes unchecked. It harms India's global academic reputation.
    - Leadership must address and prioritize ethical conduct for India to truly excel in the global research arena.

REASONS FOR PREVALENCE OF UNETHICAL PRACTICES

- **Absence of Ethical Code:** Many institutions lack clear guidelines to handle misconduct, leading to unchecked unethical behaviour.
- **Easy Data Manipulation:** Software tools make data manipulation and plagiarism simpler, making it tempting for some researchers.
- **Authoritarian Behavior:** Misuse of authority by those in power discourages genuine complaints and fosters an environment of fear.
- **Defensive Academics:** Instead of investigating, some academics defend accused colleagues, hindering proper scrutiny of misconduct.
- **Cultural Perspective:** Some students may perceive cheating as "helping" rather than recognizing it as dishonest behaviour.
- **Fear of Losing Control:** Leaders view their roles as power sources and fear being exposed for their own misconduct.

- **Mishandling Opinions:** Leaders may punish faculty for expressing opinions, limiting independent thinking and open discussions.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PREVALENCE OF UNETHICAL PRACTICES

- **Untrustworthy Research:** Manipulated data can't be trusted, risking technologies and medicines.
- **Global Perception:** Perceived dishonesty affects India's academic reputation.
- **Student Opportunities:** Dishonest image affects students' global competitiveness.
- **Leadership Quality:** Ethical issues impact decision-making and organizational integrity.
- **Suppressing Voices:** Faculty face consequences for sharing opinions, limiting free thought.
- **Emigration of Talent:** Unethical environment may push researchers to work abroad.
- **Compromised Future:** Lack of emphasis on ethics hinders progress and innovation.

WAY AHEAD

- Institutions should implement clear ethical codes to provide guidance on handling misconduct.
- Ethical training modules for students and faculty can foster a culture of integrity.
- Transparent investigations are essential to address misconduct allegations impartially.
- Encouraging reporting mechanisms can ensure that students and faculty can report unethical behavior without fear of reprisal.
- Changing leadership perception by promoting leaders as responsible guides rather than power sources can foster a culture of open dialogue.
- Institutions must prioritize ethics by communicating expected ethical standards clearly.
- Safeguarding faculty's rights to express opinions without retaliation is crucial to promote independent thinking and free expression of ideas.

DRAFT NATIONAL DEEP TECH STARTUP POLICY PUBLISHED BY PRINCIPAL SCIENTIFIC ADVISER

> **Relevant for UPSC GS3: Changes in industrial policy**

EXPLAINER: The Principal Scientific Adviser has published the draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy to support and promote deep technology startups in India. The policy aims to foster innovation, research, and development in cutting-edge areas like artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, and more.

CONTEXT:

- The Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India has put out a draft **National Deep Tech Startup Policy (NDTSP)** for public comment.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DRAFT:

- **Objective:**
  - The policy seeks to "ensure India's position in the global deep tech value chain," in areas such as semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and space tech.
  - Also, the policy includes resource-intensive policy approaches to attract global talent, such as offering networking opportunities to international deep tech startups and experts interested in relocating and contributing to the local ecosystem.
- The policy seeks to bolster research and development in deep tech start-ups, which work on fundamental and technical problems, unlike firms that monetize technology with distinguished business models.

- Further, the policy seeks to find approaches to provide financing to deep tech start-ups at critical moments, such as before they go to market with their products or ideas.
- The policy seeks to simplify the intellectual property regime for such start-ups, ease regulatory requirements, and proposes a slew of measures to promote these firms.

ABOUT DEEP TECHS

- It refers to advanced and cutting-edge technologies that are based on significant scientific and engineering innovations.
  - **Example:** AI and Machine Learning (ML) are examples of Deep Tech.
    - They involve the development of sophisticated algorithms and models that enable machines to learn from data and make intelligent decisions.

STATE OF INDIA'S DEEP TECH STARTUPS

- India had over 3,000 deep-tech start-ups, dabbling in new-age technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Internet of Things, Big Data, quantum computing, robotics, etc., at the end of 2021.
- **As per NASSCOM**, deep-tech start-ups in India raised USD 2.7 billion in venture funding in 2021, and now account for over 12% of the country's overall startup ecosystem.
- In the last decade India's deep tech ecosystem has grown 53% and is at par with that in developed markets like the US, China, Israel, and Europe.
- Bengaluru accounts for 25-30% of India's deep-tech start-ups, followed by Delhi-NCR (15-20%) and Mumbai (10-12%).
- Deep-tech start-ups are making their presence felt across sectors like drone delivery and cold chain management to climate action and clean energy.

EXPLAINER: Machine learning is a subset of artificial intelligence that enables computers to learn from data and improve their performance without being explicitly programmed for specific tasks. It is used in

various applications like image recognition, natural language processing, and recommendation systems.

CURRENT ISSUES

- **Scale and Time Challenge:** To build actual business applications and transfer them from the lab to the market, it takes concerted R&D.
- **Marketing:** Failure to collect adequate market intelligence, improper use of that information, and insufficient data on overseas markets are all marketing issues.
- **Lack of Capital:** Because DeepTech firms require more capital than ordinary tech startups, one of the most significant barriers to commercialization is funding.
  - Additionally, because deep technology involves previously unknown mechanics and algorithms, investors are hesitant to support such early-stage systems because they lack the knowledge to assess the new technologies' potential worth.
- **Cultural and Industrial Challenges:** for example, Biotech firms in Asia face numerous obstacles from the government as a result of stringent laws, as this technology raises issues about biosafety, food safety, and ethics.

ABOUT NATIONAL CONSORTIUM

- It is an apex-level body set up on the recommendation of the **Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC)** to propose a comprehensive policy framework for the Indian deep tech startup ecosystem.
- **Chaired by the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, it represents a diverse group of stakeholders,** including high-level representatives from various government departments, industry associations, research institutions, and innovation centres.

EXPLAINER:PM-STIAC is an overarching body which assesses the status of specific S&T domains, comprehends challenges, formulates immediate, mid and long-term interventions and presents a roadmap to the Prime Minister. It has identified nine national science missions which aim to

address major scientific challenges to ensure India's sustainable development.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- The policy calls for a more multi-pronged approach to protect Indian interests.
- The need of the hour is a coordinated, comprehensive push to optimally engage with international partners and multilateral institutions to push the Indian Deep Tech Ecosystem.
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AKIRA RANSOMWARE: WHY HAS THE GOVERNMENT ISSUED A WARNING AGAINST IT?

Relevant for UPSC GS3: Basics of cyber security

EXPLAINER: The article discusses the Akira ransomware and highlights the government's warning against it due to its potential threat to cybersecurity and data integrity.

CONTEXT:

- The **Computer Emergency Response Team of India (CERT-In)** issued an alert for the ransomware named "Akira."
- The ransomware targets both Windows and Linux devices, encrypting data and demanding double ransom for decryption and recovery.
- The group behind Akira has already targeted multiple victims, with a focus on those located in the U.S. They maintain an active leak site for data extortion.

ABOUT AKIRA RANSOMWARE

- Akira encrypts data, appends the **".akira"** extension to file names, and deletes Windows Shadow Volume copies on affected devices.
- It uses VPN services, especially targeting users without two-factor authentication, to distribute malicious files.
- The ransomware extorts victims into paying a ransom, threatening to release data on their dark web blog if demands are not met.

HOW DOES AKIRA RANSOMWARE WORK?

- Akira terminates active Windows services using the Windows Restart Manager API to prevent interference during encryption.
- It avoids encrypting crucial system files and folders, ensuring system stability.

- Once encrypted, it **leaves a note (akira_readme.txt) with** information and a link to the ransomware gang's negotiation site.

PROTECTION MEASURES AGAINST RANSOMWARE

- Users are advised to maintain up-to-date offline backups of critical data to prevent data loss in case of an attack.
- Regularly update operating systems and networks, especially virtual patching for legacy systems.
- Implement **Domain-Based Message Authentication, Reporting, and Conformance (DMARC),** DomainKeys Identified Mail (DKIM), and Sender policy to prevent email spoofing.
- Enforce strong password policies and **multi-factor authentication (MFA).**
- Implement a strict external device usage policy and use data-at-rest and data-in-transit encryption.
- Block attachment file types like .exe, .pif, or .url to avoid downloading malicious code.
- Conduct periodic security audits, especially for critical networks and database servers.

LOKMANYA TILAK NATIONAL AWARD

EXPLAINER: *The Lokmanya Tilak National Award is a prestigious honor bestowed on individuals who have made significant contributions to various fields, recognizing their exceptional achievements and service to the nation.*

CONTEXT:

- Prime Minister will be honoured with the Lokmanya Tilak National Award on his visit to Pune.

ABOUT LOKMANYA TILAK NATIONAL AWARD

- Instituted in 1983 by the Tilak Smarak Mandir Trust.
- The **award is given every year on 1st August**, the **death anniversary of Lokmanya Tilak,** to persons who have made remarkable and extraordinary contributions, working for the progress and development of the nation.

ABOUT LOKMANYA TILAK

- **Bal Gangadhar Tilak, commonly known as Lokmanya Tilak**, was a prominent Indian nationalist, freedom fighter, social reformer, and political leader during the Indian independence movement.
  - He was one of the prime architects of modern India and probably the strongest advocate of Swaraj or Self Rule for India.
  - He is known for his **slogan, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it."**
  - He was **born as Keshav Gangadhar Tilak** and his followers bequeathed upon him the title of 'Lokmanya', meaning he who is revered by the people.
- **Extremist:**
  - He was considered a radical Nationalist.
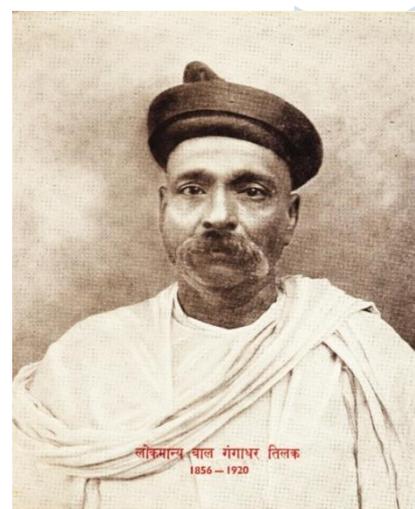
- o The **British Government termed him the "Father of Indian Unrest".**
- **Organizations:**
  - o He joined the Indian National Congress Party in the year 1890.
  - o He also helped found the All India Home Rule League in 1916–18 with G. S. Khaparde and Annie Besant.
  - o **Tilak started his Home Rule League in Maharashtra**, Central Provinces, and Karnataka and Berar region.
  - o **Besant's League was active in the rest part of India**.
  - o It aimed to advocate for self-rule and raise public awareness about India's right to govern itself.
- **Literary works**:
  - o Tilak was a **prolific writer and journalist**.
  - o **He used his newspaper, "Kesari" (meaning Lion)** in Marathi and later "Maratha" in English to disseminate nationalist ideas.
  - o **Some of his notable literary works include "The Arctic Home in the Vedas,"** where he presented his theory that the Vedas originated in the Arctic region, **and "Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Rahasya**," an interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita from a nationalist perspective.
- **Educationist:**
  - o Tilak believed in the power of education and established the Deccan Education Society in Pune in 1884.
- **Social Reform:** Lokmanya Tilak was also an advocate of social reform. He actively supported the eradication of social evils like untouchability and child marriage and promoted education for women.
- **Lal-Bal-Pal:** He had popular **leaders such as Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai as his political companions, and the three** were popularly **known as the 'Lal-Bal-Pal** triumvirate.'
- **Imprisonments:** He was arrested for sedition on multiple occasions.
- In 1916 he concluded the Lucknow Pact with Mohammed Ali Jinnah, which provided for Hindu-Muslim unity in the nationalist struggle.

COULD CHINA TAKE KURIL ISLANDS CLAIMED BY JAPAN AND RUSSIA?

EXPLAINER: *The article explores the potential scenario of China becoming involved in the territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands, which are claimed by both Japan and Russia, raising concerns about regional stability and geopolitical implications.*

CONTEXT:

- The Ukraine war has given some hope to Japanese that the Kuril Islands can be wrestled out of Russia's control.

ABOUT:

- The Kuril Islands are strategically located islands stretching between the north of **Japan's Hokkaido island** and the southern tip of **Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula**.
- These are **a set of 4 islands situated** between the Sea of Okhotsk and the North Pacific Ocean.
- They are -**Iturup (Etorofu in Japanese), Kunashir (Kunashiri), Shikotan and Habomai Islets**.
- These islands are a point of contention between Russia and Japan.
  - **Japan claims:** The islands have been part of it since the early 19th century.

RUSSIA-JAPAN TALKS ON DISPUTED KURIL ISLANDS

■ **Southern Kurils:** Disputed islands, known as Northern Territories by Japan

200km / 125 miles

Matua Island Russia planning new naval base

Kunashir and Iturup Russian coastal defence missile batteries deployed

P-800 Oniks anti-ship missile

HISTORY OF KURIL DISPUTE

■ **1855:** *Treaty of Shimoda* gives southern Kurils to Japan and rest of island chain to Russia.

■ **1875:** *Treaty of St Petersburg* cedes all Kurils to Japan in exchange for Russian jurisdiction over Sakhalin

■ **1905:** After Russia's defeat in *Russo-Japanese War*, Japan gains control of southern Sakhalin

■ **1945:** Soviet Union occupies entire Kuril chain and southern Sakhalin after declaring war on Japan during final days of *World War II*

■ **1951:** Japan renounces claim to Kurils in *Treaty of San Francisco*, signed between Japan and Allied powers.

■ **1956:** *Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration* restores diplomatic ties between two countries.

- o **Russia:** These islands were seized by Soviet forces in the closing days of WWII.
- Japan, Russia and South Korea calls them in 3 different names.
    - o **Japan -** Northern territories
    - o **Russia -** the Kuril Islands
    - o **South Korea -** Dokdo islands
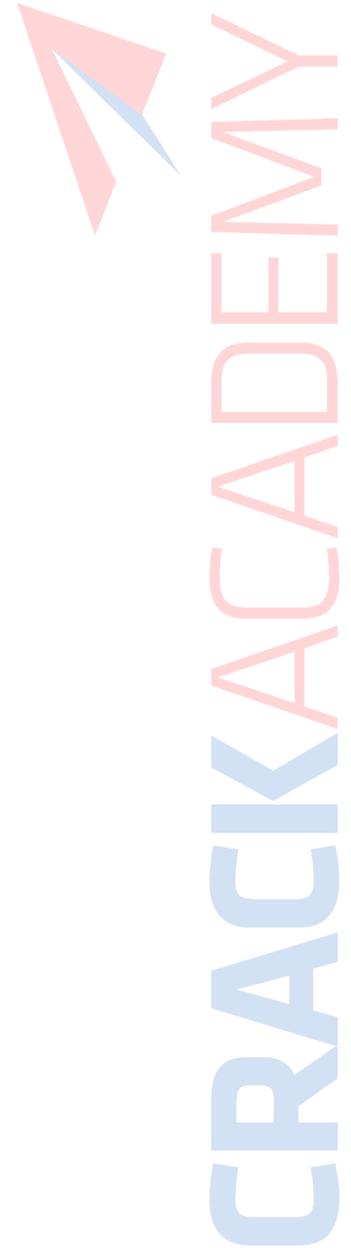
ROHINI PANEL SUBMITS LONG-AWAITED REPORT: WHAT IS 'SUB-CATEGORIZATION' OF OBCS?

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections**

EXPLAINER: The article discusses the recommendations made by the Rohini Panel regarding the sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India, which aims to provide a more equitable distribution of reservation benefits within the OBC category.

WHY IN NEWS?

- Recently, the **report of Rohini commission** which was set up to examine the sub-categorization of **Other Backward Classes (OBCs)** was submitted to the President Droupadi Murmu.

WHAT IS THE COMMISSION'S NEED?

- OBCs get 27% reservation in central government jobs and admission to educational institutions.
- There are more than 2,600 entries in the Central List of OBCs, but over the years, a perception has taken root that only a few affluent communities among them have benefited from the quota.
    - So, there is an argument that a **"sub-categorization" of OBCs (quotas within the 27% quota)** is needed in order to ensure "equitable distribution" of the benefits of reservation.
- The Parliamentary Committee had said that as on 2016, OBC employees in 78 ministries and departments of the Central government constituted only 21.57% against the quota of 27%.
    - Thus, Rohini Commission was constituted by the Government.
- **Note:As per SECC 2011**, total households in the country (rural plus urban) is 24.49 crore. Households considered for deprivation is 10.74 crore.

EXPLAINER: The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) is a nationwide survey conducted to identify and categorize households based on their socio-economic status, occupation, and caste in India. It helps in targeting welfare schemes and policies to benefit the most marginalized sections of society.

ABOUT THE ROHINI COMMISSION

- **Constituted:** In 2017 under Article 340.
- **Chairman:** Justice G.Rohini, a retired Chief Justice of Delhi High Court.
- **Role:**
  - To examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of OBCs;
  - To identify the respective castes or communities or sub-castes in the Central List of OBCs and classifying them into their respective sub-categories;
  - To formulate scientific data on sub-categories and ensuring equitable redistribution of 27% of quota benefits among all sub-communities;
  - To recommend corrections of any repetitions, ambiguities, inconsistencies and errors of transcription or spelling.
  - After 13 extensions, the committee submitted its report to President and it has not been made public yet.
- **Issues**
  - COVID pandemicslowed down the work of the commission, during second wave the government reported that committee is working on finalizing the report.
  - Absence of data on the population of various communities to compare with their representation in jobs and admissions.

EXPLAINER: Article 340 provides for the appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions for the improvement of socially and educationally backward class.

FINDINGS IN 2018

- It analyzed the data of 1.3 lakh central government jobs under the OBC quota over the preceding 5 years.

- **Less than 1% of backward castes have cornered 50% of the reservation benefits** in admissions to Central educational institutions and recruitment to Central services between 2014 and 2018.
  - There are more than 2,600 communities on the OBC Central list but 938 OBC sub-castes have no representation in the reserved seats.
  - Meanwhile, **the analysis suffered from limitations due to the absence** of **updated population data**.

EXPLAINER: Reservation is a policy implemented by governments to ensure representation and opportunities for historically disadvantaged or marginalized communities in areas like education, employment, and politics, aiming to promote social inclusion and equality.

REPORT'S SIGNIFICANCE

- **Recommendation suggested breaking the caste groups into broad categories:**
  - With the dominant castes (most access to benefits) getting the smallest share of the 27% reservation; and
  - The historically crowded-out caste groups getting the largest share of the reservation pie.
- **Many State Governments are pushing the Centre** for independent caste based survey in their jurisdiction.
  - Recently, Patna High Court upholder the Bihar Government's right to conduct such caste survey.
- **Updating of caste related population:** Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have conducted exercises to bring OBC reservation in urban local body poll.

WAY FORWARD

- There is a need to frequently revise the income limit in determining the creamy layer.

- Inclusion of factors like the trend of rise in GDP, inflation, per capita income and rise in the cost of living, etc. is needed while revising the income limit.
- Definition of income exempts income from salary and agriculture but takes into account income from other sources and this need to be changed.
- Political parties should channel their energies to make substantive and qualitative changes in the way the reservation is implemented.
- There is a need to develop an evidence-based policy options that can be tailored to meet specific requirements of specific groups.

PRESERVING TRIBAL CULTURE: ODISHA'S SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS MODEL IS WORTH EMULATING

Relevant for UPSC GS1: Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India

EXPLAINER: The article highlights Odisha's Special Development Councils model as a successful approach for preserving tribal culture and ensuring their socio-economic development, suggesting it as a potential model for other regions to emulate.

WHY IN NEWS?

- The author discusses how tribal cultures are fading due to modern development.
  - The Central government's development projects don't consider tribal cultures.
  - The Odisha government's **Special Development Councils (SDCs)** initiative helps preserve tribal culture while promoting development.

TRIBAL POPULATION IN INDIA

- India comprises 8.6% tribal population has access to an enormous indigenous knowledge which through recognition, adoption, and mainstreaming has the potential
  - to provide sustainable solutions to concerns related to falling agricultural productivity and soil quality, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, pollution, and Climate Change challenges.

WHY IS TRIBAL CULTURE FADING IN INDIA?

- **Modern development:** Societies adopting global norms overshadow tribal cultures.

- **Central government projects:** These have a one-size-fits-all approach, not considering tribal customs.
- **Focus on development:** Programs such as the **Aspirational Districts Programme** prioritize development over cultural context.
  - **For example,** except Odisha, other states follow the Central government's approach which doesn't prioritize tribal culture.
- It has led to a decline in the richness and diversity of tribal traditions.

ODISHA'S SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS (SDCS) INITIATIVE

- **About:**
  - In a significant move towards preserving, promoting, and popularizing tribal culture while also continuing with the development process,
  - the Odisha government launched the **Special Development Councils (SDCs) i**nitiative in 2017.
  - The initiative is an active effort to preserve the culture and heritage of 62 tribes in the State under one umbrella while keeping economic development on course in the regions.
  - The **scheme, which covered 9 tribal-dominated districts and 60 lakh tribal households in 117 blocks**, has now been expanded to 23 districts covering more than 84 lakhs tribal people.
- The **Odisha government's SDCs initiative aids in preserving tribal culture through-**
  - **Languages:**
    - Odisha has over **22 tribal languages**. The SDCs promote the use and spread of these languages.
    - **For example:** 21 tribal proficiency centres have been set up to educate people about tribal culture and dialect.
  - **Sacred Groves:**
    - These are vital for tribal culture and religion.
    - **Data:** 4,500 groves were near extinction. Now, 4,730 groves are protected in nine districts.
  - **Artisan Support:**
    - Recognizing tribal artisans helps in preserving their craft.

- **Data:** 40,000 tribal artisans received ID cards, ensuring both cultural preservation and job opportunities.
    - **Tribal Resource Centres:**
        - They ensure knowledge transfer.
        - **Data:** Over 50 centres built in Sundargarh district, with more planned in other districts.
    - **Representation:**
        - The SDCs involve tribes in decision-making, preventing majoritarianism.
        - **For example:** The Councils have members from all tribal groups, including **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**.
        - By integrating development with cultural preservation, the SDCs initiative ensures that tribal culture thrives alongside progress.

EXPLAINER: Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) refer to specific indigenous communities in India that face extreme vulnerability and need special attention for their socio-economic and cultural upliftment. Measures are taken to protect and preserve their distinct identities and traditional ways of life.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- Central government should use Odisha's SDCs approach for tribal areas.
- Development projects should prioritize preserving tribal customs.
- All tribal groups, especially smaller ones, should be involved in decisions.
- Ensure projects are state funded to cater to local needs.
- Apply Odisha model in tribal-dominated areas like Madhya Pradesh and Sikkim for effective preservation and development.

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THE IIM BILL IS A BOLD MOVE

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education**

EXPLAINER: The article discusses the Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) Act and the introduction of the IIM (Amendment) Bill to address governance issues and accountability in the IIM system.

WHY IN NEWS?

- The Central government has brought a Bill in the Parliament giving itself significant say in the appointment and removal of Directors of the **Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs),** and in initiating inquiries.
- The **proposed changes in** the **Indian Institutes of Management (Amendment) Bill, 2023** have triggered concern over their potential to erode the autonomy of the IIMs.

BACKGROUND

- **The IIMs are institutions of excellence, established with the objectives of:**
  - imparting high quality management education and training;
  - conducting research; and
  - providing consultancy services in the field of management to various sectors of the Indian economy.
- **IIM-Calcutta was the first IIM, established in 1961**.
  - Currently, there are 20 IIMs in the country.
- The Indian Institute of Management Act, 2017 provides for the creation of an academic council for each IIM.
- The **academic council is the principal academic body under the Act as it decides the:**
  - academic content;

- o criteria and processes for admissions to course; and
- o Guidelines for conduct of examinations.

PURPOSE OF IIM (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2023

- The **Bill seeks to amend the Indian Institutes of Management Act, 2017.**
- **Under the 2017 Act, the Director of an IIM is appointed by a Board of Governors,** and the government has a limited say in the process.
  - o Before the 2017 Act was passed, the Ministry of Education (formerly known as Ministry of Human Resource Development) used to appoint IIMs' directors, chairpersons and board-members.
- The proposed amendments essentially seek to alter this situation, and to give the government an expanded role in the appointment of the IIM Director.

HOW IS THIS CHANGE PROPOSED TO BE EFFECTED?

- Section 5 of the amendment Bill says that the President of India shall be the **"Visitor of every Institute"** covered under the IIM Act.
- **The Bill prescribes three primary roles for the Visitor:**
  - o to make appointments;
  - o to audit the working of institutions; and
  - o To conduct an inquiry.

CURRENT PROCESS OF APPOINTMENT OF THE DIRECTOR

- At present, the **Director is appointed from the pool of names recommended by a search-cum-selection committee** which is constituted by the Board.
- **The Board comprises of a chairperson**, along with three members chosen from amongst eminent administrators, industrialists, educationists, scientists, technocrats and management specialists.

WHAT CHANGES DOES THE BILL SEEK TO THIS PROCESS?

- The Amendment Bill requires the Board to obtain prior approval of the President before appointing a Director.

- Since, the actions of the President are on the aid and advice of the Union **Council of Ministers (CoMs),**this change essentially means the Ministry of Education can veto the choice of the Board.
- Further, the Amendment Bill seeks to give the government a say in the initial selection process.
  - The **Bill proposes that the four-member search-cum-selection committee to recommend names for the Director to have one member nominated by the Visitor (i.e. the President),** and only 2 other "eminent" members (instead of 3).
- Under the proposed amendments, the Board will be required to obtain prior approval of the Visitor to remove the Director as well.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT PROPOSED AMENDMENTS IN THE BILL

- The Bill seeks to take away the power of appointment of the Chairperson from the Board, and to instead make the Chairperson a nominee of the President. Currently, the chairperson is appointed by the Board.
- Further, the Bill proposes that the President may appoint one or more persons to review the work and progress of any Institute and to hold inquiries into the affairs.

GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION

- The government seeks to restore accountability and oversight in the IIM system.
- **The 2023 Bill aims to address the lack of checks and balances** and enhance democratic accountability.
- Ensuring accountability to the government and Parliament is seen as preferable to unchecked autonomy.

THE DANGERS IN THE DIGITAL PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION BILL

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Indian Constitution – significant provisions and basic structure**

EXPLAINER: The article discusses potential risks and concerns associated with the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, highlighting the need for careful consideration of privacy and security issues in the digital realm.

CONTEXT:

- Recently, the Data Protection Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha after a six-year gap since the Supreme Court recognized privacy as a fundamental right under the Constitution.
- The **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill** is about to be introduced by the government in Parliament.
- The acceptance of a report on the DPDP Bill was opposed by the opposition lawmakers.
- They asserted that the Bill was never formally referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee nor presented to the members.
- The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** concentrated primarily on the consulting industry and major tech businesses on a law in the framework of a draft of the DPDP Bill.

KEY FEATURES OF DIGITAL PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION BILL, 2023

- **Applicability:**
  - The Bill will apply to the processing of digital personal data within India.
  - It will also apply to the processing of personal data outside India, if it is for offering goods or services or profiling individuals in India.
- **Consent:**

- o Personal data may be processed only for a lawful purpose for which an individual has given consent. A notice must be given before seeking consent.

Safety net

A look at salient features of the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2023

- The law will require companies to clearly mention to users what data are being collected and what they are being used for
- Users will get the right to delete or modify their personal data
- Entities failing to protect user data may face penalty of up to ₹250 crore per violation
- The Bill proposes creation of Data Protection Board of India
- It strikes off Section 43A of the IT Act, 2000 that requires companies which mishandle user data to compensate users
- Many facets of implementation will be prescribed via Gazette notifications at a later stage

- The Bill provides a wide range of exemptions for the "State and its instrumentalities". For instance, personal data can be processed "in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India or security of the State" for "fulfilling any obligation under law"
- While the law requires firms to disclose to users the identity of other firms to which their data would be entrusted for processing, they are explicitly exempted from disclosing sharing of such data in the case of lawful interception of data

- o Notice should contain details about the personal data to be collected and the purpose of processing. Consent may be withdrawn at any point in time.
- o For individuals below 18 years of age, consent will be provided by the legal guardian.
- **Rights and Duties of Data Principal:**
  - o An **individual, whose data is being processed (data principal), will have the right to-**
    - obtain information about processing;
    - seek correction and erasure of personal data;
    - nominate another person to exercise rights in the event of death or incapacity
- **Transfer of Personal Data outside India:**
  - o The central government will notify countries where a data fiduciary may transfer personal data.
  - o Transfers will be subject to prescribed terms and conditions.
- **Exemptions:**
  - o Rights of the data principal and obligations of data fiduciaries (except data security) will not apply in specified cases. **These include-**
    - prevention and investigation of offences, and
    - Enforcement of legal rights or claims.
- The central government may, by notification, exempt certain activities from the application of the Bill**. These include-**

- o processing by government entities in the interest of the security of the state and public order; and
  - o Research, archiving, or statistical purposes.
- **Data Protection Board of India:**
  - o The central government will establish the Data Protection Board of India.
- **Key functions of the Board include-**
  - o monitoring compliance and imposing penalties;
  - o directing data fiduciaries to take necessary measures in the event of a data breach; and
- Hearing grievances made by affected persons.
- Penalties:
  - o Rs 200 crore for non-fulfillment of obligations for children, and
  - o Rs 250 crore for failure to take security measures to prevent data breache.

IMPORTANCE OF THE BILL

- The **Bill frames out the rights and duties of the citizen (Digital Nagrik)** on one hand and the obligations to use collected data lawfully of the Data Fiduciary on the other hand.
- The **Bill will keep the personal data of a user safe**, and give them more liberty on how to port their personal data.
- **The bill aims to make entities like internet companies**, mobile apps, and business houses more accountable and answerable about collection, storage and processing of the data of citizens as part of "Right to Privacy".

CONCERNS ASSOCIATED WITH THE BILL

- **Some of the most contentious issues include:**
  - o Wide-ranging exemptions to the government and its agencies,
  - o Dilution of powers of the data protection board,
  - o Amendment to the Right to Information Act, 2005.

- The concerns around diluting the RTI Act emanate from the fact that the Bill has a provision to amend the Act that would prohibit sharing of details linked to personal information of government officials.
- Currently, the exemption only applies when such information does not serve larger public interest.
  - Meanwhile, the Bill proposes to remove the public interest caveat.
- Further, **the Bill overrides Section 43A of the Information Technology Act, 2000** which requires companies which mishandle user data to compensate users.
- Government sources said this was because "compensation is a judicial process".

THREAT TO TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY

- The **Right to Information (RTI) Act** which has given millions of Indian citizens more authority will be amended under the Data Protection Bill of 2022.
- The DPDP Bill 2022 aims to broaden its scope and exempt any personally identifiable information from disclosure.
- It is not necessary to change the current RTI law in order to implement a data protection law.
- The country's system of accountability and transparency is in danger because of this provision.

THEN AND NOW

TERM
2005 ACT: Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and Information Commissioners (ICs) at central and state levels will serve for five years.

2019 BILL: Central government will notify the term of office.

SALARY
2005 ACT: At central level, salary of CIC and ICs equivalent to salary of Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners, respectively. At state level, equivalent to salary of Election Commissioners and Chief Secretary, respectively.

2019 BILL: Salaries, allowances, and other terms and conditions of service of central and state CIC and ICs will be determined by the central government.

DEDUCTIONS
2005 ACT: At the time of appointment, if CIC and ICs (at central and state levels) are receiving pension or any other retirement benefits for previous government service, their salaries will be reduced by an amount equal to that pension. Previous government service includes service under: (i) the central government, (ii) state government, (iii) corporation established under a central or state law, and (iv) company owned or controlled by the central or state government.

2019 BILL: The Bill removes these provisions.

Source: PRS Legislative Research

BACKGROUND OF DPDP BILL

- It was placed in the public domain in December 2022 but the final Bill has not been placed before the public.

- It has two provisions which would greatly weaken the Indian citizen's right to information.
- It plans to amend **RTI Act Section 8(1)(j)** to read as exempting information under (j), which relates to personal information
- The proposed Bill defines the term **'person'** very widely to include individuals, companies, and the state. Most information except budgets would be linked to one of these.

ABOUT SECTION 8(1) (J) OF RTI ACT

- It exempts personal information which is not a part of public activity, or which is an invasion on the privacy of an individual.
- **To help anyone claiming exemption it states:** 'Provided that the information, which cannot be denied to the Parliament or a State Legislature, shall not be denied to any person.'
- **Personal information may be exempt if:**
  o it is not related to a public activity or interest;
  o Would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of an individual.
- **Whoever claimed that a disclosure was exempt under Section 8(1) (j)** should make a statement that he would not give this information to Parliament.

DISCRETIONARY POWERS TO GOVERNMENT

- One of the fundamental goals of any data protection law is to reduce the misuse of personal data, particularly financial fraud.
- Given that the government holds the largest amount of data, a successful data protection law must not grant the government a broad range of discretionary rights.
- Unfortunately, the DPDP Bill, 2022 gives the administration the authority to make rules and notices on a wide variety of topics.
- It could allow the government to arbitrarily exempt its allies and institutions like the **Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI),** leading to serious privacy violations.
- Small **non-governmental organizations (NGOs),** on the other hand, would need to build up procedures to abide by the strict duties of a data fiduciary.

EXPLAINER:*UIDAI is the government agency responsible for implementing and managing the Aadhaar program, which provides unique identification numbers to Indian residents.*

NO AUTONOMY

- The Data Protection Board's autonomy is not guaranteed by the proposed Bill.
- It is essential that the oversight body established by the Act be sufficiently independent to take action on violations of the law by governmental organizations in order to achieve the goal of protecting personal data.
- The establishment of a fully government-controlled Data Protection Board opens the door for the administration to utilize it as a political tool.

CONCLUSION

- Without any discussion or debate, the country's inhabitants could wind up with legislation strengthening the federal government while limiting people's democratic freedom to access information and utilize it to hold the powerful accountable.
- The data protection law must preserve peoples' fundamental rights, including both the right to information and the right to privacy, and must not have the flaws that the previous draft did.
- In a democracy, citizens require access to information, including many categories of personal data, to properly hold their governments accountable.
- The Bill provides for a legislative backing to the **Supreme Court's landmark judgement in Justice K. S. Puttaswamy (Retd) Vs Union of India Case (2017).**
- A **9-judge bench of the Supreme Court** unanimously held that Indians have a constitutionally protected fundamental right to privacy that is an intrinsic part of life and liberty under **Article 21.**
- By addressing above mentioned concerns, the proposed law can extend substantial rights to individuals and provides them with better visibility, awareness, decisional autonomy and control over their data.

WHAT CAN AMENDED FOREST (CONSERVATION) ACT CHANGE?

> Relevant for UPSC GS2: Government policies and interventions aimed at development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

EXPLAINER: *The amended Forest (Conservation) Act aims to streamline the process of forest land diversion for development projects, potentially impacting forest conservation measures and environmental concerns in India.*

CONTEXT:

- The **controversial Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill 2023, passed by the Lok Sabha** with limited debate, awaits discussion in the Rajya Sabha.
- The bill aims to restrict conservation scope, exempt border lands for strategic projects, and allow some non-forest activities.

CONCERNS WITH CLASSIFICATION OF LAND AS 'FOREST

- The Forest (Conservation) Amendment **Bill 2023 states that only lands** that were **notified as 'forest' under the Indian Forest Act 1927,** or any other relevant law, or were documented as 'forests' in government records shall be recognized as 'forests' under this Act.
- The broad applicability of the current Act contrasts sharply with this amendment.
- The amendment permits commercial activity on any property that hasn't been formally designated as "forests."
- Furthermore, it eliminates the Act's present checks and balances, which include community consultation and informed consent for forest clearance.

EXPLAINER: *The Indian Forest Act of 1927 is a legislation that aims to regulate the movement of forest produce, the use of forest land, and the conservation of forests in India.*

CONTROVERSY OVER EXEMPTION FOR BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE

- The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill 2023 aims to remove linear infrastructure projects, such as roads and highways, from the need to obtain authorization to destroy forests if they are located within 100 km of the national border.
- Experts have expressed worry because strategic linear projects of national importance are an imprecise term that might be abused to push through infrastructure projects that are detrimental to the local ecology.

CONCERNS FLAGGED BY JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES (JPCS)

- Despite receiving criticism from tribal organizations, environmental attorneys, conservationists, activists, and citizen organizations, the Joint Parliamentary Committees (JPCs) did not suggest even one amendment to the Bill in their report.
- Concerns about the amendment's effects on community rights contained in the Forest Rights Act 2006 were also expressed by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

CONCLUSION

- The majority of Opposition MPs were focused on drawing attention to Manipur's human rights problems;
  - Hence, the Bill received a free pass in the Lok Sabha.
  - Regardless of whether Rajya Sabha members seriously examine the Bill, its departure from the legal definition of 'forests', emphasis on developing carbon sinks, and uncertainty about its coverage do not bode wel.

PRESS AND REGISTRATION OF PERIODICALS BILL INTRODUCED IN RS

Relevant for UPSC GS2: Government policies and interventions aimed at development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

EXPLAINER: The "Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill" aims to regulate the registration and distribution of periodicals in India. It is an important step towards maintaining media transparency and accountability.

CONTEXT:

- The Union Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Minister introduced the **Press and Registration of Periodicals (PRP) Bill 2023 in** the Rajya Sabha.
- The Bill seeks to replace the existing **Press and Registration of Books (PRB) Act 1867**, which governs the registration of print and publishing industry in the country.

ABOUT THE PRB ACT 1867

- **Aims:**
    - Regulate printing press and newspapers in India;
    - Preserve copies of books and newspapers printed in India; and
    - Provide for registration of books and newspapers.
- **'Book' for the purposes of the Act**, includes even a pamphlet and every sheet of music, map, chart etc.
- Interestingly, **electronic media is outside the purview of this Act (Sanjay Pinto v. A. Kamaraj, 2011).**
- **Under the Act, only the district magistrate (DM)** could cancel the declaration of a periodical, while the **Press Registrar General (PRG)** did not

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have suo motu powers to cancel or suspend the Certificate of Registration granted by it.

- It made improper declaration of information a punishable offence with a prison term of up to 6 months.

SALIENT PROVISIONS OF THE PRP BILL 2023

- The Bill seeks to simplify the registration process for periodicals.
- It will make it mandatory for digital news platforms to do **a "one-time registration"** in order to operate.
- It empowers the PRG to suspend/cancel registration.
- **According to the new Bill,** a person who has been convicted by any court for an offence involving terrorist act or unlawful activity or having done anything against the security of the state shall not be permitted to bring out a periodical.
- Also, the Bill seeks to do away with 2 provisions that required publishers and printers to file a declaration before the DM.
    o Only an online intimation has to be filed before PRG and DM.
- It waters down **the provision (of the PRB Act)** for prosecution and imprisonment of publishers for improper declaration of information.
- The **punishment of jail up to 6 months is envisaged only in cases where:**
    o A periodical is published without a certificate of registration; and
    o The publisher fails to cease the printing of such publication even after 6 months of a direction issued to that effect by PRG.
    o Also, the new Bill provides for an appellate authority.
- The Appellate Board (Press and Registration Appellate Board) will comprise chairperson**, Press Council of India (PCI), and two members of PCI to hear an appeal against:**
    o Refusal of grant of registration;
    o Imposition of any penalty or suspension/cancellation of registration by PRG.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PRP BILL 2023

- It aims to bring transparency and ease of doing business by providing for a simple process that will help small and medium publishers.
- It brings digital news media under its purview, which is expected to weed out apps, websites and social media accounts spreading fake news.
- At present, while traditional print and electronic media are governed by various laws, digital news platforms are not covered by any registration process;
- To fix this, the government introduced the **IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021,** which made it mandatory for digital news platforms to register themselves with the government.
- Books, which were part of the PRB Act, 1867, have been taken out of the purview of PRP Bill, as books as a subject are administered by the Ministry of Education.
- The **statute has been substantially decriminalized as against the PRB Act 1867**.

EXPLAINER: The Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code Rules 2021 are regulations issued by the Indian government to govern digital platforms and social media intermediaries, aimed at promoting accountability and ethical practices in the digital space.

SOUTH ASIA, NOW OPEN TO BUSINESS

Relevant for UPSC GS2: India and its neighborhood-relations

EXPLAINER: The article discusses India's growing economy and its potential to positively impact South Asia through regional integration driven by economic reforms. It emphasizes new factors like increased economic ties with neighbors, regional economic openness, and support from Western countries that can accelerate this process and benefit all South Asian nations.

CONTEXT:

- India's economic prospects and growing financial resources have potential implications for the rest of the Subcontinent.
- Recent visits to Delhi by Nepal's Prime Minister and Sri Lankan President highlight shifting currents in South Asian regionalism.
- New external impetus from Japan and France towards Subcontinent's economic integration.

HOW INDIA'S ECONOMY IS GROWING, AND WHAT KIND OF GOOD IMPACT COULD IT AFFECT ON SOUTH ASIA?

- India is emerging as the 3rd-largest economy and a major tech hub.
- **Effects on South Asia:**
  - **Trade Increase:**
    - Intra-regional trade grew from 2% in 1990 to 6% now;
    - **India's exports:** $16 billion to Bangladesh, $6 billion to Sri Lanka, and $8.5 billion to Nepal in 2022.
  - **Regional Integration:**
    - Leaders from Nepal and Sri Lanka are showing interest in deeper economic ties with India;

- Cross-border projects such as rail, road, and energy are gaining momentum.
  - o **Great Power Influence:**
    - The US and allies are focusing on India as a counter to China, helping promote India's ties with its neighbors;
    - Japan is promoting connectivity between India and Bangladesh.

HOW CAN REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN SOUTH ASIA OVERCOME POLITICAL DISPUTES?

- **Trade as a Bridge:**
  - o Intra-regional trade in South Asia grew from 2% in 1990 to 6% currently;
  - o As trade benefits economies, it encourages nations to resolve political issues.

Countries Of South Asia

- **Leadership Engagements:**
  - o Visits by Nepal's PM and Sri Lanka's President to India have led to stronger economic commitments;
  - o Such direct discussions can pave the way for resolution of disputes.
- **Economic Alliances:**
  - o Countries such as Nepal and Sri Lanka show increased interest in economic ties with India;
  - o Economic interests can overshadow past political differences.
- **External Influence:**
  - o Japan's effort in promoting India-Bangladesh connectivity is an example of foreign nations pushing for regional unity;
  - o The US's $500 million grant to Nepal for energy and road connectivity emphasizes regional collaboration.
- **Alternative Cooperation Routes:**

o   Instead of relying solely on SAARC, nations are pursuing bilateral and sub-regional cooperation, bypassing traditional hindrances.

EXPLAINER:*SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) is an intergovernmental organization of South Asian countries aimed at promoting regional cooperation and development in various fields, including trade, economy, culture, and security.*

CONCLUSION

- India's optimistic economic prospects and its engagement with neighbors and global partners could lead to significant geo-economic transformation in South Asia, opening new opportunities for the entire region.

RAJYA SABHA PASSES MULTI-STATE COOPERATIVE BILL

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Government policies and interventions aimed at development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation**

EXPLAINER: *The Rajya Sabha has passed the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Bill, which aims to strengthen the functioning and governance of multi-state cooperative societies in India. The bill seeks to promote the cooperative movement and ensure better management and regulation of these societies operating across multiple states.*

CONTEXT:

- Rajya Sabha passed the **Multi-State Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2023.**
    - The Bill had been approved by Lok Sabha recently, and was now passed in Rajya Sabha by voice vote.

COOPERATIVES IN INDIA

- Co-operatives are voluntary, democratic, and autonomous organizations controlled by their members who actively participate in its policies and decision-making.
- After independence, the **first 5-year plan (1951-56),** emphasized the adoption of co-operatives to cover various aspects of community development.
- **As per the Article 43B (DPSP)** of the Indian Constitution inserted by the **97th Amendment (2011),** states shall endeavor to promote:
    - Voluntary formation;
    - Autonomous functioning;
    - Democratic control; and
    - Professional management of cooperative societies.

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CHALLENGES FACED BY THE CO-OPERATIVES

- Inadequacies in governance;
- Politicization and the excessive role of the government;
- Inability to ensure active membership;
- Lack of efforts for capital formation;
- Inability to attract and retain competent professionals;
- There have also been cases where elections to co-operative boards have been postponed indefinitely.

ABOUT MULTI-STATE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES

- **Regulated by the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act (MCSA), 2002**, these are societies that have operations in more than one state (**like farmer-producers organizations (FPOs).**
- Part IXB (also inserted by the 97th amendment) of the Indian constitution is applicable only to multi-state co-operative societies (according to an SC verdict), as states have the jurisdiction to legislate over state co-operative societies.

KEY FEATURES OF THE MULTI-STATE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES ACT 2002

- **Election of board members:** Elections to the board are conducted by its existing board.
- **Amalgamation of co-operative societies:** Amalgamation and division by passing a resolution at a general meeting with at least two-thirds of the members present and voting.
- **Restriction on redemption of government shareholding:** The shares held in a multi-state co-operative society by certain government authorities can be redeemed based on the bye-laws of the society.

KEY FEATURES OF THE MULTI-STATE COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023

- **Election of board members:**
  - Co-operative Election Authority: The central government will establish the Authority to conduct such elections.
  - It will consist of a chairperson, VC, and up to 3 members appointed by the central government on the recommendations of a selection committee.
- **Amalgamation of co-operative societies:**
  - Allows state co-operative societies to merge into an existing multi-state co-operative society, subject to the respective state laws.
- **Fund for sick co-operative societies:**
  - Co-operative Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Development Fund: Multi-state co-operative societies that are in profit for the preceding three financial years shall finance the Fund.
- **Restriction on redemption of government shareholding:**
  - Any shares held by the central and state governments cannot be redeemed without their prior approval.
- **Redressal of complaints:**
  - **Co-operative Ombudsman:** The central government will appoint one or more such Ombudsman with territorial jurisdiction.
  - They shall complete the process of inquiry and adjudication within 3 months from the receipt of the complaint.
  - **Appeals (within a month) - Central Registrar appointed** by the central government.

IMPORTANCE OF THE BILL

- By increasing their transparency and implementing a system of frequent elections, it will strengthen cooperatives.
- The Bill aims to address issues with the operation and governance of cooperative societies as well as match its provisions with those in Part IXB of the Constitution.

ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE BILL:

- **Imposing a cost on well-functioning societies**: Sick multi-state co-operative societies will be revived by a Fund that will be financed through contributions by profitable multi-state co-operative societies.
- **Dilute autonomy and independence of co-operatives:** By empowering the government to restrict redemption of its shareholding in multi-state co-operative societies.

CONCLUSION

- The Multi-State Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2023, aims to strengthen cooperatives and enhance transparency through various provisions.
- By addressing issues such as nepotism, electoral reforms, and revival of struggling cooperatives, the government seeks to promote the growth and effectiveness of the cooperative sector in India.

DEEP TECH STARTUPS TAKING BRAVE RISKS

> **Relevant for UPSC GS3: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life**

EXPLAINER: *The article discusses the rise of deep tech startups that focus on cutting-edge technologies like AI, biotech, and nanotechnology. These startups are taking bold risks to create innovative solutions and drive technological advancements.*

CONTEXT:

- The office of the **Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government has put out a draft National Deep Tech Start-up Policy**.

ABOUT DEEP TECH START-UP

- **It refers to a class of startup businesses that develop new offerings** based on tangible engineering innovation or scientific discoveries and advances.

- **Deep Technology refers to innovations founded on advanced scientific** and technological breakthroughs such as Artificial Intelligence, Quantum computing, drones etc.,

- The **Great Indian Start-up Boom of the last decade**, led by young entrepreneurs and catalyzed by the government's Start-up India movement, created an environment of entrepreneurship in India.

- **Note:** Deep-tech start-ups in India raised 2.7 billion dollars in venture funding in 2021, and accounts for over 12% of the country's overall startup ecosystem, as per **NASSCOM study.**

- **Advantages:**

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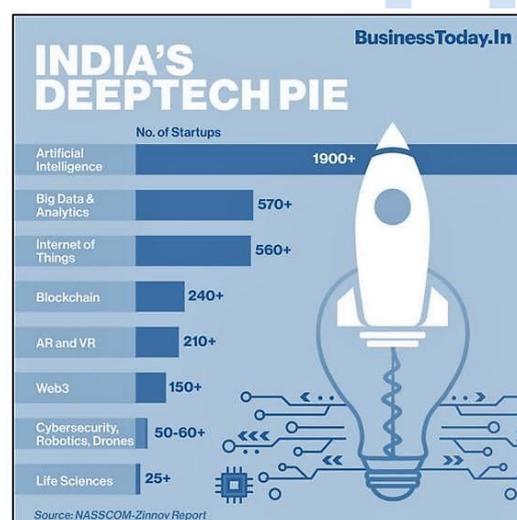
- o **Address real world problems-** It can create more effective, efficient, and sustainable solutions.
- o **For example-** AI and machine learning can diagnose diseases, optimize supply chains and improve energy efficiency.
- **The rise of quantum computing is expected to revolutionize** fields such as finance, cryptography, and logistics.
  - o Foster innovation helps innovation in variety of fields.
- IIT Madras's Research Park, which has incubated over 200 deep tech companies cumulatively valued at over ₹50,000 crore including those in space and aviation.
- **National Chemical Laboratory's Venture Centre supported** to file and commercialize high-quality patents.
- **Discovery through start-ups founded by themselves** foster independent decisions which leverage deep historical investments in S&T in its public labs and institutions.
- **Deep tech startups are the main route** through which India is taking technology risks, a crucial element to build new capabilities.

Pillars of the Draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy	
Ensuring the security of india's economic future	Facilitating a seamless transition to a knowledge-driven economy
Bolstering national capability and sovereignty through atmanirbhar bharat imperative	Fostering ethical innovation

KEY PROVISIONS UNDER DRAFT POLICY

- **Aim:** To support and nurture the unique requirements of deep tech start-ups in India.
- It serves as a comprehensive framework to address the challenges faced by deep tech startups and provide definitive policy interventions to enhance the ecosystem.
- **Enhance technology commercialization:**
  - o Creating seamless partnerships between academic institutions, research labs and industry;
  - o Technology commercialization offices within academic institutes and research labs;

- o Providing a set of guidelines for commercialization of publicly funded research.

- **Open Science Data Sharing Platform** is set up to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among the stakeholders to promote deep tech innovations.

- **Increase R&D expenditure** is the critical base for scientific human resource.

- **Simplify intellectual property aims** to establish a single window platform that enables a Unified IP Framework, customized for deep tech start-ups.

- **Ease regulatory requirements** suggests the creation of Export Promotion Board to ease barriers of entry for Indian deep tech start-ups into foreign markets.

- **Resource intensive policy approach:** To attract global talent, such as offering networking opportunities to international deep tech startups and experts interested in relocating and contributing to the local ecosystem.

- **Inter-Ministerial Deep Tech Committee** is constituted to regularly review the requirements of enabling the deep tech ecosystem to function better.

WAY FORWARD

- The government must lay emphasis on the deep tech sectors in existing SIDBI Fund of Funds.

- Industry must increase and channel their research funds.

- There is a need to mass procure indigenously developed technologies across the ministries.

- **Focus on Start-up India 2.0:** The energies of India's entrepreneurs should be directed towards building Indian industrial and public capabilities.

GOVT. KICKS OFF CONTRACTUAL DISPUTE SETTLEMENT SCHEME

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.**

EXPLAINER: The article highlights the launch of the Contractual Dispute Settlement Scheme by the government, aimed at resolving contract-related disputes efficiently and providing a fair mechanism for settlement.

CONTEXT:

- In order to settle the pending contractual disputes of government and government undertakings, the finance ministry has launched the **'Vivad se Vishwas II – (Contractual Disputes)' scheme.**
- The last date for submission of claims is October 31, 2023.

EXPLAINER: Contractual disputes are disputes between the parties to any contract regarding any clause of the contract. They may arise due to various reasons, such as breach of contract, non-performance, delay, force majeure, frustration of contract, etc. They can have a significant impact on the economy, as they affect the business environment, investor confidence, trade relations and public welfare.

ABOUT VIVAD SE VISHWAS SCHEME II

- **Vendors:** The Centre on August 2 launched a settlement scheme for contractual disputes with vendors or suppliers to government and its undertakings.
- **Budget:** The **scheme is termed Vivad se Vishwas II — (Contractual Disputes)' in this year's Union Budget** and the Department of Expenditure had indicated the guidelines for its operation.

- **Cutoff date:** For disputes to be considered for settlement, the aggrieved party should have secured an arbitral award by January 31, 2023, with the cut-off date set at April 30 in case of Court orders.
- **Available to The scheme** will apply to all domestic contractual disputes where one of the parties is either the Government of India or an organization working under its control.
- **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** has developed a dedicated web page for implementation of this scheme and eligible claims shall be processed only through GeM.

ABOUT VIVAD SE VISHWAS SCHEME I

- In the 2020-21 Budget, this scheme was introduced to put an end to pending direct tax disputes at various appellate forums paving way for efficient revenue collection.
- It waives of the interest, penalty & prosecution for those persons who settle their dues by March 31, 2021.
- It is modeled on the lines of **Sabka Vishwas scheme,** which met with reasonable success in closing numerous litigations in indirect tax demands.
- **According to the Standing Committee on Finance,** there are 4,83,000 disputes cases pending before the **Commissioner (Appeals), the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, High Courts & Supreme Court.**
- The **Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Act, 2020 was enacted on 17th March, 2020 with the objective:**
  - To reduce pending income tax litigation;
  - To generate timely revenue for the Government;
  - To benefit taxpayers by providing them peace of mind, certainty and savings because of time and resources that would otherwise be spent on the long-drawn and vexatious litigation process.

APAR GUPTA WRITES: ON MANIPUR, INTERNET SHUTDOWN IS NO CURE

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential**

EXPLAINER: In this article, Apar Gupta discusses how internet shutdowns in Manipur are not an effective solution and can have negative consequences on the local population's access to information and communication.

CONTEXT:

- India holds the top global rank for the highest number of internet shutdowns since 2018, raising concerns about the impact on law and order and deprivation for citizens.
- The idea of "limited internet shutdowns" gains administrative consensus, appealing to officials, legislators, judges, and the public, as it aims to allow beneficial use while banning harmful activities.

EXPLAINER: The "Limited internet shutdowns" refers to the intentional restriction or blocking of access to the internet, often specific websites or online services, within a defined geographic area or for a specified period of time. It is done as a response to security threats, social unrest, or public emergencies, with the aim of controlling the flow of information and communication. Eg. this has been applied in Manipur violence and recent Nuh (Haryana) communal violence.

DIFFERENT METHODS OF "LIMITED INTERNET SHUTDOWNS"

- **Restriction of Access by Medium:**
  - This form of rationing allows only an affluent minority with wired internet access to use the internet.
  - Wired access is limited to 3.8% of connections in India, with smartphones being the primary means of internet usage.

- **Time and Geographical Restrictions:**
  - Existing practices involve orders limiting internet shutdowns to specific hours or days in certain areas.
  - These orders can be repeated and extended, affecting social and economic activities.
- **Banning Specific Websites and Services:**
  - Some shutdowns target virtual private networks (VPNs), social media, and internet messaging applications.
  - Enforcement becomes challenging, and whitelisting approaches may lead to invasive surveillance.

DIFFERENT JUDICIAL CASES RELATED TO INTERNET SHUTDOWN

- **Gujarat High Court Case:**
  - Concerning Gauravbhai Sureshbhai Vyas in 2015.
  - The court found shutdown orders proportional because they limited only mobile internet.
- **Manipur High Court Case:**
  - The court restored wired internet but continued to block social media and VPNs.
  - Supreme Court's Anuradha Bhasin Judgment:
  - Condoned selective internet bans.

IMPLICATIONS OF "LIMITED INTERNET SHUTDOWNS"

- **Socio-economic Impact:** Limited access affects mostly the less affluent.
- **Challenging Enforcement:** Restricting specific services or apps is hard to implement.
  - **For instance,** in Jammu and Kashmir, 80 out of 153 whitelisted websites didn't work effectively.
- **Increased Surveillance:** Whitelisting can lead to invasive checks like physical stop-and-frisk measures.
- **No Confirmed Effectiveness:** No government study proves the positive impact of these shutdowns.
- **Hinders Peaceful Protests:** Social media shutdowns can prevent citizens from organizing non-violent demonstrations.

    o **For example,** shutdowns limited the spread of information about the Phaknung gangrape protest in Imphal.

LACK OF EMPIRICAL DATA

- The government has not conducted a study to assess the intended objectives and impact of internet shutdowns on the economy and public safety.
- Evidence shows that shutdowns lead to social and economic harm and may hinder peaceful protests, impeding state accountability.

CONCLUSION

- The **call for "limited internet shutdowns" needs to be re-evaluated,** considering the lack of empirical evidence and the potential harms they pose.
- An **evidence-based approach** is necessary to balance the interests of law and order without compromising citizens' rights and well-being.
- **Possibility of Increased Violence:** Some studies suggest violence can rise during shutdowns as peaceful protests are stifled.

FROM STATE VISIT TO A MORE ROBUST TRADE RELATIONSHIP

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests**

EXPLAINER: This article discusses how a state visit can lead to strengthening trade relationships between countries, fostering economic cooperation and promoting bilateral ties.

CONTEXT:

- Recently, **PM Narendra Modi's historic State visit to Washington** marked a turning point in the U.S.-India relations.

- With the Biden administration demonstrating a keen interest in cultivating India as a long-term partner, the visit underscored the strategic significance of their partnership, particularly in the context of the United States' competition with China.

  o Although progress has been made in various realms, the economic and trade relationship between the both nations still has untapped potential.

GROWING U.S.-INDIA TRADE PARTNERSHIP

- During the fiscal year 2023, the United States solidified its position as India's most prominent trading partner, with bilateral trade soaring to an impressive $128.55 billion.
- Notably, India experienced a commendable 2.81% growth in exports to the U.S., while imports from the United States saw a remarkable surge of approximately 16% during the same period.
- The **major export items that India dispatched to the U.S. encompassed a diverse range of goods**, such as petroleum, polished diamonds, pharmaceutical products, jewelry, and frozen shrimp.
- Conversely, **pivotal imports from the United States comprised essential commodities**, including petroleum, rough diamonds, liquefied natural gas, and gold.
- This **significant expansion in trade relations highlights the strengthening economic ties** between the two nations and signifies the potential for further collaborations in the future.

REALIZING THE TRADE POTENTIAL

- Despite the considerable expansion in trade, the **economic relationship between the United States and India is not fully realizing its potential.**
  - To maximize the benefits of this crucial strategic partnership, trade must be accorded a more central and pivotal role
- In recent times, the **Indian government has successfully finalized free trade agreements with both** the **United Arab Emirates (UAE) and** Australia, while simultaneous negotiations with the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Canada remain underway.

U.S.'S CURRENT TRADE APPROACH

- **Shift from FTAs:** The U.S. has evolved away from Free Trade Agreements.
- **Supply Chain Focus:** Emphasis on creating resilient supply chains.
- **Reshoring and Friend-shoring:** Aim to bring production back to the U.S. or move to friendly countries.

- **Labor and Environment:** Prioritizing labor rights and environmentally friendly production over traditional globalization.
- **Skeptics' Views:** Many believe the U.S.'s goals could be better achieved with a revamped FTA strategy.

NEED FOR BALANCING TRADE OBJECTIVES

- Achieving a harmonious trade policy is paramount for the U.S. administration, requiring a balanced approach that acknowledges the strategic importance of the relationship with India without neglecting the trade aspect.
- It is crucial for both nations to seek common ground, navigating the realms of resilient supply chains, labor rights, and climate-friendly production while also capitalizing on the potential benefits that a **free trade agreement (FTA)** can offer.
- The **U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)** stands as a compelling example, illustrating how trade deals can effectively address multiple objectives while promoting economic growth.

EXPLAINER: The U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) is a trade agreement among the United States, Mexico, and Canada, aimed at modernizing and replacing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It aims to promote trade, investment, and economic growth between the three countries.

STRENGTHENING TRADE TIES

- The State visit produced favorable results, leading to the resolution of 6 disputes at the **World Trade Organization (WTO).**
- Leveraging these achievements, trade negotiators from both nations should receive a more ambitious mandate from their leaders.
- **India's positive strides in negotiating FTAs with other trade partners are promising**, and although these agreements may not align entirely with the U.S. gold standard, the disparities are diminishing.

- **India's gradual willingness to open its agricultural sector presents an opportunity** for deeper engagement and further collaboration.

LEVERAGING FTA NEGOTIATIONS

- **Commencing FTA negotiations holds the potential to foster broader agreements** on agriculture and facilitate increased trade in goods, services, and investments between the U.S. and India.
- Drawing inspiration from the successes of the USMCA, such agreements can unlock fresh opportunities and bolster economic ties.
- India's gradual market opening, coupled with concessions, offers the prospect of substantial gains, particularly in the agriculture sector.

LOOKING BEYOND TRANSACTIONAL CONCESSIONS

- Indeed, the **bilateral Trade Policy Forum (TPF)** has already played a role in securing transactional concessions between the U.S. and India in certain sectors.
  - Nevertheless, a **comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** holds the potential to establish a more stable and predictable environment for businesses and investors from both nations.
- By lowering tariffs, simplifying regulations, and strengthening the protection of intellectual property rights, an FTA would foster increased bilateral trade and investment, unlocking new avenues of economic cooperation and growth.

EXPLAINER:Trade Policy Forum (TPF) is a platform for India and the United States to discuss and address trade and investment issues, promote economic cooperation, and enhance bilateral trade relations between the two countries. It aims to strengthen economic ties and resolve trade-related challenges through regular dialogues and discussions.

CHALLENGES

- As both countries aim for a more ambitious trade agenda, it is essential to acknowledge and tackle the challenges and concerns that may arise.
- **For India, one of the critical considerations is addressing the trade deficit** with the U.S. To achieve this, India can focus on diversifying its export portfolio, fostering innovation, and adding value to its products.
- These measures can potentially lead to an increase in India's exports and contribute to a more balanced and mutually beneficial trade relationship between the two nations.

CONCLUSION

- The historic State visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington reaffirmed the growing strategic partnership between the U.S. and India.
  - To fully realize the potential of this alliance, trade must be elevated to a central role.
- Both countries have shown a willingness to negotiate and adapt their trade policies, making it an opportune moment for FTA negotiations.
- By aiming higher and bolstering the mandate from both administrations, the target of $500-$600 billion in bilateral trade by 2030 can be easily attained.
- The USMCA provides valuable insights into how a comprehensive trade agreement can benefit both parties while addressing multiple objectives.
  - As the U.S. and India navigate the challenges ahead, a robust trade relationship will undoubtedly propel their partnership into the 21st century.

IN 2 YEARS, PSYCHIATRIC CASES IN PARAMILITARY UP BY 38%: MHA

Relevant for GS2: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

EXPLAINER: The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reported a significant increase of 38% in psychiatric cases within paramilitary forces in just two years, highlighting the need for mental health support and awareness in these organizations.

CONTEXT:

- The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** informed the Rajya Sabha that the total **number of psychiatric patients in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)** has increased by almost 38% in reported psychiatric cases.
- Around 3,864 cases were reported in CAPFs in 2021.
- There were a total of 1,470 psychiatric patients in CRPF in 2020, 1,506 in 2021 and 1,882 in 2022.

EXPLAINER: The Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) are uniformed security forces under the Ministry of Home Affairs in India, responsible for maintaining internal security and law enforcement across the country. They include forces like the CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP, and SSB.

REASONS FOR THE PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN THE PARAMILITARY FORCES

- **Tightly Structured Hierarchy:**
  - Uniformed forces are tightly structured with a command-and-control hierarchy system.

- o A senior officer is the reporting authority for his immediate junior and this junior has to fulfill their tasks with manpower under his/her command.
  - o The hierarchy is rarely breached and the system ensures discipline, clarity of roles and accountability.
  - o Meanwhile, it tends to become inhuman, especially to those who cannot communicate their personal issues in an appropriate forum.
- **Stress is not Addressed:**
  - o Uniformed forces showing signs of mental stress are not given enough attention.
  - o Those who express the problem are termed as weak and are seen as shying away from the rigors of life.
- **Less Recognition for their Achievements:**
  - o The constabulary accounts for around 85% of state police and CAPFs.
  - o These personnel perform their duties as directed by their seniors.
  - o They mostly remain in the background of the organization with less recognition for their achievements and more frequent persecution for failure.
- **Tend towards Alcoholism:**
  - o To cope with the difficulty of the types of setups, personnel often resort to alcoholism and drug abuse.
  - o In the latter cases, defaulters are punished according to the law and suitable departmental action is also taken.

WHAT CAN BE THE IMPACT OF THE RISING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG THE FORCES?

- Despite the good image that the armed forces have, and the fact that it is a very respectable job, rising mental health issues among the forces can discourage the younger generations from joining.
- Increasing mental health issues among the forces can discourage them and negatively impact their daily operations.
- Suicides, fratricides and untoward incidents are causing more Army personnel to lose their lives than any enemy or terrorist activities, as per the findings of a study by **United Service Institution of India (USI).**

EXPLAINER: *The United Service Institution of India (USI) is a premier think tank and research institute dedicated to national security and defense-related studies in India, fostering strategic thinking and military analysis. It aims to promote cooperation and understanding among the armed forces, government, academia, and the public.*

STEPS TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT

- Provision of better quality of facilities such as clothing, food, married accommodation, travel facilities, schooling, recreation etc. and periodic welfare meeting.
- **Institutionalization of projects 'MILAP' and 'SAHYOG' by** Army in Northern & Eastern Command to reduce stress among troops.
- A **'MansikSahayata Helpline' has been established** by Army & Air Force to take professional counselling.
  - o Mental Health Awareness is provided during pre-induction training.
- **Formation of Military Psychiatry Treatment Centre at INHSAsvini and establishment of Mental Health Centres in Mumbai**, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Port Blair, Goa and Karwar.

WHY IS THE BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY BILL FACING OPPOSITION?

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors**

EXPLAINER: The article discusses the reasons behind the opposition faced by the Biological Diversity Bill. It explores the concerns and arguments raised by various stakeholders regarding the implications of the proposed legislation on biodiversity conservation and local communities.

CONTEXT:

- Recently, the passed **Biological Diversity Amendment Bill** raises concerns due to exemptions given for industry.

EXPLAINER: Convention on Biological Diversityis an international treaty adopted in 1992 during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Its primary goal is the conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ACT, 2002

- It was enacted to give effect to the provisions of the CBD in India.
- **Aim:** to regulate access to biological resources, protect traditional knowledge, and ensure fair benefit sharing with local communities.

EXPLAINER: Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to amend the existing Act to introduce certain relaxations and exemptions.It is intended to promote the "ease of doing business" and support the AYUSH industry.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE ACT BEEN IMPLEMENTED?

- Despite being in force for several years, the **Biological Diversity Act** has faced challenges in full implementation.
- **A 2022 investigation revealed that in many states**, there was no transparent data available on access and benefit-sharing transactions.
- **Concerns were raised regarding non-sharing of benefits with local communities**, leading to a lack of confidence in the Act's implementation.
- **Legal researchers identified difficulties in implementing provisions** related to access and benefit sharing, leading to cases in high courts and the National Green Tribunal.

WHY THE BILL IS CONSIDERED PROBLEMATIC?

- The **proposed amendments exempt "codified traditional knowledge"** and the AYUSH industry from benefit sharing, denying local communities fair compensation for their resources.
- Ambiguity in the definition of "codified traditional knowledge" may lead to exploitation and misuse of traditional knowledge.
- Critics argue that these exemptions are regressive and go against the original intent of ensuring fair and equitable benefit-sharing.

HOW DOES THE INDUSTRY VIEW THE ACT?

- **The industry, particularly the AYUSH sector**, has expressed discontent with the existing regulations.
- **Several companies have faced legal challenges for allegedly** using biological resources without complying with the Act's provisions.
- **Representatives from various sectors**, including the Indian system of medicine, seed, and industry, have urged the government to simplify and streamline compliance burdens to encourage research and investment.

CONCLUSION

- The proposed amendments in the **Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill** have sparked concerns about their impact on local communities, resource

exploitation, and the government's focus on **"ease of doing business"** rather than environmental protection.

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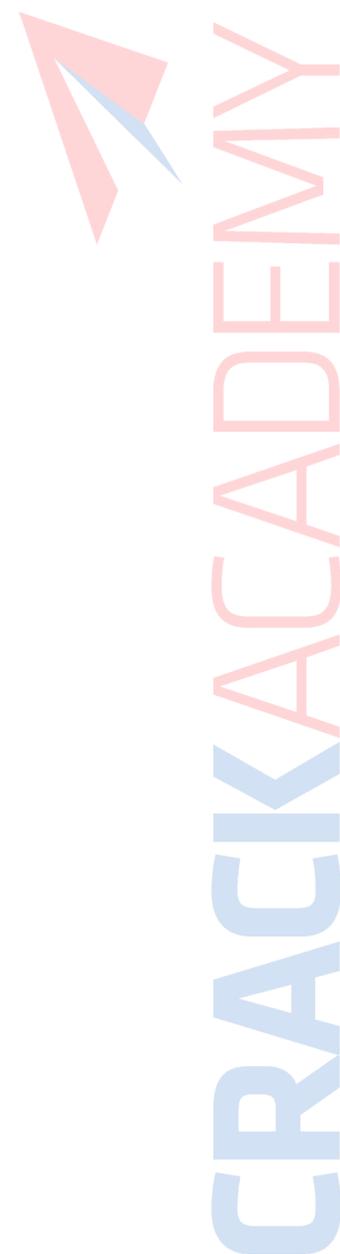
INDIA NEEDS EVIDENCE-BASED, ETHICS-DRIVEN MEDICINE

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health**

EXPLAINER: The article emphasizes the importance of evidence-based and ethics-driven medicine in India's healthcare system. It highlights the need for scientific research, reliable data, and ethical practices to ensure quality healthcare delivery and patient safety.

CONTEXT:

- The recent push to integrate **'AYUSH' medicinal systems** into mainstream health care to achieve universal health coverage and 'decolonize medicine' is a pluralistic approach that would require every participating system to meet basic safety and efficacy standards.

EXPLAINER: AYUSH stands for Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy, representing traditional Indian systems of medicine that focus on holistic well-being and natural remedies. These practices are recognized and promoted by the Indian government for their therapeutic benefits and are integrated into the country's healthcare system.

EFFICACY AND SAFETY OF HOMOEOPATHY

- The **Nuremberg Salt Test noted that "the changes which the homeopaths** claimed to observe as an effect of their medicines were the fruit of imagination, self--deception and preconceived opinion — if not fraud.
- **Low evidence quality-**homoeopathic treatments lack clinically significant effects.
  - Reviews that somewhat support homoeopathy's efficacy also caution over the low evidence quality.

- Recently, researchers demonstrated that **more than half of the 193 homoeopathic trials in the last two decades were not registered**.

HOMEOPATHY

- It was **introduced in 1839 in India** by Austrian physician M. Honigberger
- It is **a method of treating patients with medicines** when a healthy person imitates a natural illness and exhibits similar symptoms.
- It is **a style of supplementary medicine founded on the concept of "symmetry".**
- Patients are treated holistically in this method, but they are also treated individually, keeping in view their specific characteristics.

DEBATE OVER STANDARDS USED IN EVIDENCE- BASED MEDICINE

- **Standards set by the global community:** RCTs and other methods for assessing evidence are collaboratively set by a global community pushing for evidence -based medicine that includes epidemiologists and several others, beyond clinicians.
- **Not suitable for homoeopathy:** Homoeopathy's supporters argue that the standards commonly used in evidence- based medicine are not suitable for judging the "**holistic effects"** of homoeopathy.
- **No conformity on standards used:** Homoeopathy advocates have failed to invent valid alternative evidence synthesis frameworks suited for testing its efficacy and safety, which are also acceptable to the critics.

NATIONAL AYUSH MISSION:

- **Launched in September 2014 by the Department of AYUSH under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**, during the 12th Plan for implementation through States/UTs.
  - Now, it is **implemented by the Ministry of Ayush.**
- The **scheme involves expansion of the AYUSH sector to promote** holistic health of Indians.
- The **Mission addresses the gaps in health services through supporting the efforts of State/UT Governments** for providing AYUSH health

services/education in the country, particularly in vulnerable and far-flung areas.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- India's path to universal health care must be grounded in evidence- based and ethics- driven medicine.
- The argument to reject homoeopathy is not just based on its coloniality, but chiefly on the lack of evidence for efficacy.
- All medicine practices should update themselves based on growing scientific evidence.

CONCLUSION

- Integrating homoeopathy into mainstream health care requires strong evidence of efficacy and safety, which is currently lacking.
- The push for evidence-based and ethics-driven medicine is essential for India's path to universal health care.

GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT MAY SEE 9.64 LAKH TREES AXED, SAYS MINISTER

> **Relevant for UPSC GS3: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA**

EXPLAINER:The Great Nicobar Project could result in the felling of around 9.64 lakh trees, according to a government minister. This has raised concerns over environmental impact and conservation efforts in the region.

CONTEXT:

- The **Centre's ambitious ₹72,000- crore Great Nicobar Project** aims to develop infrastructure on the Great Nicobar Island, including a transshipment port, international airport, township, and a gas- and solar-based power plant.
  - However, concerns have been raised about the potential impact on the island's evergreen tropical forests and diverse flora and fauna.

Source: 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman & Nicobar Islands': Pre-feasibility report (March 2021)
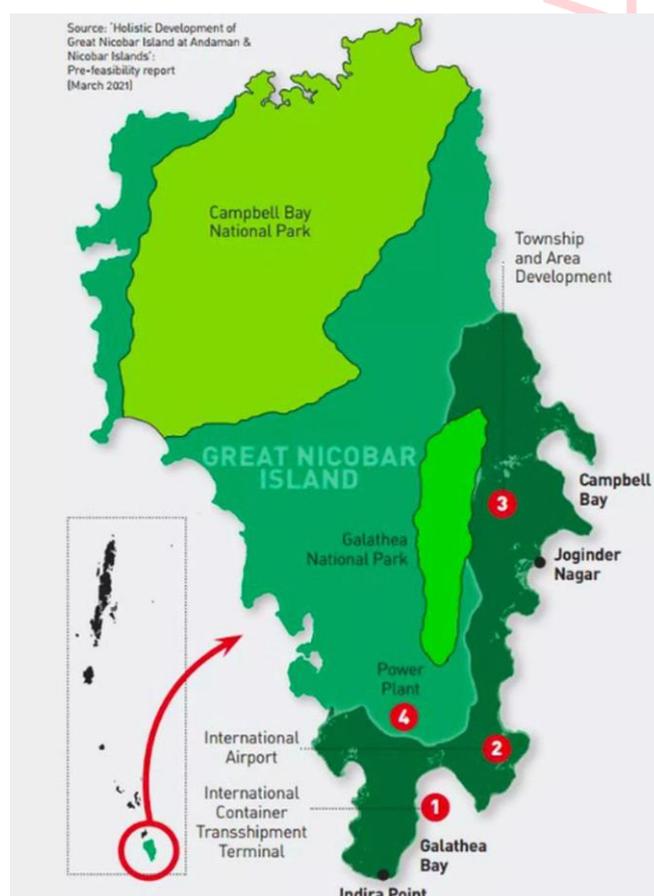
GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND PROJECT

- **About:**

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o The **Great Nicobar Island (GNI)** Project is a mega project to be implemented at the southern end of the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

o The project includes an international container transshipment terminal, a greenfield international airport, township development, and a 450 MVA gas and solar based power plant over an extent of 16,610 hectares in the island.

- **Purpose:**
  - o **Economic Reasons:**
    - As per the NITI Aayog report, the proposed port will allow Great Nicobar to participate in the regional and global maritime economy by becoming a major player in cargo transshipment.
    - It is **equidistant from Colombo to the southwest and Port Klang (Malaysia)** and Singapore to the southeast, and positioned close to the East-West international shipping corridor, through which a very large part of the world's shipping trade passes.
  - o **Strategic Reasons:**
    - The proposal to develop Great Nicobar was first floated in the 1970s, and its importance for national security and consolidation of the Indian Ocean Region has been repeatedly underlined.
    - Increasing Chinese assertion in the Indian Ocean has added great urgency to this imperative in recent years.
  - o **Impact on Biodiversity:**
    - The project has faced several criticism citing concerns regarding its adverse impact on the rich biodiversity of the area and damage to the habitats of endangered species.
    - The **project area is part of Coastal Regulation Zones-IA and IB**, and the Galathea bay which is a nesting ground for birds.
    - Further, turtle nesting sites, dolphins and other species will be harmed by dredging.

AMBITIOUS PROJECT WITH TREE FELLING

- The project aims to build a transshipment port, an international airport, a township, and a 450 MVA gas and solar-based power plant.

- The **Minister of State (Environment) revealed in the Rajya Sabha** that around **9.64 lakh trees** may be felled for the project, not the previously estimated 8.5 lakh trees.

ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE AND CHALLENGE

- The Great Nicobar Project, spanning over 130 square km of pristine forest, received environmental clearance from an expert committee.
- Meanwhile, the clearance decision was challenged in the **National Green Tribunal (NGT).**
- The NGT subsequently formed an expert committee in April 2023 to investigate aspects of the clearance.

PROJECT'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE AND LACK OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

- Normally, details of projects undergoing environmental clearance are made available on a public portal maintained by the Environment Ministry.
- Surprisingly, **details of the Great Nicobar Project have not been disclosed,** following instructions from the Union Home Ministry, which classifies the project as "**strategically important."**

WAY AHEAD

- **Minister of State (Environment) revealed that the Great Nicobar Project may cut down 9.64 lakh trees,** surpassing the initial estimate of 8.5 lakh, for development.
- Limited public disclosure is due to its strategic importance, despite environmental clearance.
  - **The area is known for its diverse flora and fauna,** and compensatory afforestation in Haryana is planned.

INDIA@75, LOOKING AT 100: FROM MATHURA TO MANIPUR: THE JOURNEY FOR GENDER JUSTICE

> **Relevant for UPSC GS1: Social issues**

EXPLAINER:*This article highlights India's progress towards gender justice as it approaches its 75th year of independence and looks ahead to the future with a focus on addressing gender disparities across the country. The journey from Mathura to Manipur signifies the broader efforts to achieve gender equality and empowerment for women in different regions of India.*

CONTEXT:

- India's journey towards gender justice over the last century raises concerns as violence against women continues to escalate.
- Despite the challenges, there is hope for improvement in curbing and addressing this violence.

BACKGROUND: WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

- Since the 1980s, the Indian women's movement has been focused on combating violence against women and advocating for law reform.
- Despite legislative changes, reformed statutes have not effectively deterred violence against women.
- The **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported** a rise in registered rape cases, including cases of minors, in 2021.

EXPLAINER:*The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) is a government agency in India responsible for collecting and analyzing crime data across the country to provide accurate and reliable crime statistics and information. It plays a crucial role in crime prevention, law enforcement, and policy formulation.*

KEY MILESTONES AND AMENDMENTS

- The **anti-rape campaign was catalyzed by the Mathura rape case in 1979**.
- The **first amendment to rape laws in 1983**introduced mandatory punishments for general and aggravated rapes.
- The **enactment of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in 2012** widened the definition of sexual assault for children under 18.
- The **2012Delhi gang rape led to further amendments to incorporate the POCSO** definition into **Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).**
- Incidents like police rape, rapes of Dalit and minority women, and rapes during conflicts highlighted the need for reform.

WHAT NOTABLE CASES MARKED THE CAMPAIGN?

- **Mathura Case (1979):** A tribal girl raped by policemen, leading to a Supreme Court judgment.
- **Rameeza Bi & Maya Tyagi:** Husbands killed by police; both women raped.
- **Suman Rani (1989):** Sentence reduced due to the victim's "character and conduct".
- **Bhanwari Devi (1992):** Acquitted due to caste beliefs; sparked workplace harassment guidelines.
- **Khairlanji Massacre (2006):** Dalit family targeted; mother and daughter gang-raped.
- **Kathua Case (2018):** Muslim girl raped and murdered; led to death penalty for rape of minors under 12.
- **Hathras Case (2020):** Dalit woman raped by upper-caste men; delayed medical care and controversial cremation.
- **Manipur Conflict:** Ethnic conflict saw increased sexual assaults, compelling national attention.

CONCLUSION

- Despite progress, India faces complex and systemic challenges in addressing violence against women.

- The fate of Indian women as the nation approaches a century of nationhood remains uncertain.
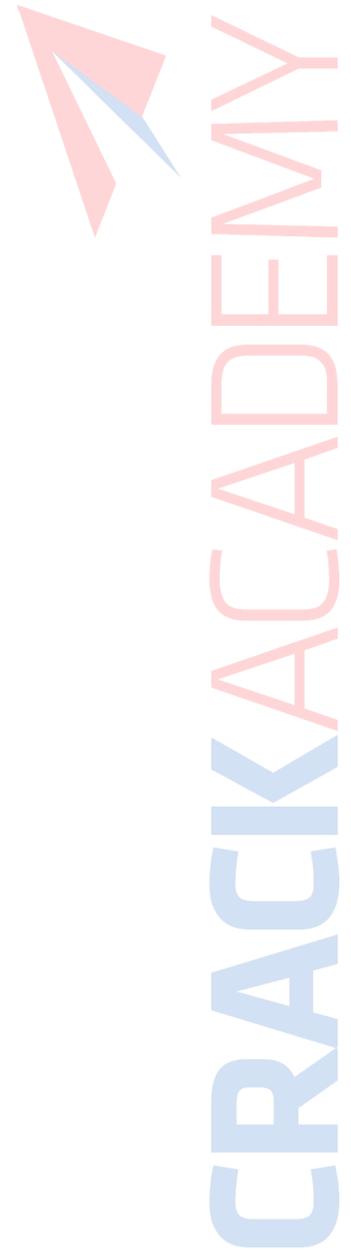
HOW A NUCLEAR 'CHAIN REACTION' AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CHALLENGES LED TO INDIA ACQUIRING ITS N-WEAPONS

> **Relevant for UPSC GS3- Security challenges**

EXPLAINER:*In this article author discusses J. Robert Oppenheimer's regret over creating the atomic bomb. The article traces India's nuclear journey, from Nehru's early decisions to Vajpayee's nuclear tests in 1998. Current global tensions around nuclear weapons are highlighted, with India's role in promoting disarmament emphasized.*

WHY IN NEWS?

- A Hollywood movie named **'Oppenheimer', based on the life of J Robert Oppenheimer - an American physicist** who is known as the **"father of the atomic bomb",** was released.

BACKGROUND: INDIA'S EVOLUTION OF NUCLEAR POWER

- **Initial Approach:**
  - Prime Minister Nehru was against atomic bombs but wanted nuclear power.
  - Dr. Homi J Bhabha was chosen to lead India's nuclear program.
  - Reason for Development: After China's nuclear test in 1964, India felt the need for its own nuclear capabilities.
- **Early Testing:** India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974 under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- **External Influences:**
  - In 1985, US President Reagan informed Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi about Pakistan's nuclear capabilities.
  - Rajiv Gandhi then began considering developing India's own bomb.
- **Further Testing and Evolution:**
  - Prime Minister Vajpayee oversaw nuclear tests in 1998.

- o These tests were a response to perceived threats from China.
- **Diplomatic Moves Post-Testing:**
  - o India engaged with the US, resulting in a strategic partnership involving technology cooperation.

CURRENT STANCE OF INDIA ON NUCLEAR POWER

- **Political Utility Emphasized:**
  - o After the 1998 tests, India highlighted the political benefits of its nuclear actions.
  - o Despite international criticism, these tests boosted India's strategic autonomy in decision-making.
- **Strategic Partnerships Formed:**
  - o Talks between Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbott solidified the India-US relationship.
  - o It led to the Indo-US nuclear deal, promoting cooperation in defense and technology sectors.
- **Promotion of Peace and Deterrence:**
  - o India's nuclear weapons are primarily for deterrence.
  - o In the **2019 Balakot surgical strike**, even though India had nuclear capabilities, it opted for conventional warfare, ensuring peace.
- **Global Leadership in Disarmament:**
  - o Ahead of the **G7 summit in Hiroshima**, Japan emphasized a nuclear-free world.
  - o As the G20 chair, India has the moral authority and opportunity to spearhead efforts in nuclear disarmament.
  - o Overall, India maintains a careful balance between demonstrating its nuclear capabilities and promoting global peace.

ABOUT INDIA'S NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

- India's official nuclear doctrine is codified in a 2003 document, which takes cues from the 1999 draft doctrine.
- Since 2003, **India's nuclear doctrine has had 3 primary components:**
  - o No First Use;
  - o Massive Retaliation;

- o Credible Minimum Deterrence.
- **No First Use:**
  - o India will only use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack on Indian Territory or Indian forces.
  - o Non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states.
  - o A warning is made about their possible use in response to a chemical or biological attack.
- **Massive Retaliation:**
  - o India's response to a first strike will be massive, to cause 'unacceptable damage'.
  - o While the doctrine does not explicitly espouse a counter-value strategy (civilian targets), the wording implies the same.
- **Credible Minimum Deterrence:**
  - o The number and capabilities of India's nuclear weapons and delivery systems should merely be sufficient to ensure intolerable retaliation.
  - o It should also keep in mind first-strike survival of its relatively meagre arsenal.
  - o India's strategic nuclear command was formally established in 2003.

CHALLENGES TO INDIA'S NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

- **Slow implementation:**
  - o India's nuclear triad is still a work in progress, which is a three-sided military-force structure consisting of land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines, and strategic aircraft with nuclear bombs and missiles.
  - o India's sea component of the triad is facing difficulties.
  - o The commissioning of the INS Arighat - the 2nd nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine being built by India, has ostensibly been delayed.
- **Need to Upgrade the Doctrine:**
  - o India's existing doctrinal principles of **'credible minimum deterrence (CMD),' 'No First Use (NFU),'** and massive retaliation are inadequate to deter its adversaries – China and Pakistan.
  - o China's quest for enlarging its nuclear arsenals and delivery systems nullifies India's commitment to maintain the CMD.

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o The persisting Chinese provocations to alter the status quo in the Line of Actual Control (LAC) put a question mark on the original intentions and relevance of the NFU.

EXPLAINER: The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the de facto border between India and China, separating the two countries in the disputed regions of Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.

WAY FORWARD

- Ahead of the **G7 summit in Hiroshima**, Japan's PM spoke of his desire to use the meeting to **"send out a strong message"** about the need for a world without nuclear weapons.
- As the chair of G20 this year, India (invited to Hiroshima) has both the leverage and the moral stature to take the lead in working with the international community to reduce the risk of use of nuclear weapons.

INCREMENTAL INJUSTICE: ON THE GYANVAPI MOSQUE SURVEY

Relevant for GS2: Indian Constitution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure

EXPLAINER: The article discusses the Gyanvapi Mosque survey in Varanasi, raising concerns about incremental injustice and its implications on religious sites' preservation and harmony.

CONTEXT:

- A three-judge bench of the Supreme Court upheld an order by the Allahabad High Court allowing the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** to conduct its investigation of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi.

EXPLAINER: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Ministry of Culture, established in 1861 is the premier organization for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation.

ABOUT GYANVAPI MOSQUE

- It is **believed to have been built in 1669 during the reign of Aurangzeb**, who ordered the demolition of the existing Vishweshwar temple and its replacement by a mosque.
- Also, it is **mentioned in the 1937 book History of Benares:** From the Earliest Times Down to 1937 by AS Altekar.
- The mosque's name is said to have derived from an adjoining well, the Gyanvapi, or Well of Knowledge.
- The plinth of the temple was left untouched and served as the courtyard of the mosque.

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- One of the walls of the temple became the qibla wall; the most ornate and important wall in a mosque that faces Mecca.
- Material from the destroyed temple was used to build the mosque.

BACKGROUND

- The **controversy erupted in 1991** when a group of local priests sought permission to worship in the Gyanvapi complex, claiming the mosque was built on a demolished portion of Kashi Vishwanath Temple.
- The matter was reignited after petitioners demanded an archaeological survey of the Gyanvapi complex.
- The Varanasi district court ordered the **ASI survey of Gyanvapi complex** on an application moved by four Hindu women in 2023.
- The Allahabad High Court had given its nod for the ASI to go ahead with the survey ordered by the Varanasi District Judge.
- **Note:** The mosque is not an ASI-protected site, and the ASI has no role in its maintenance or upkeep.

WHAT IS THE SC'S ORDER

- The SC allowed the ASI to conduct its investigation of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi.
- It has asked the expert body to use only **"non-invasive methodology"** throughout its survey.
- The survey is meant to determine whether the **17th century mosque** had been constructed over a pre-existing Hindu temple.
- The Muslim sides contend that the survey was a breach of the **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991,** which was enacted to guard fraternity and secularism through protection of the religious character of religious places.
- They argue that the 1991 Act prohibited any attempts to convert the religious character of a place of worship as it had existed on the day of Independence.

ABOUT THE PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT

- **Aim:** The **Places of Worship Act, 1991**, seeks to prohibit the conversion of a place of worship and maintain its religious character as was at the time of **India's Independence on August 15, 1947.**
- **Features:**
  - It bars the conversion, in full or part, of a place of worship of any religious denomination into a different religious denomination or even a different segment of the same religious denomination.
  - Any suit or legal proceeding regarding the conversion of the religious character of any place of worship existing on August 15, 1947, pending before any court shall end and no fresh suit shall be instituted.
- **Exemptions:**
  - **Section 5 stipulates** that the Act shall not apply to the **Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case.**
  - It exempts any place of worship, which is an ancient and historical monument or an archaeological site covered by the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.**

WHY IS THE LAW BEING CHALLENGED NOW?

- The law has been challenged on the ground that it bars judicial review, which is a basic feature of the Constitution.
- It imposes an **"arbitrary irrational retrospective cut-off date"** and abridges the right to religion of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs.
- **Cases like the Ayodhya Ram temple dispute**, the matters pertaining to alleged disputed sites at Kashi and Mathura are kept out of the purview.

CONCLUSION

- The Supreme Court's decision allows the ASI survey to proceed using non-invasive methods, ensuring the preservation of the mosque while determining its historical religious character.
- The Act's validity remains a subject of further legal scrutiny.

THE LOK SABHA HAS PASSED THE INTER-SERVICES ORGANISATION (COMMAND, CONTROL & DISCIPLINE) BILL - 2023

> **Relevant for GS2 Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests**

EXPLAINER: The Inter-Services Organization (Command, Control & Discipline) Bill - 2023 is a legislation introduced to improve coordination, command, and discipline among the armed forces in India. It aims to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the country's defense establishment.

CONTEXT:

- The bill seeks **to empower Commander-in-Chief and Officer-in-Command of Inter-Services Organizations (ISOs)** with all disciplinary and administrative powers in respect of the personnel serving in or attached to such organizations.
- **Scope of services covered:** Existing Inter-services organizations such as Andaman and Nicobar Command, the Defence Space Agency, and the National Defence Academy will also come under the provisions of the bill.

PROVISIONS

- Central government may constitute an **ISO which has personnel belonging to** at **least 2 of the 3 services:** the army, the navy, and the air force.
- The bill applies to all personnel (from services such as army, navy, air force etc.) serving in or attached to an ISO.

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- The bill gives the Commander-in-Chief, Officer-in-Command, or any other officer appointed by the Central Government the power to take disciplinary and administrative action against personnel serving in or attached to an ISO.

- Also, the **bill empowers the Commanding Officer of an ISO to take disciplinary and administrative action** against personnel serving in or attached to that ISO.

- **The bill does not change the existing Service Acts/Rules/Regulations**, but it does give the heads of ISOs more power to take disciplinary action against personnel.

NEED FOR ISO

- ISO are an example of theatre commands.
  - It is part of the overhaul of India's military that would bring the separate arms of the military under a single-unified command structure.

- Theatre commands would enable the military to combine resources and optimally use them for offensive and defensive operations.

- **Some of the ongoing plans for theatre commands include:** one for the northern front with China, one for the western borders with Pakistan, and one for the maritime command towards Southern India.

ADVANTAGES

- **Improved discipline:** The bill will help to maintain effective discipline in inter-services establishments by giving the heads of ISOs more power to take disciplinary action against personnel.

- The **bill will no longer require personnel under disciplinary proceedings** to be reverted to their parent service units.
  - It will save time and money, and it will also allow the heads of ISOs to take more effective action against those who break the rules.

- **Expedited disposal of cases:** The bill will help to expedite the disposal of cases of misdemeanor or indiscipline. This will ensure that cases are dealt with promptly and fairly, and it will also help to protect the reputation of the Armed Forces.

- **Saving of public money and time:** The bill will help to save public money and time by avoiding multiple proceedings. This is because the heads of ISOs will be able to take disciplinary action against personnel without having to refer the matter to their parent service units.
- **Greater integration and jointness:** The bill will pave the way for much greater integration and jointness amongst the three Services.
  - Improved logistics management and communication processes among the service units.

CHALLENGES

- Inertia from existing services to realign the operational SOPs and commands.
- Lack of a coherent **National Security Strategy (NSS)** which brings clarity on the responsibilities etc.

EXPLAINER: The National Security Strategy (NSS) is a comprehensive document that outlines a country's approach to addressing security challenges, threats, and opportunities both domestically and internationally. It serves as a guiding framework for national defense and foreign policy decisions.

CONCLUSION

- The passing of the Inter-Services Organization Bill is a significant milestone in the military reforms, promoting integration and jointness among the Armed Forces.
- It sets the foundation for the creation of Joint Structures and further improves the functioning of the armed forces in India.

THE BUREAUCRACY AS PROSECUTOR AND JUDGE

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Role of civil services in a democracy**

EXPLAINER: *This article discusses concerns about the role of the bureaucracy in simultaneously acting as a prosecutor and judge, potentially compromising fair and unbiased decision-making processes in governance. It highlights the need for transparency and accountability in administrative procedures.*

CONTEXT:

- The **Jan Vishwas Act of 2022, which has stirred controversy since its recent passage in Parliament**, is being heralded by the government as a significant legal reform aimed at enhancing the business environment in India.
- The **Act seeks to achieve this by either decriminalizing** certain offenses or rendering them "**compoundable" across 42 legislations.**

JAN VISHWAS ACT: CONSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND SHIFT IN AUTHORITY

- Despite being touted as a landmark legal reform by the government, the finer details of the Jan Vishwas Act have received minimal media attention.
- It is noteworthy that the Act not only replaces criminal imprisonment with penalties but also shifts the power to impose these monetary penalties from the judiciary to the bureaucracy.
- In particular, the **Jan Vishwas Act amends the Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981,** to substitute imprisonment as a punishment for certain offenses with penalties of up to ₹15 lakh that can be imposed by designated bureaucrats, notably Joint Secretaries.

- Similarly, amendments to the Indian Forest Act, 1927 grant forest officers the authority to conduct inquiries to ascertain the extent of **"damage done to the forest"** and to order offenders to pay hitherto uncapped "compensation" for the said damage.

EXPLAINER: *The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 is an Indian legislation aimed at preventing and controlling air pollution by regulating and managing sources of air pollutants. It empowers authorities to take measures for improving air quality and protecting public health.*

BACKGROUND: ON THE PRINCIPLE OF SEPARATION OF POWERS

- Although the Indian Constitution does not explicitly prescribe a strict **separation of powers between the judiciary and the executive, Article 50** instructs the state to work towards achieving this separation in due time.
- Meanwhile, such a separation was not accomplished until several years after the Constitution came into effect, primarily because the criminal magistracy was originally part of the executive at the time of Independence.
- The **separation of power at the level of the criminal magistracy was eventually achieved around 1970,** through the enactment of laws such as The West Bengal Separation of Judicial and Executive Functions Act, 1970, which effectively delineated the roles of judicial and executive magistrates in the **Criminal Procedure Code, 1898.**

CHALLENGES

- **Starting from the 1980s, the bureaucracy has pursued various avenues** to exert influence over judicial power:
  - Different Ministries began establishing judicial tribunals to take over various judicial functions previously exercised by the judiciary.
    - Many of these tribunals were devised to provide bureaucrats with the opportunity to be appointed as "technical members," further eroding the line between executive and judicial functions.
  - **Establishment of Statutory Regulators:** The Union government embarked on creating a new class of statutory regulators, such as the **Securities and Exchange Board of India and the Competition**

Commission of India (CCI), equipped with powers to levy significant fines on the private sector.

- Notably, many of these regulators ended up being headed by senior bureaucrats, thereby raising concerns about the potential encroachment of executive powers into judicial matters.

o **Introduction of Adjudicatory Officers:** The Union government introduced the role of adjudicatory officers in several legislations, including the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002,** the **Information Technology Act, 2001,** and the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.**

- These adjudicatory officers, typically bureaucrats, were granted powers to either confirm **"attachment orders"** for properties or impose penalties on businesses.

- The **Jan Vishwas Act continues this trend by creating "adjudicatory officers"** within the bureaucracy with the authority to impose penalties.

EXPLAINER: The Criminal Procedure Code, 1898, is an outdated legal code that governed criminal procedures in India, encompassing processes for investigation, trial, and sentencing. It has been replaced by the modern Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, which is the current framework for criminal procedures in India.

THE JAN VISHWAS ACT'S CONSTITUTIONALITY

- The constitutional validity of the Jan Vishwas Act comes into question, given its provision to empower bureaucrats to impose penalties and the related concerns about the separation of powers.

- The Act confers authority on designated bureaucrats, **such as Joint Secretaries, to replace imprisonment with penalties of up to ₹15 lakh for certain offenses,** and forest officers gain the power to conduct inquiries and impose uncapped compensation for damage to forests.

- o Central to the debate is whether the imposition of a penalty constitutes a "judicial function."
- While ample case law exists on whether penalties are considered civil or criminal in nature, there is limited judicial precedent on whether the imposition of a penalty qualifies as a **"judicial function."**
  - o Arguably, any inquiry that entails fact-finding, applying the law to the facts, and determining punishment or compensation embodies a judicial function.
- As such, the **burden should fall on the government to prove its case** before an independent judge to ensure a fair trial before the imposition of any punishment.
  - o It is well-established that the government cannot act as both prosecutor and judge in its own cause, as that undermines the fundamental principles of the rule of law.

CONCLUSION

- The Jan Vishwas Act, despite its objective of facilitating the ease of doing business in India, has raised **significant concerns regarding the separation of powers enshrined in the Indian Constitution.**
- By granting bureaucrats the authority to impose penalties and compensation, **the Act challenges the fundamental principle of an independent judiciary** and the core tenets of the rule of law.
- India must uphold the essence of its democratic system and preserve the sanctity of its Constitution by ensuring the independence of the judiciary, safeguarding the rights of citizens, and preventing the encroachment of executive powers on judicial matters.
- In addressing the broader issue of bureaucratic efforts to encroach upon judicial powers, elected officials must remain vigilant and act in the best interest of the nation's democratic principles and constitutional values.
- Only then can India continue on the path of progress and justice while upholding the cherished principle of the separation of powers.

IS INDIA'S SUGAR SURPLUS LEADING TO A CRISIS?

Relevant for UPSC GS3: Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country

EXPLAINER: India's sugar surplus has raised concerns of a crisis due to the imbalance between production and consumption, impacting prices and the financial health of sugar mills. This surplus underscores the need for effective management strategies in the sugar industry.

CONTEXT:

- In 2021-2022, India surpassed Brazil to become the largest sugar producer in the world, producing 359 lakh tonnes.
  - Being a Cash Crop, excess sugarcane production has led to chronic ground water table depletion.

SUGARCANE PRODUCTION IS ON RISE IN INDIA

- India is the world's largest producer and consumer of sugar, and thus has to produce enough to meet its huge domestic demand.
- The Central government offers a **fair and remunerative price (FRP) scheme**, which mandates a minimum price that sugar mills have to pay to sugarcane farmers, ensuring that farmers always get fair profits for their crop.
- Also, State governments offer heavy subsidies to incentivize sugarcane cultivation.
- The resulting sugar surplus has led to higher exports, with a record 110 lakh tonnes exported in 2021-2022.
- **Impact on India's WTO image**
  - Brazil, Australia, and Guatemala filed a complaint with the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** against India for violating international trade

rules by offering excessive export subsidies and domestic support to farmers to outcompete other countries in the global sugar market.

o The Organization ruled against India and India also lost its appeal.

EXPLAINER: *The Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) scheme is a government policy in India that ensures sugarcane farmers receive a fixed minimum price for their produce, promoting their economic welfare and sustainable cultivation practices.*

STEPS TAKEN TO OVERCOME OF EXCESS CULTIVATION

- To deal with the sugar surplus, the Indian government considered diverting it to the production of ethanol, an organic compound made by fermenting sugarcane molasses or sugar.
  - o **Ethanol is the active ingredient in alcoholic beverages** and is also used in the chemicals and cosmetics
- In the transport sector, the use of **ethanol-blended petrol (EBP)** significantly reduces harmful emissions, such as of carbon monoxide and various hydrocarbons, from vehicles.
- Further, the government reduced the Goods and Services Tax on ethanol from 18% to 5% in 2021.

HOW DOES EXCESSIVE SUGARCANE CULTIVATION IMPACT GROUNDWATER?

- **Sugarcane is a highly resource-intensive cash crop:** It needs a large amount of land and water for its cultivation.
  - o Normally, 100 kg of sugar is produced from one tonne of sugarcane, which consumes around 2 lakh litres of groundwater for irrigation
- **Regional concentration:** India's top sugarcane-growing states are Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu.
  - o The first three account for 85-90% of the sugar produced in the country.
    - ▪ The top sugarcane growing states are already drought-prone as well as groundwater-stressed;
    - ▪ Sugarcane requires around 3,000 mm of rainfall a year to be irrigated. But these 3 states receive around 1,000-1,200 mm a year;
    - ▪ The remaining water requirement is met by

- **Ground water is a Limited resource:** Most of this groundwater resides in confined aquifers, i.e. the water is trapped between two impermeable layers of rock.
  - o It can only be extracted by drilling a borewell through the upper layer. Such groundwater can't be recharged by rainfall, so it is a limited resource.
- **Note:** In a 2022 report, the **Central Ground Water Board (CGWB)** noted that a third of all its **groundwater assessment units in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka were 'semi-critical', 'critical' or 'over-exploited'.**

EXPLAINER: The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) is a government agency responsible for managing and regulating groundwater resources in India to ensure sustainable utilization and conservation. It plays a crucial role in monitoring groundwater levels, promoting water conservation, and implementing policies for groundwater management.

IMPACT OF GROUNDWATER EXTRACTION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

- **Weather in anomalies:** The shift in the Earth's axis could affect the distribution of heat around the planet, which could lead to changes in weather patterns.
- **Sea level rise:** The study's findings suggest that groundwater extraction is a significant contributor to global sea level rise.
  - o It is because when groundwater is extracted, it is replaced by seawater, which has a higher density and therefore contributes to the rising of the sea level.
- **Depletion of Aquifers:** The excessive extraction of groundwater has resulted in the depletion of aquifers, causing irreversible damage to the underground water storage.
  - o Once aquifers are depleted, it becomes challenging to replenish them, leading to long-term water scarcity.
  - o **For instance:** Zero water day in Cape Town (2018).

- **Land Subsidence:** Over-extraction of groundwater can cause the land above the aquifers to sink, leading to land subsidence.
  - The phenomenon damages infrastructure, disrupts ecosystems, and increases the vulnerability of coastal regions to flooding.
- **Contamination of Water:** As water tables decline, the concentration of contaminants in groundwater increases, leading to water quality issues. Contaminants like fluoride, arsenic, and nitrates can have severe health implications for the population relying on groundwater for drinking water.
  - **For instance:** Purulia district in West Bengal (Uranium contamination).
- **Agricultural Crisis:** The depletion of groundwater adversely affects agriculture, which heavily relies on irrigation.
  - Declining water availability hampers crop yields, reduces agricultural productivity, and threatens food security in the country.

MEASURES TO BE TAKEN

- Even though the negative effects of excessive sugar production on the environment should be obvious, exporting extra sugar has significant economic benefits, bringing in millions or crores of dollars annually.
  - To evaluate and then rectify incentives that favor sugarcane over other crops, resulting in a persistent surplus.
  - The implementation of fair and comprehensive crop subsidy programmes for a variety of crops can assist farmers in diversifying agriculture equally and ensuring an equitable income.
  - To ensure the availability of a broader range of profitable and less resource-intensive crops can help to reduce the burden on essential natural resources.
  - To focus on needs to invest in overall water-saving and management systems.
  - To map different aspects of groundwater availability and distribution throughout India.

CONCLUSION

- Cleaner practices such as rainwater gathering, wastewater treatment, and canal irrigation networks can assist reduce demand on groundwater reservoirs as additional water sources become accessible for irrigation.
- Investment in groundwater research must therefore be taken seriously.
- As India continues to rise to prominence in the agriculture sector, it must prioritize sustainability.

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DOES INDIA NEED SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS?

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Elections, Election Commission and the Electoral Reforms in India Incl. Political Parties**

EXPLAINER: The article discusses the idea of holding simultaneous elections for various levels of government in India, exploring its benefits and challenges in terms of administrative efficiency and political stability.

CONTEXT:

- In the recent monsoon session, the Law Ministry has talked about the potential benefits of simultaneous election.

ABOUT SIMULTANEOUS ELECTION

- It **refers to structuring the Indian election cycle by synchronizing the elections** to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- **One nation One election** means that the **voters will cast their vote for electing members of the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies on a single day**, at the same time or in a phased manner as the case may be.
- **Current scenario:** The elections to the state assemblies and the Lok Sabha are held separately (whenever the incumbent government's 5-year term ends or whenever it is dissolved).
- **Note:Article 324 constitutes Election Commission** which is responsible for conducting polls to the offices of the President and Vice-President of India, Parliament, the state assemblies and the legislative councils.
- **Advantages:**
  - Reduce election expenditure:
    - Cost reductions for political parties and candidates during their election campaigns;
    - Economic costs associated with Model Code of Conduct;
    - Cost savings for public;

- Intangible costs due to lack of leadership as ministers focus on elections.
  - o **Reduce the manpower:** It prevents the duplication of efforts by administrative and law enforcement agencies in conducting multiple elections.
  - o **Improve governance:** The system will help ruling parties focus on governance, instead of being constantly in election mode.
    - It reduces the distractions from long-term planning and policy goals.
  - o **Boost voter turnout:** As per the Law Commission, it increases voter participation.
  - o **Improve administration:** It will increase the focus of administrative machinery on nation to remain consistently focused on developmental effort.
  - o **Reduce policy paralysis:** This system will lead to minimized disruption of essential services.

HISTORY BEHIND SIMULTANEOUS ELECTION

- Dissolution Simultaneous elections were the norm until 1967. It was **disturbed by the dissolution of-**
  - o Some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969; and
  - o Lok Sabha in 1970.
- The **idea of reverting to simultaneous polls was mooted by**-
  - o Election Commission annual report in 1983;
  - o Law Commission report in 1999 and 2018;
  - o NITI Aayog working paper in 2017.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF LAW COMMISSION REPORT 2018

- The report examined legal and constitutional questions related to the conduct of simultaneous elections.
- **Five Constitutional recommendations**
  - o Appropriate amendments to Constitution and **Representation of People Act 1951;**

- To replace no confidence motion with the constructive vote of no confidence;
- In case of hung assembly the President/ Governor should give an opportunity to the largest party along with their pre or post-poll alliance to form the government;
- Proper amendment to Anti defection law 1985;
- Framework to synchronize elections.

EXPLAINER:*The Representation of the People Act, 1951 is a key legislation in India that governs the conduct of elections to the Parliament and State Legislatures, including matters related to voter registration, qualification, and disqualification of candidates.*

CHALLENGES WITH SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

- It **undermines the fundamental tenet of federalism,** which constitutes an integral component of our Constitutional framework.
- Synchronization would involve curtailment or extension of the tenure of a House.
- The **move requires amendment to the Representation of Peoples's Act 1951** and the Constitution's basic structure, posing a challenge.
- **Multiple amendments:** It requires **amendment in 5 Articles of the Constitution**, namely **Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, and 356**.
- **Practical difficulties:** The Election Commission sometimes holds elections to even one state in many phases.
  - Given this, holding simultaneous elections for the whole country has many practical difficulties.
- **Dissolution challenges:** It is possible for Lok Sabha to be prematurely dissolved on account of a vote of no-confidence.
  - **For example:** Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government faced dissolution within 13 days of taking power.

- It raises the question of whether new elections would be required in all 29 states, even if the ruling party holds an absolute majority in those states in case of simultaneous elections.
- It will benefit the dominant national party or the incumbent at the Centre while disadvantaging the smaller regional party and issue.

WAY FORWARD

- There must be a mechanism for the measures that can be taken to ensure that simultaneous polls provide equal opportunities for regional parties in comparison to national parties.
- There is a need to work on drawbacks before implementing One Nation One Election.

INDIA'S MINING POLICY SHIFT

Relevant for UPSC GS3: Infrastructure: Energy

EXPLAINER: The article discusses a shift in India's mining policy towards more sustainable and responsible practices, focusing on environmental protection and community welfare while extracting mineral resources. This change aims to balance economic development with ecological and social considerations.

CONTEXT:

- The **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2023,** was just enacted by Parliament.
  - It intends to promote private sector investment in the country's exploration of important and deep-seated minerals.
- **Six minerals, including lithium, which is utilized in electric vehicle batteries** and other energy storage systems, are included in the Bill's list of "critical and strategic" minerals.
  - These six minerals, originally categorized as atomic minerals, were traditionally restricted to government-owned companies.

IMPORTANCE OF INDIA'S CRITICAL MINERALS

- India's distinct geological and tectonic context is favorable to the hosting of significant mineral resources.
  - Minerals of many types are essential to a country's manufacturing, infrastructure, and advancement.
- Furthermore, the clean energy transitions of nations such as India, which are attempting to reach their net-zero emission targets, are dependent on the supply of essential minerals and others such as cobalt, graphite, and **rare earth elements (REEs).**

- These are also necessary for the production of semiconductors used in smart electronics, defence and aerospace equipment, telecommunication technologies, and other applications.
- The scarcity of such minerals leads to import dependency, supply chain weaknesses, and potential supply disruption.

NEED OF PRIVATE SECTOR FOR CRITICAL MINERALS EXPLORATION

- Mineral exploration is the first step in discovering mineral deposits and, eventually, economically viable reserves.
- The **stages of exploration are classified as**
  - o G4 (Reconnaissance),
  - o G3 (Prospecting),
  - o G2 (General Exploration), and
  - o G1 (Detailed Exploration) by the United Nations Framework for Classification of Resources.
- There haven't been many notable mineral discoveries in the country in the recent few decades, and the majority of exploration efforts have been carried out by government organizations.
- **For many years, India's mining policy barred private-sector explorers** from conducting greenfield mineral exploration. Companies also reported a lack of appropriate incentives.
- **Exploration necessitates procedures such as aerial surveys,** geological mapping, and geochemical analysis, and it is a highly specialist, time-consuming, and financially risky business, with less than 1% of investigated sites developing into commercially viable mines.

INDIA'S MINING POLICY AND PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION

- The **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR Act), 1957,** the principal mining legislation in the country, has been revised numerous times since its inception, most recently in 2015, 2020, and 2021.
- The **MMDR Act was revised in 2015** to allow private businesses to bid for Mining Leases and **Composite Licenses (CLs)** in government auctions.

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- Due to the **Evidence of Mineral Content (EMT) regulation**, however, only government-explored projects were auctioned, limiting private-sector participation.
- The amendment also allowed private companies to register as exploring agencies, with the **National Mineral exploration Trust (NMET)** supporting exploration from G4 to G1, but private participation remained limited.

HOW DOES THE MINES AND MINERALS BILL 2023 AIM TO ENCOURAGE PRIVATE PLAYERS?

- The **Mines and Minerals Bill 2023 excludes at least six of the previously stated atomic minerals** from a list of 12 that cannot be mined economically.
- Pitting, trenching, drilling, and subsurface excavation are prohibited as part of reconnaissance, which includes mapping and surveys.
  - The Bill permits these illegal actions.
- The **Bill also proposes a new form of licence to encourage private sector** reconnaissance—level and or prospective stage exploration.
  - It also stipulates the maximum exploring area;
  - Activities in up to 1,000 square kilometers will be permitted under a single exploration license.
- It also stipulates that after the first three years, the licensee will be able to keep up to 25% of the originally authorized territory by submitting a report to the State government outlining the reasons for keeping the area.
- The Bill also authorizes the national government to hold auctions for composite licenses and mining leases for selected important and strategic minerals.

CONCERNS WITH THE BILL'S PROPOSALS

- Organizations and professionals in the industry have recommended changes to the proposed revisions and highlighted several problems.
- A part of the premium paid by the miner would be the major source of revenue for a private business with an exploration license.

- The explorer would not know how much money they would make because the auction premium would not be known until the mine was successfully auctioned.

CONCLUSION

- Mines and Minerals Bill 2023 aims to encourage private sector participation in critical minerals exploration.
- Addressing issues related to revenue generation and auction mechanisms is crucial for successful implementation.
- Lessons from global jurisdictions can guide India's efforts to boost private sector involvement in exploration.

LEARNING FROM THE CHIPS ACT OF THE U.S.

> **Relevant for UPSC GS3: Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth**

EXPLAINER: The article discusses the importance of learning from the CHIPS Act in the U.S., which aims to boost semiconductor manufacturing and innovation, and how similar initiatives could benefit India's technology sector and self-reliance goals.

CONTEXT:

- The **Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors and Science Act of 2022 (CHIPS Act)** in the United States (U.S.), which has completed its first year as law, offers valuable lessons for India's semiconductor strategy.
- As industrial policies become increasingly significant for nation-states, the CHIPS Act exemplifies the essential capabilities and structures required for successful implementation.

ABOUT CHIPS ACT

- It was **passed into law in 2022.**
- The Act is intended to increase the US's national security, innovation, and competitiveness.
- The law is designed to encourage investments in domestic semiconductor production facilities.
- The **CHIPS and Science Act** seeks to encourage tech firms to establish semiconductor manufacturing facilities in the nation.

LESSONS FOR INDIA

- **Four crucial lessons for India to enhance its semiconductor strategy**, drawing insights from the CHIPS Act.
  - **Coordination between Departments:**
    - The Act requires collaboration and coordination across numerous federal agencies.
    - On the other hand, the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** is primarily in charge of managing India's industrial policy for semiconductors.
    - A non-profit organization founded by MeitY has entrusted the plans for **semiconductors to an independent branch known as India Semiconductor Mission (ISM).**
  - **Separate Funds:**
    - For the **purpose of carrying out the Act**, 4 distinct funds have been established.
    - This arrangement clearly shows how important semiconductors are.
    - Companies must submit workforce development plans in order to be eligible for funding under the CHIPS Act.
  - **Collaboration with Private Institutions:**
    - India can quickly establish a competitive edge in the semiconductor business by developing a skilled workforce of semiconductor engineers.
    - In the case of India, numerous private educational facilities train chip designers outside the framework of the traditional university system.
    - The **Chips2 Startup (C2S)** program should concentrate on accrediting top-notch academic or private training programmes.
  - **Structuring Accountability:**
    - Also, the CHIPS Act established the **CHIPS Programme Office (CPO)** to establish the standards for judging a project's financial viability.
    - To encourage private sector investments, the CPO is hiring Financial Structuring Directors and Investment Principals.

- Even though India has criteria for determining whether ideas are viable, there is still plenty that can be done to increase openness.
- Regular monthly progress reports on the government's semiconductor programme must be released.

CONCLUSION

- The CHIPS Act serves as a valuable template for effective industrial policy in the semiconductor sector.
  - By closely examining the administrative framework of the Act, India's semiconductor strategists can draw inspiration to refine their approach.
- Coordinated government efforts, workforce development, accountability, transparency, and future research are key components that India should adopt to strengthen its semiconductor strategy.
- By implementing these lessons, India can ensure the continuity and success of its semiconductor policy, contributing to its technological advancement and global competitiveness.

IMPROVED NUTRITION, EARLY WEIGHT GAIN CAN CUT TB CASES, MORTALITY: LANCET'S INDIA RESEARCH

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Issues Relating to Development & Management of social sector/services such as Health, Education and Human Resource**

EXPLAINER: The article discusses research published in The Lancet indicating that improved nutrition and early weight gain could potentially reduce tuberculosis cases and mortality rates in India.

CONTEXT:

- According to Lancet's India research, improved nutrition, early weight gain can cut TB cases, mortality.

ABOUT THE STUDY

- The two studies were conducted between August 2019 and August 2022 in four districts of Jharkhand.
- The study was named **Reducing Activation of Tuberculosis by Improvement of Nutritional Status (RATIONS) trial.**
- The findings of the studies by the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR),** in collaboration with the National TB Elimination Programme and National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis,

Nutrition and Tuberculosis

- More than two-thirds of **trial participants were tribals,** most of whom were accessing ration from the PDS.
- **Undernutrition** (BMI<18.5 kg/m2) was prevalent in four out of five patients, with severe undernutrition (BMI<16 kg/m2) in nearly half of these.
- Prevalence of HIV, diabetes, MDR-TB was low but **alcohol** and **tobacco** use was high.
- Nearly one per cent of patients were **hypotensive, hypoxic,** or were unable to stand, indicating need for in-patient care.
- One of three contacts across all ages had **undernutrition** at enrolment.
- There was a **39 per cent reduction** of incidence of **all forms of TB** and a **48 per cent reduction** of incidence of **infectious TB** in the intervention group of families.

Representative Image

Chennai, have also been published in The Lancet and The Lancet Global Health Journals.

EXPLAINER: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination, and promotion of biomedical research, working towards advancing healthcare and medical knowledge in the country.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- **Improved nutrition can reduce the incidence of all forms of TB by up to 40 per cent,** and of infectious TB by up to 50% among those in contact with patients suffering from infectious lung TB.
- Early weight gain among underweight patients with TB could reduce the risk of mortality by up to 60%, as it ensured higher treatment success.
- **As per the study, to prevent a single case of TB,** about 30 households (111 household contacts) and about 47 patients would need to be provided nutritional support.
  - The monthly cost of a food basket was Rs 1,100 per patient and Rs 325 per contact (at 2019 prices).
- The TB patients currently receive a monthly 10 kg food basket (rice, pulses, milk powder, and oil) and multivitamins for 6 months.
  - Among family members, the intervention group received 5 kg rice and 1.5 kg pulses per head per month.
- Jharkhand was chosen as a trial site because it has a high burden of TB (52,179 cases notified in 2021) and the **second highest level of multidimensional poverty.**

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDING

- The study is the first of its kind in the world and the question was can nutritional intervention reduce TB incidence.

- o These findings, which come at a time when the Centre is seeking to eliminate TB by 2025, can have implications at the policy implementation level.
- The **study offers the first evidence of how nutritional support** reduces the risk of mortality among TB patients.
- The **results of the trial are significant** as it shows that improved nutrition in family members has worked at the community level.
- The **studies are significant because under-nutrition has now emerged as the leading risk factor for TB** globally and simple dietary interventions have been found to be effective.
- The findings shed light on how we can tackle TB in the future.

WHO AND GOVERNMENT'S INITIATIVES

- The national strategic plan 2017-2025 sets the target of India reporting no more than 44 new TB cases or 65 total cases per lakh population by 2025.
- Under the national programme to eliminate TB by 2025, TB patients are given monthly nutritional support of Rs 500 through direct benefit transfer for the duration of their treatment.
    - o The programme also aims to reduce the mortality to 3 deaths per lakh population by 2025.
- Under the **Ni-Akshay Mitra programme**, volunteers can provide monthly nutrition kits to their "adopted" patients.
- **More accurate molecular diagnostic tests like CB-NAAT and TureNat** have been developed to test and detect TB cases.
- 79 line probe assay laboratories and 96 liquid culture testing laboratories have been set up for the diagnosis of multi and extremely drug-resistant TB.
- **WHO's End TB strategy calls for an 80% reduction in the number of new cases**, a 90% reduction in mortality, and zero catastrophic cost by 2030.

*EXPLAINER:*The Ni-Akshay Mitra programme is an initiative by the Indian government aimed at providing financial support to senior citizens for their medical and healthcare needs, ensuring their well-being and quality of life during their later years.

TB'S PREVALENCE IN INDIA

- India accounts for 28% of all TB cases in the world, according to the Global TB Report 2022.
- There were 21.3 lakhs cases detected in 2021 as compared to 18.05 lakhs cases in 2020.
  - The numbers are still lower than the 24.04 lakhs cases reported before the pandemic in 2019, as per data from the **government's Ni-kshay portal.**
- In India, 3 million new TB cases and 4, 94,000 deaths were reported in 2021, representing 27% of the global TB incidence and 35% of deaths, **as per the World Health Organization (WHO)** Global Tuberculosis Report, 2022.

*EXPLAINER:*The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. It provides leadership in global health matters, sets health standards, and coordinates international health responses.

NEWER VACCINES IN THE PIPELINE

- **Trials are underway to test the effectiveness of a vaccine called Immuvac**, which was initially developed to prevent leprosy, preventing TB.
- The **vaccine developed using Mycobacterium indicus pranii has antigens** – the portions of a pathogen against which antibodies are developed – similar to those of leprosy and TB bacteria.
- Also, **researchers are testing the vaccine candidate called VPM1002**, which is a recombinant form of the BCG vaccine modified to express the TB antigens better.

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WAY AHEAD

- A good nutritional package that provides a substantive amount of calories, proteins and micronutrients should be given to the household members of TB patients.
- The **government needs to take stock of where the bottlenecks are.**
  o There is no point in pouring more money into a failing system.
- Any investment in diagnostic treatments is irrelevant if people fighting TB are living on an empty stomach.
- A broader approach is needed to prevent TB, and it should include food support for those in close contact with the patient as they are also at high risk of contracting the disease.

CLASHES WILL EXACT A STIFF ECONOMIC COST

> **Relevant for UPSC GS1: Society - communalism**

EXPLAINER:The potential clashes are expected to impose a significant economic burden due to disruptions, loss of productivity, and infrastructural damage, underscoring the need for peaceful resolutions to mitigate adverse financial consequences.

CONTEXT:

- The **latest outbreak of violence in the Nuh district and Gurgaon**, Haryana, has not only highlighted the persistent issue of Hindu-Muslim clashes in India but also unveiled a new dimension in terms of its nature, consequences, and underlying factors.
    - Although the region's economic challenges are often cited, this violence is better understood as an outcome of competing identities within a polarized political landscape.
    - The analysis delves into the multifaceted anatomy of the riots, considering factors such as historical context, state response, communalism, and ideological influences.

EXPLAINER: Communal violence is a form of collective violence that involves clashes between groups belonging to different religious, ethnic, linguistic, or regional identities.

POLARIZATION AND COMPETING IDENTITIES

- The violence in Nuh district and Gurgaon emerges as a reflection of competitive identity assertion within a polarized political environment.
    - Amid a polity that offers varied patronage to non-state actors, the assertion of identities becomes a trigger for conflict.

- The historical **institutionalized riot system (IRS),** as **proposed by scholar Paul Brass,** offers a framework for understanding the spontaneity and scale of the violence.

EVOLUTION OF COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

- Various **key incidents and policies have played a crucial role in this evolution:**
  - The **British colonial rulers employed a "divide and rule" policy,** deliberately fostering divisions among different communities to maintain control.
    - By pitting communities against each other, they sowed the seeds of communalism, leading to animosities and conflicts.
  - The **British decision to partition Bengal along religious lines in 1905** exacerbated communal sentiments.
    - This move created a Muslim-majority province in the east and a Hindu-majority province in the west, intensifying religious identities and tensions.
  - The **introduction of the Communal Award by the British government in 1932** allocated legislative assembly seats based on population proportions of different marginalized communities.
    - While aiming to address social imbalances, it inadvertently reinforced communal identities and divisions.
  - **Appeasement Policies:** The British administration's policies of appeasement, favoring specific communities for political gain, added fuel to communalism.
    - This **selective treatment generated feelings of alienation** and unequal treatment among various groups.

REASONS OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA

- **Political Reasons:**
  - The role of political parties and leaders in mobilizing communal sentiments for electoral gains or ideological agendas.
  - The use of communal polarization as a strategy to divide and rule.

- o The failure of political institutions and mechanisms to prevent or resolve communal conflicts. The lack of accountability and impunity for perpetrators of communal violence.

- **Social Reasons:**
  - o The existence of deep-rooted prejudices and stereotypes against different communities.
  - o The lack of inter-community dialogue and trust.
  - o The influence of extremist groups and organizations that propagate communal hatred and violence.
  - o The manipulation of religious symbols and sentiments for communal purposes.

- **Economic Reasons:**
  - o The competition for scarce resources and opportunities among different communities.
  - o The perception of relative deprivation or discrimination among marginalized groups.
  - o The impact of globalization and modernization on traditional livelihoods and identities.

- **Cultural Factors:**
  - o The clash of values and lifestyles between different communities. The erosion of cultural diversity and pluralism.
  - o The challenge posed by secularism and liberalism to religious orthodoxy and conservatism.
  - o The appropriation or desecration of cultural heritage and sacred sites.

- **Lack of Education and Awareness:** Misinformation can spread easily, deepening mistrust and misunderstanding, and eventually contributing to the eruption of communal violence.

IMPACTS OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA

- **Loss of Human Lives:**
  - o Individuals, families, and entire communities are torn apart by the tragedy of lives cut short, leaving scars that last for generations.

- **Destruction of Property:**

- o Communal violence leads to the destruction of homes, businesses, and places of worship.
- o The economic losses resulting from this destruction can be substantial, affecting the livelihoods of individuals and communities.

- **Social Disintegration:**
  - o The breakdown or weakening of social cohesion, tolerance, solidarity, etc., among different communities.
  - o The fabric of trust and unity that binds a society together is often torn apart by communal violence.
  - o Communities that once lived in harmony can find themselves divided along religious lines, eroding the bonds that have held them together.

- **Economic Setbacks:**
  - o Communal violence can have significant economic ramifications. The diversion or wastage of resources and funds.
  - o Investors may be hesitant to invest in areas prone to violence, economic activities can be disrupted, and developmental projects can be derailed, slowing down progress and growth.

- **Psychological Impact:**
  - o The trauma inflicted by communal violence extends beyond physical harm.
  - o Survivors often experience psychological distress, anxiety, and depression, affecting their overall well-being and ability to lead fulfilling lives.

- **Political Impact:**
  - o The erosion or subversion of democracy, secularism, rule of law, justice, etc., in India. The loss of legitimacy and credibility of political institutions and actors.
  - o The increase in corruption, nepotism, patronage, violence, etc., in political processes. The rise or resurgence of authoritarianism, populism, nationalism, communalism, etc.

- **Impact on Security:**
  - o The threat or challenge to national, regional, and international security.

- o The involvement or interference of external actors or forces in communal conflicts.
- o The spillover or escalation of communal violence across borders.
- o The linkages or nexus between communal violence and other forms of violence, such as terrorism, insurgency, militancy, etc.
- o The proliferation or misuse of weapons or explosives.

MEASURES TO ADDRESS COMMUNALISM

- **To mitigate communal violence, comprehensive measures are imperative**.
  - o These encompass judicial reform for speedy trials and compensation to deter violence.
  - o Inclusive law enforcement involving increased representation of minorities and enhanced human rights training can help bridge divides.
- **Specialized training for police units to manage riots** and specialized investigation teams can aid in prompt intervention.
- **Emphasizing value-oriented education in schools** that promotes peace, secularism, and humanism is crucial.
- **Early-warning systems modeled after successful initiatives** like Malaysia's Mesra can help monitor tensions.
- Encouraging civil society involvement, implementing minority welfare schemes, and proactive efforts by organizations like the **National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH)** can foster unity and prevent communal conflicts.
- Furthermore, legislative action such as enacting the **Communal Violence (Prevention, Control, and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill, 2005**, can provide a legal framework to curb communal strife and promote harmony.

EXPLAINER: The Communal Violence Bill of 2005 aimed to prevent and control communal violence while providing rehabilitation for victims, emphasizing social harmony and justice.

CONCLUSION

- The recent riots in Nuh and Gurgaon expose a worrying pattern of targeting minorities in a polarized political climate.
- The interplay of competing identities, state response, ideological influences, and communal dynamics underscores the complexity of the situation.
  - As long as sincere secular interventions are absent, the risk of violence remains a looming threat.
- A comprehensive approach, addressing both communal tensions and the underlying economic challenges, is crucial to preventing the recurrence of such tragic events.

BIBEK DEBROY WRITES: BIMARU STATES ARE BREAKING POVERTY'S CHAINS

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Issues related to poverty and hunger**

EXPLAINER: The article explains the prevalence of poverty rate in India as indicated by UNDP and NITI Aayog reports.

METHODS USED IN INDIA TO DEFINE AND QUANTIFY POVERTY

- Traditionally, poverty has been identified as a percentage of the population living below a designated poverty line. It is known as the head-count ratio.
- The **currently recognized poverty line is still based on the Tendulkar measurement**.
- Due to the absence of **National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) surveys** on consumption expenditure beyond 2011-12, no head-count ratios are available after that period.
- Over time, development economists have contended that poverty is a multi-faceted concept.
  - There has been a transition to **multidimensional poverty index (MDPI).**

EXPLAINER: The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) is a government agency responsible for conducting large-scale household surveys to collect socio-economic data in India. It plays a vital role in shaping policies and programs based on accurate and comprehensive data analysis.

ABOUT MDPI

- It **relies on 3 key dimensions of poverty:** health, education, and living standards.

- o Health metrics encompass aspects like nutrition, child and adolescent mortality, and maternal health;
- o while education measures include years of schooling and school attendance;
- o Living standard encompasses factors like cooking fuel, sanitation, access to clean drinking water, electricity, housing, assets, and bank accounts.

POVERTY RATES IN INDIA ACCORDING TO DATA PROVIDED BY UNDP AND NITI AAYOG

- **As per the UNDP report,** around 415 million individuals transitioned out of poverty between 2005-06 and 2019-21, resulting in a reduction of poverty incidence from 55.1% to 16.4%.
  - o According to UNDP report, the steepest declines in poverty have occurred in economically disadvantaged states.
    - ▪ Meanwhile, it's significant to note that the UNDP's report presents a national aggregate perspective for India, while the NITI Aayog report delves into regional and state-specific disparities.
- **The NITI Aayog report indicates** a decrease in poverty rates from 24.85% in 2015-16 to 14.96% in 2019-21.
  - o During this period, an estimated 135.5 million Indians were lifted out of poverty.
  - o Within this group, Uttar Pradesh alone accounted for 34.3 million individuals.

EXPLAINER: *NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) is a policy think tank of the Indian government that aims to foster sustainable development and provide strategic policy inputs. It focuses on economic growth, innovation, and social welfare through collaborative and evidence-based initiatives.*

HOW HAVE BIMARU STATES PERFORMED WELL IN POVERTY REDUCTION?

- BIMARU served as a symbolic representation of the various issues that plagued India during that time.

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- **India's overall development, employment situation, and poverty alleviation efforts are significantly** influenced by the conditions prevailing in these states. It is primarily due to their substantial populations, as well as the extensive poverty levels.
- The **report from NITI Aayog reveals that the most rapid declines in poverty** rates were observed in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Rajasthan.
  - Specifically, **Bihar's poverty rate** has now reached 33.8%, Madhya Pradesh at 20.6%, Odisha at 15.7%, and Rajasthan at 15.3%.
  - **Uttar Pradesh's poverty rate** stands at 22.9%, having started from a baseline of 37.7% in 2015-16.
- **Note:** Many years ago, **demographer Ashish Bose introduced the acronym BIMARU to represent t**he then-undivided states of **Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.**

CONCLUSION

- MDPI provides a snapshot of poverty's multi-dimensional nature.
- BIMARU states' progress indicates breaking the cycle of deprivation.
- Continued efforts required to sustain and enhance poverty reduction initiatives.

THAT '70S SHOW: ON INDIA'S RESTRICTIONS ON IMPORTS OF LAPTOPS, PCS, TABLETS AND SERVERS

> **Relevant for UPSC GS3: Infrastructure: Energy.**

EXPLAINER: This article discusses India's recent restrictions on imports of laptops, PCs, tablets, and servers, reflecting on the potential impacts of these measures on the technology industry and the country's economic policies. It explores the implications of such restrictions in the context of global trade and technological advancements.

CONTEXT:

- The **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** has delayed notification restricting imports of laptops, PCs, tablets and servers to India with immediate effect to November 1, 2023.

EXPLAINER:DGFT is responsible for formulating and implementing the Foreign Trade Policy with the main objective of promoting India's exports. The DGFT also issues scrip/authorization to exporters and monitors their corresponding obligations through a network of 24 regional offices.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The Union government has restricted imports of personal computers, laptops, palmtops, automatic data processing machines, microcomputer/ processors and large/ mainframe computers with immediate effect.
- Under this move, seven categories of **HSN Code 8471 (HSN is the Harmonized System of Nomenclature, a globally accepted method of naming goods)** were restricted.

- **Valid license:** Meanwhile, their import would be allowed against a valid licence for restricted imports.
- **Re-imports:** Also, the licence for restricted imports shall not be required for the repair and return of re-import of goods repaired abroad, as per the Foreign Trade Policy.

EXPLAINER:HSN code is a classification system used to identify products for taxation purposes. HSN Code 8471 is used to identify devices that are designed to perform data processing tasks.

EXEMPTIONS GIVEN

- **Current regulations permit companies to import laptops without any restrictions**.
- The **import of one laptop, tablet, all-in-one personal computer or ultra-small form factor computer** including those purchased from e-commerce portals through post or courier, has been exempted from licensing requirement. It will attract payment of duty as applicable.
- **Imports up to 20 items per consignment for R&D**, testing, benchmarking, and evaluation repair and re-export, and product development purposes, have also been exempted from import license.

CUSTOMS DUTY HIKES: MAJOR INSTANCES

2016
JAN: Concessional duties on 76 specified drugs withdrawn; restored for 3 drugs on Feb 17 after Health Ministry opposition
FEB: Budget withdraws basic customs duty exemption on cashew nuts in shell; imposes 5%

2017
JUN: 10% basic customs duty on smartphones notified; parts like charger, battery, covered.
SEPT: Implementation of 7.5% duty on solar panels, proposed in September 2016, implemented at some ports.
DEC: Duty on push-button phones, mobile handsets raised to 15% from 10%; on TVs to 20% from 15%. Duty also raised on digital cameras, microwave ovens, LED bulbs, etc.

2018
FEB: Duties on 46 items, from fruit juices to mobile phones, raised mostly from 10% to 15% and 20%.
MAY: Import duties raised up to 100% on five products including wheat, shelled almond, walnut, and protein concentrate, imported from US, other developed nations.
JUN: Duty hiked on 29 US products in retaliation for steel and aluminium tariff hikes by US. Hike, set to be effective from Aug 4, postponed.
AUG: Duties on 328 textiles products including innerwear, baby garments, more than doubled to 20%.

2019
FEB: Customs duty on all goods imported from Pakistan hiked to 200%.
JUL: Duty on gold, other precious metals hiked from 10% to 12.5%; on ACs, TV and plasma display panels hiked or tweaked.

2020
FEB: Duties hiked on fans, shavers, water heaters, shoes, fridge and AC compressors, etc; basic customs duty on toys hiked from 20% to 60%.
JUL: Restrictions imposed on import of 10 categories of TVs; traders now needed DGFT licence.

2021
FEB: Duties up on smart speakers, laptops, tablets, "some mobile phone parts"

2022
FEB: Higher customs duties in Budget on items like umbrellas, headphones, earphones, imitation jewellery (mostly Chinese imports).
APR: Basic customs duty hiked on solar PV cells and modules.

2023
FEB: Duty on toys and its components hiked to 70%; on bicycles to 35%.
AUG: Licensing requirement for laptops, computer parts; implementation pushed to Nov 1.

- Further, the **government has exempted laptops, tablets**, all-in-one personal computers, and ultra-small form factor computers from import licensing requirements if they are essential part of capital goods.

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NEED OF THE MOVE

- **Increase in imports:** India has seen an increase in imports of electronic goods and laptops/ computers over the last few years.
  - During April-June 2023, the import of electronic goods increased with a share of 4-7% in overall imports.
- **Increasing presence of China:** Majority of these imports were coming from.

CONCERNS WITH IMPOSING RESTRICTIONS

- While the government claims quick license issuance, this situation brings back memories of **India's earlier IT industry stages (1970s and 1980s),** causing unease among industry players until the licensing rules clarify.
- If concerns about security are arising due to PC and tablet imports from China, the government could enforce testing requirements to ensure the safety of shipments.
- Whereas, if the goal is to encourage investments, it becomes challenging to force major global players into making substantial investments when they have more convenient business options elsewhere.
- So, such restrictions might increase costs and limit device choices, impacting Indian consumers and hindering digital access to government services.

NEED FOR INDIA TO ESTABLISH AN INDUSTRIAL POLICY

- India has had successes of liberalization but the fact remains that India failed to build a manufacturing base, and prematurely de-industrialized.
- No country in the world has industrialized only by deregulation.
  - Industrial policy is necessary for the structural transformation of the economy.
- Well-chosen import restrictions can be a part of that policy mechanism.
- The global context requires serious industrial policy.

o Every other country is resorting to it, and the nature of geo-politics and security requires that India establishes an industrial policy and takes manufacturing seriously.

SUGGESTIONS TO FORMULATE A ROBUST INDUSTRIAL POLICY

- **Promotes Competition and Coordination:**
  - o Critics of industrial policy argue that India needs to focus on the general features that make an economy competitive.
  - o Industrial policy can create positive externalities; it can solve coordination problems and create agglomeration effects.
- **Exit from Subsidies and Protections:**
  - o Despite the growth in state capacity, the political economy of bureaucratic arbitrariness should not be underestimated, especially in a context where the state heavily favours particular companies over others.
  - o The Indian states should be able to exit from subsidies and modest protections.
- **Export Oriented Rather than Import Substitution:**
  - o The most important thing about Chinese and East Asian industrial policy was their export orientation.
  - o But India's orientation to exports is challenging in two respects. China and East Asia pulled off both industrial policy and maintained access to an open world trade system.
  - o India is in a contradictory position. Export orientation will require an open trade system.
    - ▪ But support for an open trade system is diminishing globally.
  - o India cannot be an effective advocate for that system if it itself turns protectionist.
  - o Therefore, it is significant to configure industrial policy in a way that it becomes a push for exports, not another import substitution scheme.
- **Avoid Showmanship:**
  - o **For example**, currently the government is making much of the Micron deal, with the government providing 70% of the investment.

- o Yet at the same time the government forgets that chip companies are relocating manufacturing to far more expensive places with less subsidy.

WAY FORWARD

- This situation, along with recent policies like the 28% GST on gaming bets and the freeze on prices of 'deregulated' petroleum products, is worrying for investors.
- Thus, India's reform narrative might be derailed by unpredictable policies, exorbitant taxes, and a return to maximum government.

CONCLUSION

- The government will require careful analysis of the country's circumstances and capabilities.
  - o India needs an industrial policy where the benefits of laptops are for more than the laptop class.
- Meanwhile, it's vital to remember that the discussion of industrial policy shouldn't be held captive by showmanship, theoretical simplicity, or misleading historical analogies.

CENTRE'S NEW BILL ON ELECTION COMMISSION MEMBERS' APPOINTMENTS: HOW IT PLANS TO AMEND THE PROCESS

EXPLAINER: This article examines the Centre's new bill aiming to amend the process of appointing members to the Election Commission. It highlights the proposed changes and their potential impact on the functioning and transparency of the election regulatory body.

CONTEXT:

- A Bill is set to be introduced in the Rajya Sabha with the view of overturning the effect of the Supreme Court's (SC) verdict on the appointment of the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs).**

EXPLAINER: The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) is the highest authority in the Election Commission of India, responsible for overseeing and supervising the conduct of elections at all levels and ensuring fair and transparent electoral processes in the country.

ABOUT THE BILL

- It **seeks to establish a committee of the Prime Minister**, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM for selecting members of the **Election Commission of India (ECI).**
- Currently, the **Law Minister suggests a pool of suitable candidates** to the Prime Minister for consideration.
  - The President makes the appointment on the advice of the PM.
- **According to the Bill, a Search Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary** and comprising two other members, not below the rank of Secretary to the government, having knowledge and experience in matters relating to elections, shall prepare a panel of five persons who can be considered for appointment.
- Then, **according to the Bill, a Selection Committee consisting of the PM,** the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister will **appoint the CEC and other ECs**.

EXPLAINER: The Election Commission of India (ECI) is an autonomous constitutional body responsible for administering and supervising elections in India,

ensuring the conduct of free and fair elections and maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

PRESENT STRUCTURE TO APPOINT CEC AND ECS

- **Under Article 324 (2),** the **President appoints the CEC and other ECs.**
- The President makes the appointment on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister.
- The Constitution does not prescribe any qualifications, academic or otherwise, for appointment to these offices.
- **Tenure:**
  - The tenure of office and the conditions of service of all the commissioners is determined by the President.
  - The tenure of commissioners is 6 years or up to the age of 65, whichever is earlier.
- **The CEC and the two other ECs have the same powers and emoluments**, including salaries, which are the same as a Supreme Court judge.
  - All three commissioners have the same right of taking a decision.
    - In case of a difference of opinion amongst the three members, the matter is decided by the Commission by a majority.

PROCESS OF REMOVAL

- **Article 324 mentions the provisionsto safeguard and ensure** the independent and **impartial functioning of the Election Commission.**
- The **CEC is provided with security of tenure**.
  - He cannot be removed from his office except in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.
- Any other election commissioner or a regional commissioner cannot be removed from office except on the recommendation of the CEC.

JUDGMENT OF SUPREME COURT

- On March 2, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that a high-power committee consisting of the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India (CJI) must pick the CEC and ECs.
- The judgement by a bench came in 2015, challenging the constitutional validity of the practice of the Centre-appointed members of the Election Commission.
- **As per the judgement, the SC has now given the Opposition and the judiciary a say in the matter,** ruling that the CEC and ECs must be appointed by the President on the advice of a committee comprising the PM, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India.

- Further, in 2018, a two-judge bench of the SC referred the case to a larger bench since it required a close examination of Article 324, which deals with the role of a CEC.

DEBATE: ON APPOINTMENT OF CEC AND ECS

- **Article 324(2)** reads that "**The Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other ECs, if any, as the President may from time-to-time fix and the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other ECs shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament is made by the President."**
- The Parliament has the power to nullify the effect of a Court ruling by addressing the concerns flagged in the judgment.
- In this case, the arrangement prescribed by the Supreme Court was specifically because the Court noted that there was a **"legislative vacuum."**
  - Filling that vacuum is well within the purview of the Parliament.
- Meanwhile, the idea of an independent body that conducts elections permeates through the judgement.
- The Court repeatedly stated that to be the objective of the framers of the Constitution.
- The composition of the Selection Committee in the Bill raises questions on whether the process is now independent or still rigged in favour of the Executive.

CONCLUSION

- The proposed Bill seeks to address the void created by the Supreme Court's verdict on EC appointments.
- The Bill establishes a process involving a Search Committee and a Selection Committee, raising discussions about the process's independence and fairness in decision-making.

S Y QURAISHI ON THE COLLEGIUM BILL: HOW TO MAKE ELECTION COMMISSION CREDIBLE

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Indian Constitution - historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure**

EXPLAINER:The article discusses the Collegium Bill's proposals to enhance the credibility of the Election Commission, focusing on refining the appointment process for election commissioners and strengthening democratic mechanisms.

CONTEXT:

- Recently, the day before the Monsoon Session is set to end, the government tabled the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** and other **Election Commissioners (ECs)** (Appointments, Conditions of Service, Term of Office) Bill in the Rajya Sabha.

EXPLAINER:The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) is the head of the Election Commission of India (ECI), responsible for overseeing and supervising the conduct of elections in the country.

BACKGROUND: INTRODUCTION OF BILL

- In March, a unanimous decision was given by the Supreme Court (SC).
- The verdict stated that a committee composed of the PM, the Leader of the Opposition, and the **Chief Justice of India (CJI)** would be responsible for appointing the Chief CEC and ECs until the Parliament enacts a law.
- The ruling emphasized that the independence of the Election Commission (EC) necessitates a collegiums.
  - The court emphasized that safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process is essential to uphold democracy.
- The involvement of the CJI will ensure fairness and shield the appointment procedure from any interference by the Executive branch.

WHY IS THE RULING BY SC SIGNIFICANT?

- It addresses concerns related to bias and the autonomy of institutions.
- The **existing selection process creates a notable drawback for newly appointed ECs**.
  - Irrespective of their impressive backgrounds, they remain vulnerable to being perceived as partisan.
- Their actions carried out dutifully and in good faith, are frequently interpreted as favouring a specific political party.
  - This underscores the necessity for a collegial approach to enhance public perception of the Commission's impartiality and autonomy.
- The SC verdict emphasized that the involvement of the CJI could counterbalance the unchecked influence of the executive branch over appointments.

EXPLAINER:*Election Commissioners (ECs) are members of the Election Commission of India (ECI), responsible for assisting the Chief Election Commissioner in the organization and administration of elections across the country.*

IMPORTANT PROVISIONS OF THE BILL

- The proposed legislation aims to replace the CJI with a cabinet minister designated by the PM.
- It provides for a search committee led by the Cabinet Secretary and consisting of two other members not below the rank of government secretary.
  - This committee's role is to compile a list of 5 potential candidates for the Selection Committee's evaluation.
- The CEC and other ECs will be chosen from individuals who currently hold or have previously held a position equivalent to the rank of a government secretary.
- These appointees must possess integrity, as well as knowledge and expertise in the administration and execution of elections.
- The Bill safeguards the 2 ECs against removal and establish parity with the CEC.

CHALLENGES WITH THE BILL

- The Commissioners were previously placed on the same level as SC judges since the enactment of the 1991 Act. They are now being relegated.
- The Election Commissioner then and now remains equivalent to that of the **Chief Secretary (CS)** and the Supreme Court judge.
  - But their position in the hierarchy of precedence is being diminished.

- The provision that permits the Selection Committee to choose someone from outside the shortlist is completely undesirable and undermines the purpose of the shortlisting committee.

HOW THE INSTITUTIONAL INDEPENDENCE OF THE EC IS A PRESSING CONCERN AT NATIONAL AND GLOBAL LEVEL?

- There has been **a growing worldwide erosion of confidence in electoral bodies**.
    - The Gallup World Poll indicates that merely 50% of voters express trust in the fairness of elections. In the USA, this number was at 40% in 2019.
- Even within India, the credibility of the EC has faced increasing scrutiny in recent years.
    - Allegations of bias in election scheduling and the arbitrary removal of registered voters' names, and disregard for blatant violations of the model code, have cast doubt on the EC's reputation.
- Recent democracy reports from the V-Dem Institute underline that various democracy indicators, including the autonomy of the ECI, have been on a decline in India.

CHALLENGES WITH THE COLLEGIUM SYSTEM FOR APPOINTMENT OF ECS

- **For example,** the appointment of CBI directors has been conducted through the collegium process.
    - But, some of these appointments have not upheld a commendable reputation.
- Furthermore, there have been concerns about the inclusion of the CJI in the collegium.
- CJI may possess legal expertise but might not be well-acquainted with the candidates.
    - There are concerns regarding fair adjudication by CJI if an appointment is challenged in the SC.
- The collegium system would gain further credibility if a unanimous decision were made a prerequisite for appointments.

CONCLUSION

- The proposed Bill aims to amend the appointment process of election officials based on the SC's ruling.

- While the changes introduced raise certain concerns, the Bill's overall objective is to maintain the Election Commission's autonomy and integrity in the democratic process.

KERALA ASSEMBLY ADOPTS RESOLUTION AGAINST UNIFORM CIVIL CODE: CAN STATES MAKE LAWS ON UCC?

Relevant for UPSC GS2: Indian Constitution - historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure

EXPLAINER:The Kerala Assembly has passed a resolution against the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), raising questions about whether states can legislate on this matter. UCC aims to replace personal laws based on religious practices with a common set of laws for all citizens.

CONTEXT:

- The Kerala Legislative Assembly has unanimously adopted a resolution expressing its concern over the Union Government move to impose a **Uniform civil code (UCC).**

ABOUT UCC

- **Defined in Article 44 as part** of the Directive Principles of State Policy **(DPSP), in Part IV** of the Constitution.
  - It is often called as **"One Law for One Nation".**
- **Article 44 states** that 'the State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India'. Though DPSP is fundamental to the country's governance, it is not enforceable or justiciable in a court of law.
- **Aim:**
  - To enforce a uniform legal framework to all citizens, irrespective of their religion.
  - To safeguard the fundamental rights of all citizens and reduce social inequalities and gender discrimination.
- **Note:** In **Shah Bano Begum Judgement of 1985**, where a divorced Muslim woman demanded maintenance from her former husband, the apex court called for the implementation of the UCC.

WHAT DOES THE KERALA RESOLUTION ON UCC SAY?

- The Uniform Civil Code affects the secular fabric of the country.
- **Imposition of Manusmriti:** It is an ancient Hindu code that endorsed the oppressive caste system and was deeply prejudicial to women.
  - The Court may order to enforce Fundamental rights. But, Article 44 of the Constitution cannot be enforced even by the courts.
- **Against federalism:** Centre could make a unilateral move on the contentious issue without consulting states, which is the basic structure of the Constitution.
  - It is essential to understand how much thought the founders of the Constitution put into their decision.
  - It would render the statutory autonomous councils for tribal development in North Eastern States redundant.
- **Violates article 25:** It seeks to erase the fundamental right of citizens to practice, profess and propagate the religion of their choice.

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EXPLAINER: *Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the freedom of conscience and the right to freely practice, propagate, and profess one's religion.*

CAN THE CENTRE MAKE A LAW UNILATERALLY ON UCC?

- **Personal laws are found in Concurrent List (List III) of the 7th Schedule** to the Constitution.
- **Article 162:** The constitution gives State governments the power to legislate on subjects where a central law does not occupy the field.
- **Limitations:** The executive power of the State is limited by the executive power conferred by the Constitution or by any law made by Parliament.
  - If there is a central law, it automatically gains precedence over the state law on the subject.
- **Entry 5 of the Concurrent list:** Marriage, divorce, Adoption of infants and minors, wills intestacy and succession, joint family and partition.
  - State laws will not have precedence over the central laws for the issues mentioned in Entry 5 of the concurrent list.
- **Legislations:** Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and Shariat Act of 1937 are central legislations on Hindu and Muslim personal laws.
  - When the Hindu personal laws were codified in 1955, it replaced several provincial legislations that existed on the issue.
- **Judiciary stand:** Supreme Court refused to hear petitions challenging the move by certain states to set up committees to explore the feasibility of

implementing a uniform civil code in their respective administrative jurisdictions.

- **According to article 162, the executive power of a State extends** to matters with respect to which the Legislature of the State has power to make laws hence the constitution of a Committee cannot be challenged.

STATES IN FAVOUR OF UCC

- **Goa** is the only state in India that has a uniform civil code regardless of religion, gender and caste.
  - It inherited the **Portuguese Civil Code, 1867** even after it joined the Indian Union in 1961.
- **Uttarakhand:Ranjana Desai committee** was set up to prepare draft for the implementation of UCC.
- **Gujarat** announced to constitute a committee for the implementation of UCC in the state.
- **Madhya Pradesh** announced that it will form a committee to implement UCC in the state.
- **Assam** is in favour of UCC and also plans to ban polygamy by legislation.
- **Uttar Pradesh** decided to implement the UCC in the state.

WHICH OTHER STATES HAVE OPPOSED THE IDEA OF UCC?

- **Mizoram unanimously passed resolution against Article 44,** as it could clash with the customs and social practices of Mizos in the state.
- The **Nagaland Tribal Council** has written to the Law Commission that the UCC will dilute the provisions of **Article 371A of the Constitution** (Special provisions for the state).
- **Tamil Nadu wrote to 22nd Law commission** that the UCC could violate individual's religious freedom.
- **Kerala** passed resolution against the UCC as it would affect secularism and federalism in the country.

WAY AHEAD

- **Reiterate Ambedkar's position:** If implemented, UCC should also "make a provision that the Code shall apply only to those who make a declaration that they are prepared to be bound by it".
- **21st Law Commission report** recommended that the UCC is "neither necessary nor desirable at this stage."

IN 'DEMOLITION RAJ', THE HIGH COURTS AS BEACONS

EXPLAINER: *The article discusses how high courts in India are acting as important guides in cases related to demolition and construction regulations, ensuring adherence to legal procedures. They play a crucial role in upholding justice and preventing arbitrary actions.*

CONTEXT:

- Recently, unsettling clashes between one community and the other have engulfed districts in Haryana, resulting in loss of life and destruction.
  - Amidst these challenges, the imperative for effective administration to restore order and uphold justice becomes evident.
- Meanwhile, a disconcerting trend emerges as administrations seem to veer away from their responsibilities, reminiscent of actions witnessed in Uttar Pradesh.
  - The overnight demolition of houses by the Haryana government, particularly affecting one community, underscores the urgency of safeguarding due process and equality under the law.

MANDATE AND RESPONSE OF COURT

- The **Constitution enshrines the judiciary as the safeguard of fundamental rights** and the embodiment of constitutional values.
  - A comparative analysis of responses between the Supreme Court (SC) and High Courts unveils the need for a robust judicial role.
- The **Supreme Court's restrained response during the Uttar Pradesh house demolitions** leaves a void where pointed questions and decisive actions were expected.
- **In contrast, High Courts like Punjab and Haryana exhibit a resolute demeanor**, exemplified by **Justices G.S. Sandhawalia and Harpreet Kaur Jeevan's** piercing query.
  - Their intervention, triggered by the court itself, shines as a beacon of hope in turbulent times.

CHALLENGE OF SC'S INACTION

- Scrutiny of the SC's role in such scenarios brings forth pertinent questions.
- **Why did it not exercise suo motu jurisdiction?** Why did no party approach the apex court?

- o These queries shed light on a broader concern – the threshold for judicial intervention to safeguard constitutional values.
- o The words of Justice Vivian Bose remind us that the Constitution is meant for all citizens, emphasizing the need for proactive judicial action to protect the rights of every individual.

EMBRACING JURISPRUDENTIAL WISDOM

- While some senior judges may have raised concerns, it is paramount to draw inspiration from esteemed jurists.
- **In the face of uncertainty, the teachings of legal stalwarts guide our path**.
  - o During the dark days of the Emergency, High Courts emerged as bastions of justice, though let down by the SC.
- Reviving the spirit of jurisprudence is essential, with a renewed commitment to the principles that guided us through tumultuous times.

EMPOWERMENT OF HIGH COURTS: ARTICLE 226'S EXPANSIVE ROLE

- **Article 226 of the Constitution stands as a potent tool to uphold justice**.
  - o High Courts possess the authority to issue various writs for the enforcement of fundamental rights and other legal rights, a power broader than that of the SC.
- The **phrase 'for any other purpose'** extends their jurisdiction beyond fundamental rights, providing a unique avenue for justice.
- High Courts can issue writs to entities within or beyond their territorial jurisdiction if the cause of action originates within their purview.

PROMOTING FAIR LAWS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- The **need for fair laws resonates across sectors**, from workplaces to marketplaces, to prevent unjust practices.
- The **government's pivotal role in enforcing these laws to ensure social justice** cannot be understated.
  - o Equitable distribution of resources and opportunities underpins social justice, offering all citizens a level playing field.
- **Initiatives to address societal imbalances**, such as gender discrimination and insensitivity towards marginalized sections, reflect a commitment to individual dignity and well-being.

HIGH COURTS AS BEACONS OF HOPE: A PINNACLE OF CONSTITUTIONAL VIGILANCE

- The current landscape underscores the need for High Courts to emerge as guardians of justice.
- Their proactive and assertive approach during crises, as demonstrated by Punjab and Haryana High Court, is a testament to their pivotal role in upholding constitutional values.
- While the **Supreme Court's restraint in some instances raises eyebrows**, the potential of Article 226 serves as a powerful counterbalance.
  - It enables High Courts to not only protect fundamental rights but also champion ordinary legal rights, thus providing a comprehensive safeguard against injustice.

A CALL TO ACTION: RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF CHALLENGE

- In times of turmoil, the judiciary's role becomes even more pronounced.
- The lessons from the past, particularly during the Emergency, must guide us in the present.
- **Upholding constitutional values requires a collective commitment** from the entire legal fraternity, ensuring that the judiciary remains vigilant, resolute, and unwavering in its pursuit of justice.
- **High Courts, armed with Article 226,** possess the authority to challenge even the most formidable obstacles that threaten the fabric of our democracy.

CONCLUSION

- In conclusion, the current challenges facing India necessitate a robust response from the judiciary.
- High Courts, equipped with the authority granted by Article 226, possess the potential to lead the way in safeguarding constitutional values.
  - By exercising their power judiciously, addressing key questions, and ensuring equitable justice, High Courts can restore faith in the rule of law and the principles enshrined in the Constitution.
  - This collective effort holds the promise of a brighter and more just future for all citizens, regardless of their background or beliefs.
- As we navigate these complex times, the beacon of constitutional values shines ever brighter, guided by the resilience of the judiciary, the wisdom of jurists, and the commitment of society.
- It is through these collective efforts that we forge a path toward a more equitable and just future for our nation..

PM MODI MENTIONS KATCHATHEEVU: WHY THE TINY, UNINHABITED ISLAND REMAINS A HOT-BUTTON POLITICAL ISSUE IN TN

Relevant for UPSC GS2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and agreements involving India

EXPLAINER:PM Modi's mention of Katchatheevu island underscores its continued political significance in Tamil Nadu due to historic disputes between India and Sri Lanka over its ownership, impacting bilateral relations and local sentiments. The uninhabited island remains a focal point for discussions on maritime boundaries and fishing rights.

CONTEXT:

- PM Modi recently **mentioned the island of Katchatheevu during No Confidence** debate in the Parliament.

EXPLAINER:A "No Confidence motion" is a parliamentary procedure through which members of a legislative body express lack of confidence in the current government, potentially leading to its removal and the formation of a new government. It's a critical mechanism to gauge the support and stability of a ruling party.

HISTORY OF KATCHATHEEVU ISLAND

- **Colonial Influence:** Katchatheevu, a 285-acre island, has its origins in a 14-century volcanic eruption.
  - It was historically under the control of the Jaffna kingdom in Sri Lanka and later the Ramnad Zamindari in India.
- **St. Anthony Church is an early 20th century Catholic shrine** and the only structure in the island.

ABOUT MARITIME BOUNDARY AGREEMENT

- Fishermen of both countries have been fishing in each other's waters without conflict for a very long time.

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- The issue emerged when both the countries signed these Agreements in 1974-76.
- The **1974 agreement was to fix the maritime boundary in the Palk Strait**.
- **1974 Agreement:**
  - Each country shall have sovereignty and exclusive jurisdiction and control over the waters, the islands, the continental shelf and the subsoil, falling on its own side of the aforesaid boundary.
  - Only navigational rights of the vessels of both Sri Lanka and India over each other's waters have been preserved.

Map showing the Maritime Zones of Sri Lanka

- **Allowed activities for Indian fisherman in the island:**
  - Resting and net drying;
  - Visit the annual St.Anthony's festival without the need of visa.
- **Prohibited activities for Indian fisherman in the island:** The fishing vessels and fishermen of India shall not engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the **Exclusive Economic Zoneof Sri Lanka**
- **1976 Agreement:**
  - Each Party shall respect rights of navigation through its territorial sea and exclusive economic zone in accordance with its laws and regulations and the rules of international law.
  - It marked the international maritime boundary of India and Sri Lanka without consulting the Tamil Nadu State Assembly.
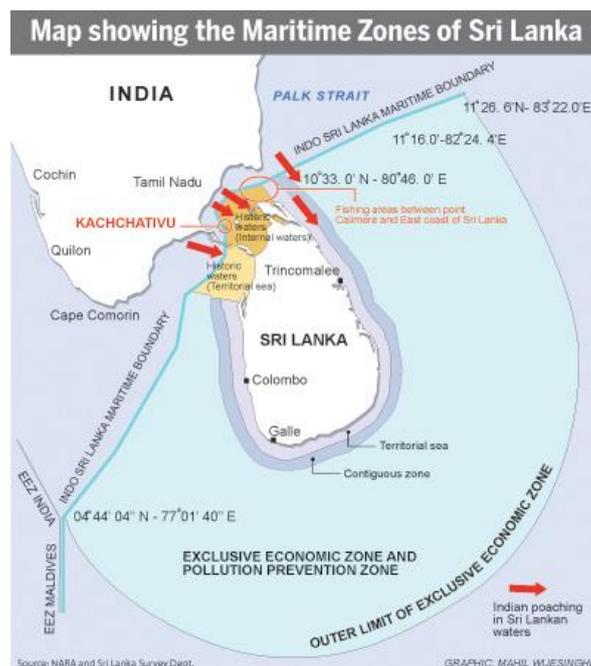
ABOUT CONFLICT

- **Fish depletion:**
  - Indian fishermen continued trespassing the Sri Lankan water boundary, searching for better catch in the area.
  - The problem turned serious when fish and aquatic life in the Indian continental shelf depleted.
  - They are also using modern fishing trolleys which harm marine life and the ecosystem.
- **Frequent arrests and killings:**
  - Sri Lankan authorities said that they are protecting their maritime boundaries against poaching, and securing the livelihood of Sri Lankan fishermen.

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- ○ Both sides ensure to not use force under any circumstances.
  - ■ Meanwhile, the violent situation remains the same.
- ○ In 2009, Sri Lanka started heavily guarding its maritime boundary in the Palk Strait to reduce the possibility of the return of Tamil insurgents in the country.

POSITION OF TAMIL NADU ON KATCHATHEEVU ISLAND

- The island was given away to Sri Lanka without consulting the State Legislative Assembly.
- **In 1991,** the Tamil Nadu Assembly adopted a resolution demanding the retrieval of Katchatheevu.
- **In 2008,** Tamil Nadu filed a petition in court saying Katchatheevu could not be ceded to another country without a constitutional amendment.
- **In 2012,** the State approached Supreme Court to expedite the issue in the wake of increasing arrests of Indian fishermen by Sri Lanka.

ABOUT INDIA'S STAND

- Union government argued that since the island had always been under dispute, "**no territory belonging to India was ceded nor sovereignty relinquished.**"
- As per the agreement, the Island lies on the Sri Lankan side of the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line.
- The government has raised the issue at the highest political level with Sri Lanka.
- The matter is still pending in the Supreme Court.

CONCLUSION

- Katchatheevu Island continues to serve as a reminder of India's historical intricacies, reflecting the delicate balancing act between state interests, national decisions, and regional aspirations.
- While Tamil Nadu's calls for retrieval echo in the political corridors, the longstanding 1974 agreement and subsequent geopolitical realities create a complex landscape.
- As the island's fate intertwines with broader diplomatic relations, Katchatheevu remains a testament to the complexities of national sovereignty and regional sentiment

DALIT CHRISTIANS — EXCLUSION BY SOCIETY, CHURCH, STATE

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

EXPLAINER:This article highlights the challenges faced by Dalit Christians in India due to exclusion by society, the church, and the state, shedding light on the discrimination and inequality they continue to experience. It discusses the complexities of their social status and advocates for a more inclusive and equal society.

CONTEXT:

- The Union Government established a commission in 2022 to investigate the potential for **granting Dalit Christians Scheduled Caste (SC) classification.**
- The Tamil Nadu Assembly has approved a resolution to make this change to the **1950 Presidential (SC) decree.**
- The **Justice Ranganath Misra Commission (2007) suggested** allowing Dalits to apply for SC quota advantages after making a conversion to Christianity.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RANGANATH REPORT

- The recommendation of Scheduled Caste reservation for Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam was made in the 2007 report of the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities.
- **Dalit Christians and Muslims face discrimination not only from upper-caste members of their own religion but also from the broader Hindu-dominated society**.
- The **exclusion of Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam from the SC category violates the constitutional guarantee of equality** and is against the basic tenets of these religions, which reject caste discrimination.
- The denial of SC status to Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam has led to their socio-economic and educational backwardness and has deprived them of access to reservations in education and employment opportunities (as provided under article 16I.

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EXPLAINER: The Registrar General of India was founded in 1961 by the Government of India under the Ministry of Home Affairs. It arranges, conducts, and analyses the results of the demographic surveys of India including the Census of India and Linguistic Survey of India. The position of Registrar is usually held by a civil servant holding the rank of Joint Secretary.

CONCERNS ASSOCIATED DALIT CHRISTIANS

- The main defence is that the underlying dream of equality has not been fully accomplished.
- Millions of Hindu Dalits migrated to more egalitarian religions, notably Christianity, to escape the horrors of casteism.
- Contradictions and ambiguities in their identity have resulted from this, and they have not experienced the predicted upward social mobility.
- Also, it is a result of their fellow believers' resistance to abandoning the long-standing custom of untouchability in society and bringing it into the church.

THEORY OF INTERSECTIONALITY

- The result of intersectional discrimination is the uniqueness of discrimination that **Kimberlé Crenshaw, the founder of the Theory of Intersectionality, introduced.**
- The **'Theory of Intersectionality' provides a more comprehensive explanation of the Dalit Christian quandary by allowing for the integration of caste and religion** as well as a composite concept of Dalit Christians as both Dalits and a religious minority group.
- The **insufficiency of the "single-axis framework" of the laws of the state of India**, which offers legal protection to isolated categories, is also extrapolated from this.
- It demonstrates how different oppressive systems including those based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability cannot be understood independently of one another.
- These power structures interact with one another to provide unique individual social experiences.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND IDENTITY

- **Identity refers to a person's assertion of belonging to specific social categories** and social identities linked to numerous social categories that are prevalent in society.
- As a result of the flawed logic that holds that Christianity does not acknowledge casteism and that, as a result, a Hindu Dalit who converts to Christianity no longer qualifies as a Dalit, the **phrase "Dalit Christians" is sometimes used as an oxymoron**.

- It is the same viewpoint that the government of India has towards Dalit Christians, despite the fact that Dalit Christians' infirmities persist even after conversion and the government just sees them as "Christians."

A 'SINGLE-AXIS' FRAMEWORK

In **the Soosai Etc versus Union of India and Others case (1985)**, a Dalit Catholic shoemaker asked the Supreme Court of India for an extension to put up a kiosk on a platform in Madras so that he may compete with Hindu shoemakers.
- **'It is necessary to prove further that the disadvantages and handicaps incurred from such caste membership in the social order of its genesis Hinduism,'** the court ruled in dismissing the complaint.
- It indicates that the Dalitness of Soosai was completely disregarded when the single-axis framework technique was used.

CONCLUSION

- Caste prejudice exists in Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism, and while these religions give privileges to its Dalits, they exclude Dalit Christians on the grounds that Christianity is of "**foreign import,**" calling their democratic citizenship into question.
- Due to the state's unwillingness and in spite of overwhelming evidence in their favour, **the 'single-axis' communal framework of the law has prevented Dalit Christians from being included to the SC list**.
  - The addition of Dalit Christians to the SC list in the 1950 Presidential (SC) decree represents a step in the right direction.

WHY IS THE CAUVERY WATER SHARING ISSUE FLARING UP AGAIN?

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure**

EXPLAINER:*The Cauvery water sharing issue is resurfacing due to disputes between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over water allocation, highlighting the ongoing challenges of equitable distribution and resource management in the region.*

CONTEXT:

- The Tamil Nadu government has asked the Supreme Court to order Karnataka to discharge 24,000 **cubic feet per second (cusecs)** from its reservoirs immediately.
- Furthermore, it sought the Court to order Karnataka to see that the 36.76 TMC mandated in the final decision of the **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)** is released.

EXPLAINER:*The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) is a legal body established to adjudicate the water-sharing disputes between the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry over the Cauvery River, aiming to resolve the long-standing conflicts and ensure fair water distribution.*

ABOUT CAUVERY RIVER

- The Cauvery (also spelt as 'Kaveri'), **known as 'Ponni' in Tamil**.
- It **rises in the Brahmagri range of the Western Ghats** and it reaches the Bay of Bengal in the south of Cuddalore, in Tamil Nadu.
  - Its **main tributariesare** Amravati, Bhavani, Hemavati and Kabini.
- The Cauvery basin is spread in the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

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ABOUT CAUVERY WATER DISPUTE

- The dispute is related to a long-standing conflict over the sharing of water from the Cauvery River.
- It **involves 3 states and one Union Territory:** Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Puducherry.
- The dispute revolves around how the river water should be distributed among these states for various uses, including irrigation, drinking water, and industrial purposes.
- **Background**
  - The dispute originated for the first-time way back in 1892 at the time of Britishers between the Presidency of Madras and Princely state of Mysore.
  - **In 1924 Mysore and Madras** reached into an agreement which will be valid for 50 years. Hence, it ceased to be enforced in 1974.
  - **Since 1974,** Karnataka started diverting water into its four newly made reservoirs, without the consent of Tamil Nadu.
  - This resulted in dispute in post independent India.
- **Formation of Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal and its final award**
  - In accordance with **Section 4 of the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956**, the **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)** was formed in June 1990.
  - After 17 years, the CWDT issued its final award in February 2007, specifying the amount of water that each state should receive during different periods of the year.
  - The final award reserved 10 TMC for environmental purposes and 4 TMC for inevitable outlets into the sea.
  - The tribunal mandated the constitution of a monitoring authority to regulate the release of water.
  - However, the **final award had not given a detailed formula** in situations when there is shortage of water due to insufficient rains. It merely said
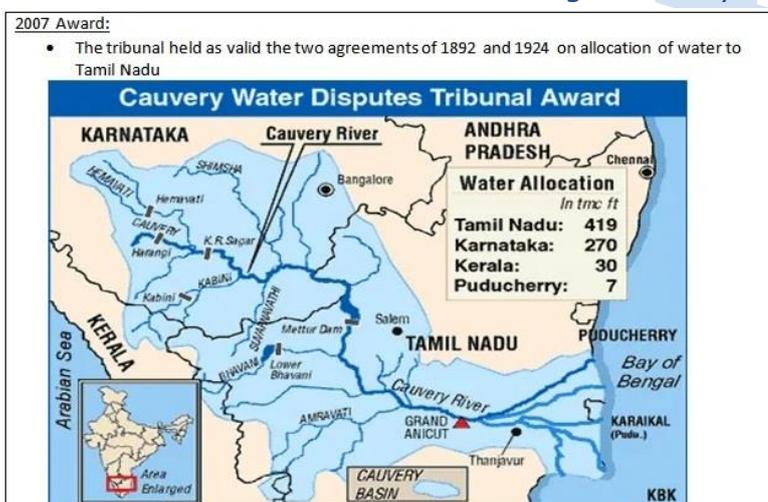
that in such situations, the allocated shares should be proportionally reduced.

- **Subsequent development**
  - ○ The government again took 6 year and notified the order in 2013 on the direction of the Supreme Court.
  - ○ Later, **Tamil Nadu government had approached the Supreme Court with the special leave petition under Article 136.**
    - ■ The Tamil Nadu Government had approached the court because Karnataka government was not following the award of the tribunal;
    - ■ **Article 136 makes the Supreme Court (SC) highest appellate court**.
      - It says that the SC may, in its discretion can grant special leave to appeal from any judgment, decree, determination, sentence or order passed by any court or tribunal in the territory of India.
  - ○ The SC delivered its judgement in 2018. In its judgement, the apex court declared Cauvery a national asset.
  - ○ It **largely upheld the water-sharing arrangements finalized by the CWDT**.
    - ■ As per the judgement, Karnataka would get 284.75 TMC, Tamil Nadu 404.25 TMC, Kerala 30 TMC and Puducherry 7 TMC;
    - ■ Further, it directed the Centre to notify the Cauvery Management Scheme;
    - ■ The central government notified the 'Cauvery Water Management Scheme' in June 2018;
    - ■ It constituted the '**Cauvery Water Management Authority' (CWMA)** and the 'Cauvery Water Regulation Committee' (CWRC) to give effect to the decision.

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ABOUT CWMA

- It has been **created according to the Cauvery Management Scheme** earlier framed by Centre and approved by Supreme Court.
- **Composition and Powers of CMA:**
  - ○ The **authority will comprise a chairman, a secretary and eight members**.
  - ○ Out of the eight members, two will be full time, while two will be part time members from centre's side.
  - ○ Rest four will be part time members from states.
- **Functions:**

- The **main mandate of the CMA will be to secure implementation and compliance of the Supreme Court's order in relation to** "storage, apportionment, regulation and control of Cauvery waters".
- Further, **CMA will advise the states to take suitable measures** to improve water use efficiency.
- It will do so by promoting use of micro-irrigation, change in cropping patterns, improved farm practices and development of command areas.
- The CMA will also prepare an annual report covering its activities during the preceding year.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS RELATED TO INTERSTATE WATER DISPUTE

- **Article 262 deals with the adjudication of water disputes**. The **provisions in this regard are:**
  - **Article 262 (1) Parliament may, by law, provide for the adjudication of any dispute** or complaint with respect to the use, distribution or control of the waters of, or in, any inter-State river or river valley.
  - **Article 262 (2) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, Parliament may, by law, provide that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court** shall exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute or complaint as is referred to in clause (1).

PRESENT ISSUE

- As per the water sharing plan, Karnataka must make a total of 177.25 TMC accessible to Tamil Nadu at Biligundlu during a "normal" water year (June to May).
- From this total, 123.14 TMC is to be distributed between June and September, which also happens to be the southwest monsoon season.
- Tamil Nadu was reportedly irritated by Karnataka's failure to adhere to the quantity decided upon at the CWRC meeting during the meeting.

RESPONSE OF KARNATAKA

- Karnataka has argued that the poor inflow to its own reservoirs is a result of reduced rainfall in the Cauvery basin, notably in Kerala.
- **Karnataka released water to Tamil Naduwhenever more water entered the reservoirs.**
  - Meanwhile, Karnataka was not in that situation this year.
- Tamil Nadu had pressed Karnataka to abide by a formula for sharing in financial hardship, but Karnataka had refused.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- **Tamil Nadu is eager to learn whether Karnataka will at least abide** by the Authority's judgement.
- With barely 20 TMC, the Mettur reservoir in Tamil Nadu has dangerously low storage levels and will run out of water in 10 days after accounting for dead storage and drinking water needs.
  - The SC's perspective on the situation is still to be determined.

CONCLUSION

- The **Cauvery River dispute is a microcosm of water-related challenges in India**.
- To address this century-old struggle, collaborative efforts, sustainable practices, and empowered community involvement are essential.
- By learning from global examples and innovating locally, a future of equitable water allocation, prosperity, and harmony can be envisioned.

PRESIDENT MURMU PAYS TRIBUTE TO MATANGINI HAZRA, KANAKLATA BARUA: WHO WERE THESE FREEDOM FIGHTERS

EXPLAINER: *President Murmu paid tribute to Matangini Hazra and Kanaklata Barua, two prominent freedom fighters who played significant roles in India's struggle for independence, highlighting their contributions to the nation's history.*

CONTEXT:

- President Droupadi Murmu, during her address on the eve of 77th Independence Day, paid tribute to women freedom fighters**. She mentioned two notable figures:Matangini Hazra, Kanaklata Barua**.

Matangini Hazra

Indian Revolutionary

(19 October 1870 – 29 September 1942)

An Indian revolutionary, she participated in the Indian independence movement until she was shot dead by the British Indian police in front of the Tamluk Police Station. She was affectionately known as Gandhi buri, Bengali for old lady Gandhi. She was an active participant in Quit India Movement.

ABOUT MATANGINI HAZRA

- She was **a revolutionary leader who played a significant role in India's** struggle for independence.
- **Born in Hogla, West Bengal in 1869.**
- Following her husband's death, she began devoting herself to social causes.
- **Role in freedom struggle:**
  - **She was influenced by Gandhiji's beliefs**, that she **earned the name "Gandhi Buri" (the old Gandhian woman).**
  - In 1905, she became actively involved in the Indian independence struggle and was **arrested for taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930**.

- ○ She **participated in the Non-Cooperation movement in 1932** and was arrested for her role in the Salt Satyagraha movement.
- ○ She was **arrested again and imprisoned in Baharampur for six months** for his persistence with the demand of Salt Tax be repealed.
- ○ In 1933, she was hurt in a police baton charge after attending a sub divisional Congress convention in Serampore.
- ○ **Matangini Hazra led a march during the Quit India movement of 1942**, to take over the Tamluk police station from British authorities and fell to the british bullets at the age of 73.
- ○ She was the **first woman revolutionary to have her statue erected in the Kolkata Maidan in 1977.**

ABOUT KANAKLATA BARUA

- She was **one of the youngest martyrs of the Quit India Movement** and has an iconic status in Assam.
- Kanaklata Barua was an eminent freedom fighter in Assam.
- Born on December 22, 1924, at Barangabari of Sonitpur district of Assam.
- She was born to Krishna Kanta Baruah and Korneswari Baruah.
- At the age of 17 she was **motivated to join the freedom struggle of the country and tried to join the Azad Hind Fauz.**
  - ○ But because of her being minor she could not succeed.
- **She joined the Mrityu Bahini** and was made the leader of the women cadres of the Bahini.
- **Role in freedom struggle:**
  - ○ Barua led the Mrityu Bahini, a procession of freedom fighters, to unfurl the Tricolour at Gohpur police station on September 20, 1942.
    - ■ When police did not let them move forward, an altercation led to firing, killing Barua at the head of the procession.
  - ○ She died at the age of 17 devoted for the independence of the country.
  - ○ **In 2020, the Coast Guard named a Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV) after her, the ICGS Kanaklata Barua.**

EXPLAINER:_Mrityu Bahini was a death/suicide squad prepared to sacrifice their lives while attempting to hoist the national flag atop police stations._

TAMIL NADU CM WRITES OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT SEEKING ASSENT TO NEET EXEMPTION BILL

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Indian Constitution - historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure**

EXPLAINER:"Tamil Nadu's CM has written an open letter to the President, asking for approval of the NEET exemption bill, showing concern about the medical entrance exam. The CM aims to ease students' stress and promote fair opportunities."

CONTEXT:

- Recently, Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has called for transferring **'education' back to the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.**
  - **Education, originally a State subject, was moved to the Concurrent List** by the Indira Gandhi government during the Emergency.
- The conflict between Tamil Nadu and the Central government over NEET has broader implications related to equity and federalism.
- Recently, a father-son duo died by suicide in Tamil Nadu after failing the NEET exam twice.

EXPLAINER:NEET (National Eligibility Entrance Test) is the qualifying test for MBBS and BDS programs in Indian medical and dental colleges. It was introduced to standardize admissions across the country.

INDIAN CONSTITUTION AND 7TH SCHEDULE

- The constitutional provisions in India on the subject of the distribution of legislative powers between the Union and the States are defined under several articles;
  - The most important in this regard being specifically under **Articles 245 & 246of** the Constitution of India.

- The Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India defines and specifies the allocation of powers and functions between Union & States.
- **Article 246deals with the 7th Schedule of the Indian Constitution that mentions three lists named as;**
  - Union List;
  - State List; and
  - Concurrent List.
- Originally there were 97 subjects in the union list but now it is 100 subject sin the union list.
- And in the state list, there were 66 subjects but now it is 61 subjects.
- And in the concurrent list, there were 47 subjects but now it is 52 subject sin the concurrent list.

EXPLAINER: "Article 246 of the Indian Constitution outlines the distribution of legislative powers between the central government and the states. It designates subjects into three lists: Union List, State List, and Concurrent List, clarifying which level of government can make laws on specific matters. This helps maintain a structured division of authority and responsibilities."

TAMIL NADU'S STAND OVER NEET BILL

- **Mechanical focus:** NEET's emphasis on marks disregards the importance of student quality and aptitude.
- **Affects educational models:** It has disrupted admired education models like that of **Christian Medical College (CMC)** Vellore, which emphasized aptitude over marks.
- **Affects federal autonomy:** The introduction of NEET has also dismantled the state's in-service quota for medical graduates in the government sector.
- **Undermines quality healthcare:**
  - Tamil Nadu's health indices were attributed to the earlier system that retained PG doctors.
  - The stalemate over NEET captures the struggle to balance uniformity and fairness with specific needs and values of a diverse society.
- **Impacts equity education:**
  - It is alleged that only kids from affluent families who can afford coaching are being aided by NEET.
  - Thus, it raises entry barrier for underprivileged students and undermines equity in education.
  - Further, it alleged that having a central level exam when syllabus varies from state to state is unfair and puts students under a lot of pressure.
- **Frequent suicides:** The state registers around 16 death by suicides due to failure in NEET exams.

- **State as competent authority:** It is said the state was the competent authority to regulate admissions for underprivileged social groups, as medical courses were traceable to the provisions of the Constitution.

STEPS TAKEN BY TAMIL NADU AGAINST NEET

- **Bills for state autonomy:**
  - The Tamil Nadu Admission to MBBS and BDS Courses Bill 2017;
  - The Tamil Nadu Admission to Postgraduate Courses in Medicine and Dentistry Bill, 2017.
- **Both sought state autonomy in medical admissions, focusing on board examination** scores for UG courses and undergraduate marks for PG courses, but both the bills were returned by President.
- **Findings of the report:**
  - NEET disproportionately benefited repeaters (71% in 2021) and coached students (99% in 2020), and discriminated against first-time applicants;
  - It noted a 50% decline in seat share in backward districts after the introduction of NEET, and an increased representation from urban centres such as Chennai;
  - Admissions fell among first-generation graduates, rural applicants, and candidates with small parental incomes;
  - While the **rural students maintained an average of 61.45% in the pre-NEET** admission, it **fell down to 49.91% in 2020-21 after NEET was introduced;**
  - Urban students who fared 38.55% average in the pre-NEET rose to 50.09% in 2020-21 in the post-NEET.
- **Report's recommendations:**
  - It supported the state's stance of NEET not being the ideal way of admissions;
  - NEET undermined societal diversity and favored the affluent in medical education;
  - The committee recommended immediate steps to eliminate it through the passage of suitable legislation.
- **Anti NEET Bill:**
  - **Tamil Nadu Admission to Undergraduate Medical Degree Courses Bill, 2021 was passed** in Tamil Nadu to dispense with NEET and allow admission to medical courses based on Class 12 marks.
  - It is one of the **recommendations of A. K. Rajan Committee.**
  - **Governor didn't give assent for the bill** and cited the Supreme Court decision that upheld NEET.
  - Governor returned the bill to the state government. The Assembly readopted the Bill within days, and the Governor subsequently forwarded the Bill to the President.

- State CM M. K. Stalin writes open letter to President seeking assent to NEET Exemption Bill.

EXPLAINER: *A. K. Rajan Committee is constituted to examine whether NEET was an equitable method to select candidates for admission to medical courses.*

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- The complex issue of NEET and its impact on Tamil Nadu's education system requires a balanced solution that addresses both equity concerns and the preservation of regional values.
- **To resolve this matter, a multi-pronged approach could be considered-**
  - There should be a comprehensive review of the NEET examination process to ensure that it fairly evaluates students' aptitude and knowledge rather than solely relying on marks.
  - Alternative admission criteria that account for socioeconomic backgrounds and contextual factors should be explored, enabling a more diverse pool of students to access medical education.
  - Efforts should be made to enhance the quality of education in state-run institutions, providing students with the necessary skills to excel in competitive exams.
  - Furthermore, the central government and state authorities could collaborate to establish a transparent and inclusive framework for medical admissions that combines elements of standardization and local autonomy.

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HOUSING FOR ALL: ON SCHEME TO HELP THE URBAN POOR BUILD HOUSES IN CITIES

Relevant for UPSC GS2: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

EXPLAINER: This article discusses a housing scheme aimed at assisting urban poor in constructing homes within cities, addressing their housing needs. It highlights efforts to provide affordable living spaces and improve living conditions.

CONTEXT:

- PM Narendra Modi's recent announcement of a new scheme to assist urban poor in building houses signals a change in government policy.
- Meanwhile**, despite this effort, the goal of "housing for all" remains distant**, with only about two-thirds of the sanctioned houses completed or handed over in the eight years since PMAY-U's launch.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF PMAY-U

- **Nodal agency:Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)** falls under the Government's mission – 'Housing for all by 2022' for urban housing being implemented by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)**.
- **Importance:** It makes home loans affordable for the urban poor by providing a subsidy on the Interest Rate of a home loan during repayment by way of **EMI (Equated Monthly Installments).**
- **Beneficiaries:** The Mission addresses urban housing shortage among the EWS/LIG and MIG categories including the slum dwellers, and a beneficiary family will comprise husband, wife, unmarried sons and/or unmarried daughters.

VERTICALS OF PMAY-U

- **In Situ Slum Redevelopment (ISSR):**
  - Encourages the use of underutilized slum land for housing development.
  - Incorporates private sector participation to leverage investment and expertise.

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- ○ Aims to improve the quality of life in slums by providing better amenities.
- **Affordable Housing through Credit Linked Subsidy (CLSS):**
  - ○ Aims to make housing loans affordable for EWS, LIG, and MIG
  - ○ Interest subsidy benefits are linked to the loan amount and income category.
  - ○ Reduces the financial burden on beneficiaries and promotes homeownership.
- **Affordable Housing Through Partnership (AHP):**
  - ○ Promotes collaboration between public and private sectors for housing projects.
  - ○ Supports the creation of a diverse mix of housing options within projects.
- **Beneficiary-led Individual House Construction (BLC):**
  - ○ Emphasizes beneficiary-driven construction or improvement of houses.
  - ○ Beneficiaries can use the assistance for constructing new houses or adding rooms.

FEATURES OF PMAY-U

- **Demand-driven Approach:**
  - ○ Conducts surveys to assess housing demand at the city and state levels.
  - ○ Beneficiary demand shapes the scale and scope of housing projects.
  - ○ Helps avoid underutilization of resources and mismatched housing supply.
- **Geotagging:**
  - ○ Geotagging involves adding geographical coordinates to identify the location.
  - ○ Houses are geotagged using the Bhuvan platform developed by ISRO.
  - ○ Enhances transparency by enabling beneficiaries to verify house locations.
- **Women Empowerment:**
  - ○ Provides recognition and ownership rights to women in property matters.
  - ○ Helps in bridging the gender gap in property ownership.
  - ○ Promotes women's financial security and decision-making power.

VARIOUS INITIATIVES UNDER PMAY-U

- **Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs):**
  - ○ Aims to provide rental housing for urban migrants and informal sector workers;
  - ○ Aims to curb the growth of slums and improve living conditions;

- ○ Private and public agencies are encouraged to participate in creating ARHCs.
- **Global Housing Technology Challenge (GHTC)– India:**
  - ○ Aims to identify innovative, sustainable, and affordable construction technologies.
  - ○ Focuses on reducing construction time and costs while maintaining quality.
  - ○ Seeks to promote the adoption of advanced construction methods.
- **CLSS Awas Portal (CLAP):**
  - ○ A web-based platform to monitor the progress of housing projects.
  - ○ Ensures timely subsidy disbursement and efficient project tracking.
  - ○ Increases transparency and accountability throughout the implementation process.

POINTS OF PROPOSED SCHEME

- **Objective:** A proposed scheme aims to lower the beneficiary share to around 40%, recognizing their limited income capacity.
- **Aim:** The scheme shift in stance comes after the extension of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) until December 2024.
- **Fund allocation:** The project amounts to Rs.1.49 lakh crore, with the government's share at 4%, states and urban bodies at 16%, and the remaining 60% expected from beneficiaries.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES' RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Flexible assistance:** The committee's key proposal is to replace the current uniform and fixed assistance approach with a flexible one that considers regional variations and factors like topography.
- **To address issues of poor housing quality and unoccupancy:** It suggests delving into reasons behind these problem such as high land costs, restrictions on floor space index, and complexities arising from multiple certifications by various agencies play pivotal roles in determining the success of urban housing initiatives.
- **Involvement of stakeholders':** The government should facilitate discussions involving relevant stakeholders like state governments, local bodies, urban planning organizations, professionals, financial institutions, and activists.

'SLUT, SEDUCTRESS' ARE SIMPLY 'WOMEN', 'EVE TEASING' IS 'STREET SEXUAL HARASSMENT': WHAT SC HANDBOOK ON GENDER STEREOTYPES SAYS

Relevant for UPSC GS1- Women and related Issues

EXPLAINER: The Supreme Court's gender stereotypes handbook emphasizes the need to use neutral language and refrains from derogatory terms, advocating for respectful communication that recognizes the dignity of individuals and addresses issues like street sexual harassment more accurately.

CONTEXT:

- Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) released a handbook meant to be used by the judges as a guide to gender-just language.

ABOUT THE SC HANDBOOK

- The SC handbook is **a 30 page booklet launched to assist judges and the legal community in identifying,** understanding and combating stereotypes about women.
- **The handbook contains a glossary of gender-unjust terms and suggests alternative** words or phrases which may be used while drafting pleadings as well as orders and judgments.
- **Aim:**
  - To identify the language that promotes gender stereotypes and offering alternative words and phrases
  - To identify common reasoning patterns that are based on gender stereotypes particularly about women and discussing why they are incorrect.
  - To highlight binding decisions of the Supreme Court that has rejected these stereotypes and can be utilized by judges to dispel gender stereotypes.

- **For instance:** In the 2017 Supreme Court ruling awarding the death penalty for the convicts in the Delhi gang-rape case, the verdict repeatedly uses the word "ravished" to say raped.

EXPLAINER:Gender stereotyping refers to the practice of assigning certain traits, roles, behaviors, and characteristics to individuals based on their gender. These stereotypes are often oversimplified and generalized beliefs about how people of different genders should act, think, or behave. Gender stereotyping can affect various aspects of life, including social interactions, education, employment, and even legal and political matters.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR JUDGES TO USE THE RIGHT WORDS?

- The **handbook argues that the language a judge uses reflects not only their interpretation of the law,** but their perception of society as well.
- **Stereotypical language may reinforce ideas contrary to our constitutional** ethos like 'equal protection of laws'
- Words are the vehicle through which the **values of the law are communicated**.
    - Words transmit the ultimate intention of the lawmaker or the judge to the nation.

ALTERNATIVE TO STEREOTYPE-PROMOTING LANGUAGE

'ADULTERESS' Woman who has engaged in sexual relations outside of marriage

'AFFAIR' Relationship outside of marriage

'BASTARD' Non-marital child or, a child whose parents were not married

'BIOLOGICAL SEX' / 'BIOLOGICAL MALE' / 'BIOLOGICAL FEMALE' Sex assigned at birth

'CARNAL INTERCOURSE' Sexual intercourse

'CHILD PROSTITUTE' Child who has been trafficked

'CONCUBINE' / 'KEEP' Woman with whom a man has had romantic or sexual relations outside of marriage

'DUTIFUL WIFE' / 'FAITHFUL WIFE' / 'GOOD WIFE' / 'OBEDIENT WIFE' Wife

'EVE TEASING' Street sexual harassment

'HOUSEWIFE' Homemaker

'FEMININE HYGIENE PRODUCTS' Menstrual products

'UNWED MOTHER' Mother

'VIOLATED' (e.g. 'he violated her') Sexually harassed / assaulted or raped

'MISTRESS' Woman with whom a man has had romantic or sexual relations outside of marriage

'PROSTITUTE' Sex worker

'PROVIDER' / 'BREADWINNER' Employed or earning

'PROVOCATIVE CLOTHING / DRESS' Clothing / dress

'SEX CHANGE' Sex reassignment or gender transition

'SPINSTER' Unmarried woman

- **Patriarchal stereotypes:** Use of words such as chaste women, seductress, wanton woman used by judges reflects the patriarchal stereotypes that are unacceptable by the judicial authority.
- **Impetus to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** It will foster Gender equality (SDG 5) by actively challenging and ousting harmful stereotypes.

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- ○ It further gives impetus to reducing inequalities (SDG 10) and reduces discrimination in the society.
- **Gender identity is not limited to a binary (girl/woman and boy/man)** but rather exists on a spectrum and can evolve over time.
  - ○ It is a significant step towards a gender- just legal order.
- **Dominant caste men have historically used sexual violence** as a tool to reinforce and maintain caste hierarchies.
  - ○ It is against the preconceived notion that the dominant caste men do not want to engage in sexual relations with women from oppressed castes, hence allegation of sexual assault is considered false.
- It marks a significant milestone in the journey towards a more just and equitable society.

PRESENT DOCTRINE ON STEREOTYPES

- **Joseph Shine v. Union of India:**
  - ○ Supreme Court struck down the offence of "adultery" under Indian Penal Code, 1860.
  - ○ The court observed that the provision is arbitrary and discriminatory.
- **State of Jharkhand v. Shailendra Kumar Rai:** Supreme Court reiterated its **categorical ban on the "two finger test" as it is**
  - ○ Irrelevant for determining rape;
  - ○ Violates the dignity of rape survivors or victims.
- **State of Punjab v. Gurmit Singh:**
  - ○ The court observed that the testimony of a survivor or victim of sexual violence is inherently credible.
  - ○ It should not be doubted merely due to incorrect assumptions that women seek to foist false cases against men.
- **State of Uttar Pradesh v. Chhotey Lal:**
  - ○ The court observed that the absence of injuries is not determinative of the absence of sexual violence.
  - ○ It must be examined within the facts and circumstances of each case.

HAVE THERE BEEN SIMILAR EFFORTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

- **Canada:** The Women's Court of Canada, a collective of female lawyers, academics and activists write "shadow judgements" on equality law.
- **India:** Indian Feminist Judgement Project also 'rewrites' judgements with a feminist critique.

CONCLUSION

- The release of handbook reflects the Supreme Court's commitment to promoting equitable and unbiased legal practices, reinforcing the notion that language shapes not only legal interpretations but also societal perceptions.
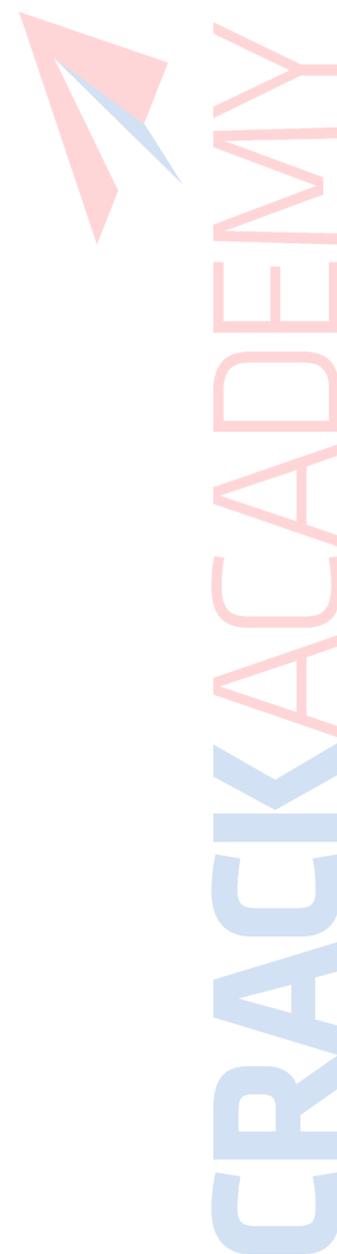
THE GAPS IN THE BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTRATION (AMENDMENT) ACT

Relevant for UPSC GS1: Population and associated issues

EXPLAINER: The Births and Deaths Registration (Amendment) Act seeks to address gaps in birth and death registration procedures, aiming to improve accuracy and data collection for essential demographic information.

CONTEXT:

- The **Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2023**, has been passed by Parliament and has got the assent of the President of India.
  - It was introduced in Lok Sabha on July 26, 2023.

ABOUT THE BILL

- **Aim:** To create a National and State level database of registered births and deaths which would help in updating other databases resulting in efficient and transparent delivery of public services and social benefits.
- **Need to record the birth and deaths at national level:**
  - The database at the central level is made available to authorities dealing with the maintenance and preparation of databases relating to the population register, electoral rolls, Aadhaar number, ration card, passport, driving licence, property registration and such other databases at the national level, as may be notified.
- The **registration hierarchy is the responsibility of State governments**, with the Registrar General of India having only the role of coordination and unification of the registration system.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2023

- **Connecting database:**
  - The Bill makes it compulsory that the **Registrar General of India (RGI)** maintains a national level database of births and deaths, and that the Chief Registrar of births and deaths in every State is required

to maintain a State-level database of registered births and deaths 'using the portal approved by the RGI.

- **In case of Birth:**
    - In the case of birth, the amendments provide for collecting the Aadhaar number of the parents.
    - Nothing is mentioned about the Aadhaar number of the deceased.
- **In case of Death:**
    - The State government could decide that a cause of death certificate should be issued by the medical practitioner who attended the deceased person so that the certificate can be sent along with the death report.
    - The amendments make it compulsory that for all deaths in medical institutions, a cause of death certificate be sent to the Registrar of Births and Deaths and a copy of the certificate is provided to the closest relative.
    - For deaths that occur outside hospitals, the medical practitioner who attended to the deceased during the person's recent illness has to issue such a certificate.
- **Electronic certificates:** The Act provides that any person may:
    - Cause a search to be made by the Registrar for any entry in a register of births and deaths; and
    - Obtain an extract from the register related to any birth or death. The Bill amends this to provide for obtaining a birth or death certificate (electronically or otherwise) instead of extracts.
- **Appeal process:**
    - Any person aggrieved by any action or order of the Registrar or District Registrar may appeal to the District Registrar or Chief Registrar, respectively.
    - Such an appeal must be made within 30 days from receipt of such action or order.
        - The **District Registrar or Chief Registrar must give their decision within 90 days** from the date of appeal.

REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS (RBD) ACT, 1969

- It provides for compulsory registration of births and deaths under a uniform law across India.
- RBD in India is mandatory with the enactment of RBD, Act 1969 and is done according to the place of occurrence of the event.
- It is the responsibility of the States to register births and deaths.
- State governments have set up facilities for registering births and deaths and keeping records.
- A **Chief Registrar appointed in every State is the executive authority for implementation of the Act.**

- A hierarchy of officials at the district and lower levels do the work.
- The **RGI, appointed under this Act, is responsible for coordinating** and unifying the implementation of the RBD Act.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

- The RBD falls under the Concurrent List, giving powers to both Parliament and state legislatures to make laws on the subject.
- As of 2019, the national level of registration of births was 93% and death registration was at 92%.
- The **Law Commission (2018) recommended** the inclusion of marriage registration in the RBD Act, 1969.

CONCERNS

- **School admission:** The Act also provides that no child should be denied admission on the grounds of lack of age proof.
  - The Bill does not provide any such exemptions.
  - It implies that if a child's birth has not been registered, they could be denied admission to educational institutions for their entire life.
- **Aadhar linkage based issues:**
  - **Right to privacy:** Also, This provision may violate the principles laid down in the Aadhaar judgement (Puttaswamy 2018).
  - **The judgement said that the Aadhaar Act, 2016** was passed as a money Bill and read down provisions that permitted linking of Aadhaar for purposes other than government benefits and services.
- **Linking state and National data with other departments:** Meanwhile, such linkage across databases under the Bill does not require consent from the person whose data is being linked.
  - It may violate an individual's right to privacy.
- **Sole powers to certifying authority:** A further consequence could be that this gives the authority issuing birth certificates significant powers to affect an individual's life.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- **Updating many of the databases would require removing the names of the deceased from the database.**
  - If the Aadhaar number of a deceased person is not collected, it would be impossible to achieve this objective.
- It is **provided that the birth certificate alone would be accepted as proof of date** and place of birth for many purposes such as school admission, issue of passport, and issue of Aadhaar number.
  - It may not require any amendment in this Act or any other Act;

- o It should be done through amendments in the rules relating to those databases or even executive orders;
  - ▪ **For instance,** while applying for passports, it was compulsory to have the birth certificate for those born after January 26, 1989 under the relevant rules;
- o The government removed this requirement in December 2016.
- **The families of such persons would have to wait for seven years** to request for a certificate that says 'presumed dead'.
  - o A provision could have been inserted in the Act to register a 'presumed death';
  - o when it is reasonable to assume that the person would have died in the calamity or accident;
  - o It would help the family concerned get the death certificates earlier.

NOW, DRONES TO MONITOR MGNREGA WORKSITES

Relevant for UPSC GS3: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

EXPLAINER: The article discusses the utilization of drones for monitoring MGNREGA worksites, aiming to improve the oversight and effectiveness of rural employment projects. This technological intervention enhances transparency and accountability in the implementation of such initiatives.

CONTEXT:

- The Ministry of Rural development has recently released a standard operating procedure (SOP) to increase its surveillance of worksites under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** scheme.

EXPLAINER:MGNREGA is a government scheme in India that guarantees a minimum number of days of wage employment to rural households, aiming to enhance rural livelihoods and reduce poverty by providing labor-intensive work opportunities.

ABOUT THE SOP

- **Asper the draft, now the drones will be used for four types of monitoring:**
  - Surveying the on-going works;
  - Inspecting the completed works;
  - Impact assessment; and
  - Special inspection in case of complaints.
- The SOP stipulates that the drones will be used by the ombudsperson.
- **As per the MGNREG Act which governs the scheme**, there should one ombudsperson per district that is responsible for registering suo Moto complaints and disposing of them within 30 days.
- **Role of Ombudsperson:**
  - For efficient monitoring and redressal of grievances, it is decided by the Ministry that the ombudsperson may use drone technology facilities for verification of the works virtually.

- ○ It has directed State governments to provide the facility to ombudspersons.
- **Fund allocation:**
  - ○ The States will not be provided with any extra funds to deploy these drones.
  - ○ According to the guidelines, State governments are expected to draw the necessary funds from the administrative head, which is roughly 10% of a State's MGNREGA budget.
- **Data management:** The Ministry also proposes to form a centralized dashboard to store the videos and photos collected from the drones, for data analysis and reporting purposes.

BACKGROUND

- As**, there are several complaints about corruption in MNREGAworks** that we receive regularly.
- These vary from machines being used in place of the workers, many receiving wages without doing work, or works beyond the approved list being undertaken, and so on.
- The idea to deploy drones will be especially helpful in such cases for real-time monitoring and for garnering evidence.
- **Last time on May 2022, the Union government made it mandatory to capture attendance at all worksites** using a specially-developed mobile-based application.
  - ○ These steps are taking MGNREAGA towards digitization.

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ABOUT E-GOVERNANCE

- e-Governance can be defined as the application of **information and communication technology (ICT)** for providing government services, exchange of information, transactions, integration of previously existing services and information portals.
- **Pillars of e-Governance:**
  - ○ People;
  - ○ Process;
  - ○ Technology;
  - ○ Resources;
- **Types of Interaction:**
  - ○ G2G i.e. Government to Government;
  - ○ G2C i.e. Government to Citizen;
  - ○ G2B i.e. Government to Business;
  - ○ G2E i.e. Government to Employees.

WHAT IS THE NEED OF TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS IN GOVERNANCE?

- **To promote Participative Democracy:** Such Mechanism may help in strengthening Social audit.
  - **For instance,** citizens can directly give suggestions to the government on myGOV platform.
- **Information Technology has ensured that a policy decision taken by the government** can be quickly executed and implemented at multiple locations, across the length and breadth of the country.
- **Government has taken much of the e-governance initiatives** for effective public service delivery.
  - Further, when combined with emerging technologies, it can help in achieving sustainable development goals.

ILLEGAL, IRRATIONAL, UNCONSTITUTIONAL: THE PROBLEM WITH RECENT SUSPENSIONS OF MPS

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these**

EXPLAINER: *The author discusses the rules for suspending members from India's Parliament if they disrupt its proceedings. Suspensions, including key leaders, have been longer than usual, going against traditional norms and rules. These extended suspensions are controversial and might be unconstitutional. The author recommends finding better solutions to manage disagreements in Parliament.*

CONTEXT:

- Some Members of Parliament (MPs) of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha have been recently suspended for disrupting the parliament functions and violating the directives of the chair.
- Lately, the fundamental idea about the disciplinary powers of the Houses seems to be changing and, so, it is necessary to assess the problems associated with the suspension of MPs.

SUSPENSION PROCEDURE RULE

- Rules of the Houses of Parliament are framed under **Article 118** and these can operate only subject to the provisions of the Constitution.
- The **standard procedure under both rules 374 (Lok Sabha) and 256 (Rajya Sabha)** dictates that suspension should typically last until the end of the ongoing session.

EXPLAINER: *Article 118 pertains to the powers of the Parliament of India to make rules for regulating its procedures and functioning. It ensures effective governance through established legislative practices and norms.*

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PROCESS OF SUSPENSION RULES OF MPS IN THE LOK SABHA

- **As per Rule 373 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business**, if the speaker finds the conduct of any Member is grossly disorderly, s/he may direct such Member to withdraw immediately from the House and to remain absent during the rest of the day's sitting.
- **According to Rule 374**, the Speaker may name a member if deems it necessary, which disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the House by persistently and willfully obstructing the business thereof.
  - If a Member is named by the Speaker, the Speaker shall put the question whether such Member be suspended from the service of the House;
  - When the House adopts the motion, the member stands suspended.
- In December 2001, **Rule 374A was incorporated in the Rule Book**.
- In case of gross violation or severe charges, on being named by the Speaker, the member stands automatically suspended from the service of the House for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less.

PROCESS OF SUSPENSION RULES OF MPS IN THE RAJYA SABHA

- **Under Rule 255, the Chairman of Rajya Sabha is empowered to direct any Member** whose conduct is in his opinion grossly disorderly to withdraw immediately from the House.
  - **Unlike the Speaker of Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha Chairman does not have the power to suspend a member**.
    - So, the House may by another motion, terminate the suspension;
  - The Chairman may name a member who disregards the authority of the Chair or abuses the rules of the Council by persistently and willfully obstructing business;
  - In this type of situation, the House may adopt a motion suspending the Member from the service of the House for a period not exceeding the remainder of the session.
- **Rule 256 provides for suspension of members**.
  - The Chairman can suspend a member from the service of the Council for a period not exceeding the remainder of the Session.

IMPLICATIONS OF SUSPENDING MEMBERS FROM INDIA'S PARLIAMENT

- **Members can't participate, potentially hindering legislative work**.
- In 2022, the Supreme Court (SC), in the Ashish Shelar vs Maharashtra Legislative Assembly case, declared suspensions beyond rule-prescribed periods unconstitutional.

- ○ The **plea of procedural irregularities under Article 122 was rejected.**
    - ■ It was seen as substantial illegality, not just procedural error.
- **Latest cases like those of Sanjay Singh, Raghav Chadha, and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury show suspensions extending beyond typical limits** or pending investigations, against traditional norms.
- **Over-reliance on suspensions might stifle opposition voices**, affecting democratic discussions.
- **Such suspensions highlight the need for better methods** to handle disagreements in Parliament.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- Parliament should strictly follow Rules 374 (Lok Sabha) and 256 (Rajya Sabha) when suspending members.
    - ○ Suspensions should not exceed the ongoing session's duration.
    - ○ Cases like Sanjay Singh's extended suspension go against this principle.
- The recent indefinite suspensions**, like that of Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury** should be revisited to ensure they align with constitutional norms.
- Referring to the **Ashish Shelar vs Maharashtra Legislative Assembly (2022)** decision can help clarify suspension durations' legality.
- Political leaders should prioritize dialogue over suspensions to address disagreements in Parliament.

CONCLUSION

- Exercising the House's disciplinary powers cannot be the only effective way to run the supreme legislative body of the country.
- The political class has the task of finding solutions to end the turmoil and bring harmony to our legislatures.
- The resolution lies in finding and applying the right method and the country is still waiting for that.

FOREST RIGHTS ACT IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR: A TRANSFORMATION IN THE MAKING

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of the vulnerable sections**

EXPLAINER:The article discusses the Forest Rights Act in Jammu & Kashmir and its significance for tribal communities. Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) took longer to implement FRA, which recognizes tribal rights over forests. Since 2021, efforts have been made to grant these rights, but challenges remain.

CONTEXT:

- The discourse on Jammu and Kashmir's public policy often neglects its socio-cultural, anthropological, and linguistic complexities.
- The focus on security emerged due to the region's insurgency, overshadowing important perspectives.
  - The recent spotlight on tribal communities, constituting 12% of the population, pertains to resource allocation and rights recognition.

TRANSHUMANT PASTORALISM AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

- **Survey of Transhumance:**
  - 2021 survey by Tribal Affairs Department revealed pastoral population of 612,000, the worlds largest.
  - Gujjars, Bakerwals, Gaddi, Sippi, Dard-Shin, and Bot comprise over 30% of the tribal population.
  - Reliance on livestock husbandry with seasonal migration, covering up to 600 km, involving families.
- **Challenges and Conservation:**
  - Migration through notified forests and wildlife reserves under strict regulations.
  - Historic community-centric conservation models led to the enactment of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006.**
    - FRA empowers forest dwellers and tribal communities over land and resources.

EXPLAINER: *Transhumant refers to the practice of seasonal migration of livestock and herders between different grazing areas, adapting to changing environmental conditions. This movement ensures animals' sustenance and preserves traditional ways of life.*

FOREST RIGHTS ACT AND RECOGNITION

- **FRA 2006:**
  - Recognizes rights of forest dwellers and tribal communities.
  - Empowers them to use forest land for essential services.
  - Enacted in 2008, adapted by most states except Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Delayed Adoption in Jammu and Kashmir:**
  - FRA's application delayed in Jammu and Kashmir.
  - Applicability of central laws after 2019 paved the way for FRA implementation.
  - Implementation process initiated in 2021 after public communication, capacity building, and rule framing.

FRA IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

- **Rolling Out FRA in Jammu and Kashmir:**
  - FRA formally implemented in 2021 in Srinagar and Jammu.
  - Tribal Affairs Department and Forest Department collaboration.
  - Lieutenant Governor handed titles to tribal forest dwellers, marking a significant step towards empowerment.
- **Challenges and Progress:**
  - Challenges in implementing FRA in Jammu and Kashmir.
  - More than 4,500 titles issued benefiting 60,000 families.
  - Focus on individual and community rights claims.
- **Community-Centric Approach:**
  - FRA implementation requires consideration of traditional folklore and record-keeping mechanisms.
  - Addressing geographical barriers, mobile communities, low literacy rates, and historical deprivation.
  - Leadership within the community essential for successful implementation.
- **Gram Sabha's Role and Capacity Building:**
  - Gram Sabha responsible for rejecting over 92% of declined claims.
  - Emphasis on capacity building of local self-government and community members.
  - Collaborative efforts to bridge gaps and facilitate individual claims.

POLICY REFORMS AND RESOURCE ACCESS

- **New Policy for Forest Produce:**
  - o Commercial tendering of forest produce replaced.
  - o Empowered tribal pastoralists and forest dwellers to collect, process, use, and commercialize non-timber forest produce.
- **Beyond Resource Access:**
  - o FRA enables tribal communities to access services like healthcare, education, energy, and connectivity.
  - o Overcoming challenges posed by low literacy rates, seasonal migration, and cultural factors.

CONCLUSION

- Empowering tribal communities in Jammu and Kashmir through the implementation of the Forest Rights Act presents both challenges and opportunities.
- The Act's success relies on community engagement, leadership, and support from various stakeholders to ensure that tribal rights are upheld and conservation efforts are effective.

RBI ALLOWS SWITCH FROM FLOATING TO FIXED RATE REGIME: WHAT DO NEW PERSONAL LOAN GUIDELINES SAY?

EXPLAINER:*The article explores RBI's decision to permit a switch from floating to fixed rate regime for personal loans, providing borrowers with more options. It delves into the implications of these new guidelines for borrowers seeking greater stability in their loan repayment terms.*

CONTEXT:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced new regulations concerning personal loans and interest rate resets.

FIXED INTEREST RATE

- The RBI has directed regulated entities, including banks and **NBFCs**, to grant personal loan borrowers the opportunity to transition from a variable rate to a fixed interest rate framework during interest rate resets.
- These regulated entities encompass banks, primary co-operative banks, **Non-Banking Financial Companies,** Credit Information Companies, and institutions like EXIM Bank, NABARD, NaBFID, National Housing Bank (NHB), and Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI).

EXPLAINER:*NBFCs are financial institutions that offer various banking services, like lending and investing, without the legal status of a bank. They play a vital role in providing credit and financial services to individuals and businesses.*

FLOATING VS. FIXED RATES

- **Banks possess the ability to alter interest rates by adjusting internal** benchmark rates and spreads throughout the loan term.
  - Such alterations can adversely affect borrowers' interests and impede monetary transmission.
- In a floating rate system, **the exchange rate is dictated by market dynamics**, reflecting supply and demand.
  - Conversely, a fixed or pegged rate is set and maintained by the government (central bank) as the official exchange rate.
  - Pegging a currency aims to foster stability, often in emerging economies, to attract foreign investment in a secure environment.

REVISED REGULATIONS

- During loan approval, regulated entities are mandated to transparently inform borrowers about potential repercussions stemming from changes in benchmark interest rates.
    - Any increase in EMIs, tenor, or both must be promptly conveyed to borrowers through appropriate communication channels.
- Regarding interest rate resets, regulated entities are obliged to offer borrowers the choice to transition to a fixed rate, as per their board-approved policy.
    - This policy also specifies the frequency at which borrowers can switch during the loan term.
- Regulated entities are required to disclose all relevant fees associated with transitioning loans from floating to fixed rates.
- Furthermore, borrowers retain the option to elevate their EMIs, extend the loan tenor, or select a combination of both possibilities.
    - Borrowers can also make prepayments, either partially or in full, during the loan term, albeit subject to foreclosure charges.

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THE KEY TO INDIA'S HUNGER CHALLENGE: A FOCUS ON GENDER-SENSITIVE GROWTH

Relevant for UPSC GS2: Poverty & hunger related issues

EXPLAINER:Addressing India's hunger challenge, the article underscores the importance of gender-sensitive growth strategies to ensure equitable access to food and nutrition. It emphasizes the role of empowering women in achieving comprehensive solutions to this issue.

CONTEXT:

- In the contemporary era of India, expediting economic expansion while ensuring inclusivity and augmenting agricultural output is imperative to combat malnutrition.

INDIA'S BATTLE AGAINST IMPOVERISHMENT

- **Efforts since Independence:** Addressing poverty, hunger, and malnutrition has been a fundamental duty of elected administrations, **resulting in a significant decrease inextreme poverty from over 80% to around 15% since gaining independence.**
- **Present Focus:** India's impressive advancements in curbing poverty and achieving economic evolution are apparent, with the nation's economic resilience being bolstered by strategic economic reforms and substantial foreign reserves, positioning India favorably in comparison to neighboring nations.
- **Initiatives Undertaken:** India exhibits potential in nearly eliminating poverty, aided by successful agricultural revolutions like the **Green and White Revolutions**, propelling India into a prominent role as a rice exporter and a leader in milk and cotton production.

EXPLAINER:Green and White Revolutions symbolize transformative agricultural advancements in India, with Green focusing on increased crop production and White on dairy production. These revolutions contributed to food security, economic growth, and rural development.

ISSUES

- **Malnutrition – A Principal Outcome of Poverty:** The issue of malnutrition among children under the age of five remains worrisome, with 32% being underweight, 35% stunted, and 19% wasted.
- **Climate Change Threat:** The imminent menace of climate change and its influence on extreme weather events like heat waves and floods presents a significant hurdle.

THE CYCLE OF HUNGER

There are many ways hunger can trap people in a cycle of poverty and need. Here is how it can burden someone for a lifetime, and pass it on to the next generation.

MERCY CORPS

CHILDREN
Poor nutrition stunts physical and mental development

YOUTH
Chronic health problems keep kids out of school

FAMILY
Poor health during pregnancy leads to an undernourished child— *starting the cycle again*

ADULTS
A lack of education limits the ability to work

POOR NUTRITION — HEALTH PROBLEMS — INABILITY TO WORK — UNHEALTHY PREGNANCIES

- **Hunger and Escalating Population:** The escalating population stands as one of the chief reasons for ineffective policy implementation and other concerns, including heightened food demand.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- **Empowerment through Female Education:** The low participation of women in the labor force, hovering around 30%, underscores the necessity for improved education and skill enhancement for women.
- **Synthesizing National Growth with Livelihood Necessities:** Fostering family planning efforts, along with contributing to national growth, can bolster agricultural productivity while emphasizing nutrition and resilience to climate impacts.
- **Augmenting investments in agricultural research and development**, as opposed to outdated price controls, assumes paramount importance.
  - Partnering with institutions like Punjab Agriculture University can drive a sustainable and nutritious agricultural transformation.

CONCLUSION

- India's commendable journey in alleviating poverty mirrors recent unparalleled progress.
- Utilizing inclusive growth, women's education, and agricultural innovation can propel enduring change.
- Safeguarding against climate change and enhancing food systems can chart the course toward a prosperous and equitable future.

CRIMINAL LAW BILLS RENAMING IS NEEDLESS MEDDLING

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation**

EXPLAINER: *The article critiques the renaming of criminal law bills, deeming it unnecessary interference in legal matters. It questions the practical implications of such changes and their impact on the legal system's effectiveness.*

CONTEXT:

- Recently, the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Bills** were introduced in Parliament as replacements for **the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Indian Evidence Act**, respectively.
- These Bills violate the first requirement for acceptance since the names are unpronounceable to more than half of the population as well as the vast majority of lawyers.
- Furthermore, **as per Article 348 of the Constitution**, all Acts passed by the Parliament or State legislatures must have authorized texts in the English language.
- Although the Hindi titles of these new bills violate the embargo imposed by the Article, the bills' bodies are written in English.

EXPLAINER:*The Indian Penal Code (IPC) is a comprehensive legal framework that defines criminal offenses and their punishments in India. It plays a crucial role in maintaining law and order by providing guidelines for legal proceedings and justice.*

ABOUT BHARATIYA NYAYA SANHITA BILL, 2023

- It **seeks to replace the IPC by repealing 22 of its provisions, proposes changes to 175 existing provisions** and introduces eight new sections.
  - It **contains a total of 356 provisions.**

- The punishment for all types of gang rape will now include 20 years of imprisonment or life imprisonment.
- The punishment for the rape of a minor will include the imposition of the death penalty.
  - Various offences have also been made gender neutral.
- For the first time capital punishment has been introduced for the offence of mob lynching apart from the offence being made punishable with 7 years of imprisonment or life imprisonment.
- It repeals the offense of sedition, which was widely criticized as a colonial relic that curbed free speech and dissent.
  - Meanwhile, upon closer inspection, it can be seen that the provision has been introduced under a new name and with a more expansive definition for the offence.
- It introduces community service as a form of punishment for specific crimes, which can help in reforming offenders and reducing overcrowding in prisons.
- Further, it criminalizes sexual intercourse under the false pretext of marriage or by deceitful means.
  - A maximum of 10-year imprisonment has been proposed for the offence.
- The provision for the offence of adultery has also been omitted.
  - This is in line with the Supreme Court's ruling in 2018 in the case of Joseph Shine v.
  - Union of India, where **Section 497 of the IPC**, which criminalized adultery, was held to be unconstitutional.
- The provision legalizing marital rape has however been retained.

EXPLAINER: *Section 497 of the IPC dealt with adultery as a criminal offense, targeting only men involved with married women. It was criticized for its gender bias and was later struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of India in 2018.*

ABOUT BHARATIYA NAGARIK SURAKSHA SANHITA BILL, 2023

- It will replace the CrPC by repealing nine of its provisions.
  - The Bill proposes changes to 160 provisions and introduces nine new provisions.
  - It contains a total of 533 sections.
- **Section 230 has been introduced to ensure that a copy of the FIR** is made available to the accused and the victim free of cost and within fourteen days from the date of production or appearance of the accused.
- Further, the Bill permits the filing of a **zero FIR** from any part of the country.

○ Also, the Bill allows the facility for an accused person to be examined through electronic means, like video conferencing.

EXPLAINER:A zero FIR is the initial complaint filed at any police station for a cognizable offense, which can later be transferred to the appropriate jurisdiction. It ensures immediate action and prevents delays in initiating investigations.

BHARATIYA SAKSHYA BILL, 2023

- It will replace the Indian Evidence Act.
  - It proposes changes to 23 provisions and introduces one new provision.
  - The Bill contains 170 sections in total.
- It permits the admissibility of an electronic or digital record as evidence and will have legal validity as documentary evidence.
- The ambit of what constitutes secondary evidence has also been expanded in the bill.

EXPLAINER: The Indian Evidence Act is a legal statute that governs the rules of evidence in Indian courts, regulating the admissibility and presentation of evidence during trials. It ensures fairness and consistency in judicial proceedings.

CONCERNS OVER LANGUAGE AND THE LEGAL REGIME

- The Constituent Assembly engaged in intense debate and discussion on the topic of language, which resulted in the approval of a number of clauses in the Constitution as well as the Official Languages Act.
- **English will continue to be an official language according to the current legal system** unless State Legislatures and Parliament approve resolutions to stop using English as an official language.
- **The feelings and sentiments that people attach to their language must be respected in a country with a diverse linguistic population** where language has served as a focal point for several protests and popular movements.
- It is sufficient to show how closely linked language is to state identity and that of its citizens that India was divided into States based on linguistic distinctions.

EXPLAINER: Article 348 of the Constitution deals with the language to be used in the Supreme Court and High Courts, allowing for the use of English for a certain period and providing provisions for the transition to Hindi or other Indian languages.

MAJORITARIANISM ISSUE

- The current occurrences in our immediate environment are what are causing the concern of non-Hindi speakers.
- **Powerful individuals' claims that Hindi must soon be recognized as the "national language"** and the distribution of Hindi-only forms by government agencies like the Indian Railways and banks have drawn attention.
- Provisions in the National Education Policy 2020's initial draft that were perceived as an effort to "**impose Hindi**" elicited criticism.
- It appears that an effort is being made to elevate the most widely spoken regional language in India above other regional languages and to elevate it above other languages as being crucial to a person's identity as an Indian.

EXPLAINER: The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) is a legal framework outlining procedures for the investigation, prosecution, and trial of criminal cases in India's judicial system. It ensures fair and consistent administration of justice.

CONCLUSION

- The High Courts & the Supreme Court of India are examples of India's superior courts, and the language of the law and of the courts is undoubtedly English.
- As per the country's legal position, English will continue to be an official language unless the non-Hindi-speaking States request otherwise.
  - So those outside of the Hindi heartland have the right to declare Hindi the only official language, not those who live in it.
- The wording of laws adopted in Parliament must also follow constitutional requirements and be written in English. Apart from reigniting an old flame, the naming of these Bills is obviously unlawful.
- The change of names must be the first order of business for the Parliamentary Committee to which the Bill has been referred.

INDIA, ASEAN AGREE TO REVIEW FTA BY 2025

EXPLAINER: *India and ASEAN agree to reassess their Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by 2025, highlighting their commitment to enhancing trade relations and exploring potential improvements in the agreement. This move aims to strengthen economic cooperation and mutual benefits between the two regions.*

CONTEXT:

- India and ASEAN nations agree to review free trade pact for goods. Aim to address trade **"asymmetry."**

EXPLAINER: *Asymmetry refers to the lack of balance or equality between two sides or elements, often leading to disparities in various contexts, such as power, size, or characteristics. It underscores the presence of differences that can impact interactions and outcomes.*

DETAILS:

- India and the ASEAN nations have come to an accord to reassess their existing trade agreement pertaining to goods, free of charge.
- **In accordance with this agreement, they have established the year 2025** as their target for completing the assessment process, with the overarching aim of rectifying the imbalances in their bilateral trade relationship.
- The long-standing request of Indian businesses for the evaluation of the **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** is being addressed, and the early initiation of this

assessment is anticipated to enhance trade by rendering it more streamlined and mutually advantageous.

- The review of AITIGA is scheduled to be undertaken during the forthcoming India-ASEAN Leaders' Summit, scheduled to take place in the early part of September.

ABOUT ASEAN

- The **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** is **a regional grouping** that aims to promote economic and **security cooperation among its ten members:** Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- **Establishment:** on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the **founding fathers of ASEAN:** Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
- **Aim:** The motto of ASEAN is **"One Vision, One Identity, One Community".**
- **Secretariat:** located in Jakarta, Indonesia.
    - ASEAN countries have a total population of 662 million people and a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of $3.2 trillion as of 2022.
- The **institutional mechanism of ASEAN include:**
    - **ASEAN Summit:** It meets annually to discuss regional issues and set policy directions.
    - **ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC):** It oversees the implementation of ASEAN agreements and decisions.
    - **ASEAN Secretariat:** It supports and facilitates ASEAN's activities and initiatives.
    - **ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF):** It is a platform for dialogue and cooperation on political and security issues among ASEAN member countries and their partners.
    - **Decision Making:** It is done through consultation and consensus.

ABOUT AITIGA

- The **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** constitutes a trade pact encompassing India and the ten member states of ASEAN.
- The Agreement was **formally endorsed during the 7th ASEAN Economic Ministers-India Consultations convened in Bangkok**, Thailand, in the year 2009.
- In effect since 2010, this Agreement is occasionally denoted as the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement.
- The implementation of this Agreement has facilitated a consistent augmentation in trade between ASEAN and India since its commencement.
- During the fiscal year 2019-20, the trade between India and ASEAN amassed a valuation of US$86 billion.

- Although this figure demonstrated a decrease from the US$97 billion recorded in 2018-19, attributed to the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic,
  - it still signified advancement from the US$81.3 billion tallied during the 2017-18 financial period.
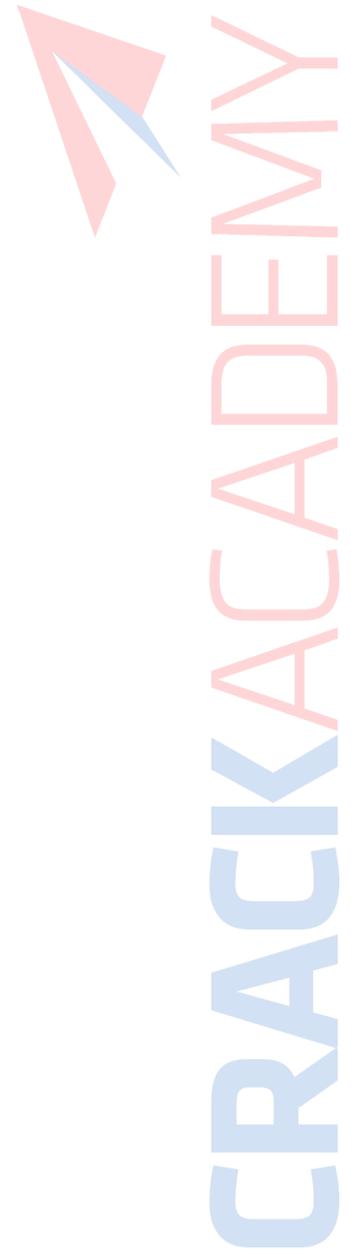
A STRONG CASE TO RESTORE SECTION 8(4) OF THE RP ACT

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.**

EXPLAINER: The article discusses the implications of the Lily Thomas case's judgment that invalidated Section 8(4) of the Representation of People (RP) Act.

CONTEXT:

- The recent disqualification of Rahul Gandhi, based on his conviction and imprisonment in a defamation case, has drawn attention to the intricate legal complexities and consequences linked to the disqualification of sitting legislators in India.
- The focus is on the Supreme Court's decision to invalidate **Section 8(4) of the Representation of People Act 1951.**
- **Note:**https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1662686/

EXPLAINER:RPA Act 1951 was promulgated by the Indian provincial legislature prior to the inaugural general elections. This act serves as the foundation for overseeing elections in India, encompassing various aspects of the electoral process. Alongside outlining the specifics of conducting elections, the act addresses the qualifications and disqualifications of members of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) and state legislatures (State Legislative Assembly and State Legislative Council). Comprehensive guidelines for the procedural aspects of conducting elections are extensively elaborated within the legislation.

THE LILY THOMAS CASE AND VERDICT

- The Lily Thomas case pertains to the judgment by India's Supreme Court that rendered Section 8(4) of the Representation of People Act ineffective.
  - This provision allowed convicted legislators a three-month window for appeals before facing disqualification.
- The **court's ruling mandated immediate disqualification upon conviction**, impacting the political careers of sitting legislators.
- The judgment was founded on the notion that **Article 102(1) does not differentiate between sitting members and candidates concerning disqualification.**

DISQUALIFICATION OF MPS AND MLAS UNDER RPA, 1951

- **Section 8(3) disqualifies MPs and MLAs convicted and imprisoned for over 2 years**, resulting in a six-year disqualification after release.
  - Convicted individuals on bail with pending appeals are ineligible for contesting elections.
- **Section 8(4) previously permitted convicted legislators to continue** their roles if they appealed within three months.
  - In the Lily Thomas case in July 2013, the Supreme Court declared Section 8(4) unconstitutional, leading to disqualification on the date of conviction.

ANALYSIS OF SECTION 8(3)

- A **comprehensive examination of Section 8(3) reveals a nuanced** understanding of the timing of disqualification.
- The provision stipulates disqualification **"from the date of conviction,"** indicating the need for an official declaration.
- The **notion that the President, as empowered by Article 103,** could be the authority to announce disqualification gains significance in this context.
- This approach aligns with principles of transparency and accountability, providing a mechanism to prevent arbitrary disqualification decisions.

WHAT THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT SAYS

SECTION 8(1) A person convicted for promoting enmity between different groups, rape, terrorist acts, insulting national flag etc stands disqualified for six years on mere conviction.
SECTION 8(2) A person convicted for hoarding, dowry offences etc. incurs disqualification if he is sentenced to at least six months for the offences. The bar continues for six years after release from jail.
SECTION 8(3) A person convicted of any other offence incurs disqualification if he is sentenced to an imprisonment of not less than two years. The disqualification continues till six years after release.
SECTION 8(4) Protects sitting MPs and MLAs from being disqualification under the above provisions. If they file an appeal within three months, they can continue as a member of the House till the completion of the term or till the decision on appeal, whichever is earlier.

ABOUT ARTICLE 103 OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

- **Resolution of questions regarding members' disqualifications:** If a question arises about whether a member of either House of Parliament has incurred any disqualifications mentioned **in Clause (1) of Article 102**, the matter shall be referred to the President for a final decision.
- Before reaching a decision, the **President must seek the opinion of the Election Commission and act in accordance with such opinion**.

PRESIDENTIAL AUTHORITY AND SECTION 8(3)

- **Section 8(3) appears to entrust a crucial role to the President** in effecting disqualification upon conviction.

- This constitutional perspective underscores the significance of upholding the separation of powers and establishing a robust mechanism for enforcing disqualification.
- The **President's involvement under Article 103 underscores the system of checks** and balances inherent in India's democratic structure.

THE DILEMMA OF STAY: SENTENCE VS. CONVICTION

- One of the intriguing legal dilemmas arising from these developments concerns the impact of a stay on the sentence versus a stay on the conviction on disqualification.
- Historical cases have yielded conflicting interpretations.
  - The **absence of a clear Supreme Court stance on this matter, as evident in Rahul Gandhi's case**, highlights the complexities surrounding the interplay between stays, convictions, and disqualifications.

EFFECT ON LEGISLATORS' POLITICAL CAREERS

- The **immediate disqualification precedent set by the Lily Thomas judgment** has profound implications for legislators' political careers.
  - The prolonged appeals process within the judicial system raises concerns about potential disruptions in the legislative journey of elected representatives.
- The **exceptional instance of the Agra court's swift intervention** in staying a conviction underscores the rare expedited response that many legislators might not experience.

BALANCING DIFFERENTIATION: ARTICLE 103 AND CONSIDERATION OF AMENDMENT

- While the **Supreme Court's reasoning for invalidating Section 8(4) was founded** on concerns about differentiation, Article 103 provides a constitutional avenue for differentiation regarding sitting legislators.
- This constitutional subtlety opens the door to thoughtful contemplation of a possible constitutional amendment to reinstate Section 8(4).
  - Such an amendment could align with Article 103, ensuring differentiation grounded in a constitutionally sound framework.

CONCLUSION

- The **reinstatement of Section 8(4) of the Representation of People Act** necessitates a thorough evaluation of legal, constitutional, and practical implications.

- This analysis underscores the need for a comprehensive approach that upholds legislators' careers, respects the spirit of the Constitution, and safeguards justice, differentiation, and the separation of powers.
- Striking a delicate balance between prompt action and procedural fairness is pivotal in establishing a robust and equitable framework for disqualifying legislators.
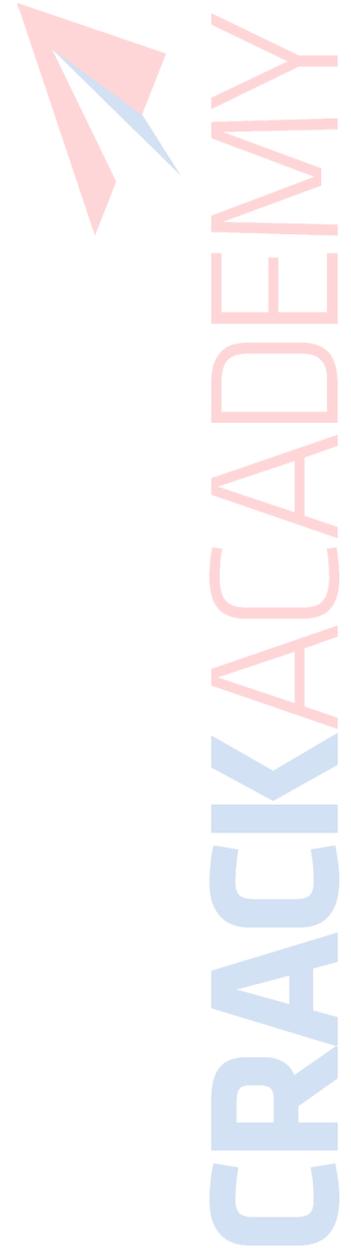
UNDERSTANDING THE FAILURE OF LUNA 25

> **Relevant for UPSC GS3: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology.**

EXPLAINER:The article delves into the factors behind the failure of Luna 25, providing insights into the challenges and complexities of lunar missions. It highlights the importance of learning from setbacks to improve future space exploration endeavors.

CONTEXT:

- The Russian space agency recently launched the Luna 25 spacecraft aboard a Soyuz 2 rocket.
    - However, due to a technical fault, **Roscosmos reported that Luna 25 landed on the moon's surface prematurely, causing the mission to be terminated**.

ABOUT LUNA 25

- **Originally named Luna-Glob, the mission was renamed Luna 25** to be part of the Luna series.
- The goal was to establish Russia's access to the moon's surface, acknowledging its growing importance as a spaceflight destination.
- **Importance:**
    - In contrast to the US-led **Artemis Accords**, Russia and China jointly oversee the **International Lunar Research Station (ILRS).**
        - Nevertheless, Russia hasn't achieved a successful interplanetary mission in 34 years.

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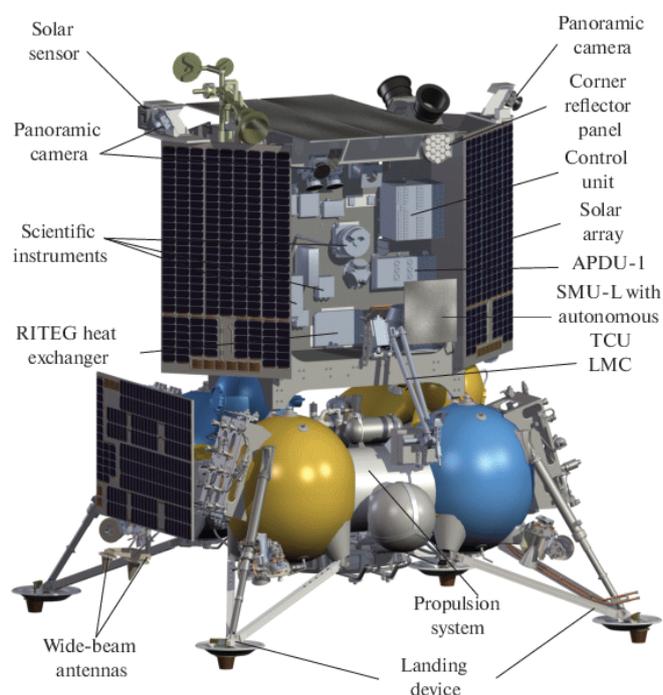
○ Some observers suggest that Luna 25 was intended to showcase Russia's economy, including its spaceflight sector.

EXPLAINER: Artemis Accords are international agreements outlining principles for cooperation in lunar exploration, aiming to establish a sustainable presence on the Moon. These accords promote collaboration, transparency, and responsible space activities among participating nations.

FAILURE OF LUNA 25

- As per Roscosmos, a technical glitch caused Luna 25 to deviate from mission parameters.
- Reports indicate that Luna 25 applied excessive power during an orbital adjustment to lower its pre-landing orbit, resulting in an uncontrolled descent to the lunar surface.
- Roscosmos lost communication with Luna 25 during this maneuver, suggesting it was knocked out of lunar orbit.

REASONS FOR LUNA 25 AND CHANDRAYAAN 3 MISSIONS NOT COMPETING

- Both Luna 25 and Chandrayaan 3 missions were launched simultaneously, aiming for soft moon landings within days of each other.
- Mission parameters are influenced by factors like launch vehicle, spacecraft mass, trajectory, and lunar sunlight availability.
- **Roscosmos began Luna 25 development in the early 2010s, while Chandrayaan 3 was initiated in 2019.**
  - **Both missions were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic**.
- **Roscosmos has previously collaborated with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** and assists in training Indian astronauts for the Gaganyaan mission.
  - Hence, Luna 25 and Chandrayaan 3 were not in direct competition.

SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA AND LUNAR MISSION IMPLICATIONS

- **NASA and the European Space Agency support ISRO in tracking Chandrayaan 3 around the moon,** given the loss of trust in Russia due to its actions in Ukraine, leading to global economic sanctions.
- Roscosmos could only communicate with Luna 25 when it was over Russia.
- Another consequence was Russia's loss of access to satellite tracking systems operated by governments worldwide.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- Russia lags in moon exploration.
  - Formerly partnering with NASA for a near-moon space station, Russia's role diminished even before leaving the collaboration in 2021.
- Roscosmos has planned Luna missions 26 and 27 as part of ILRS's initial phase, involving technology demonstrations and site selection for future lander missions.
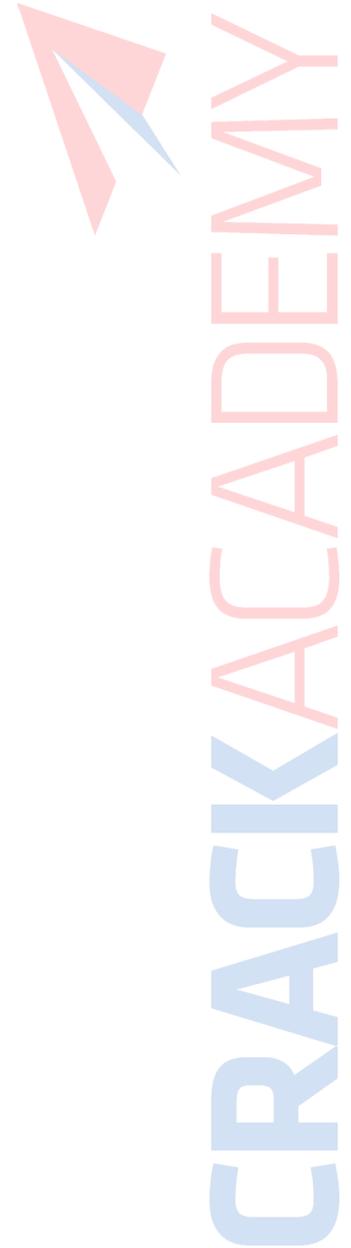
PANEL SET UP TO EXAMINE STALLED REAL ESTATE PROJECTS SUBMITS REPORT: WHAT ARE ITS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS?

Relevant for UPSC GS3: Indian Economy and issues related to growth, development; Infrastructure.

EXPLAINER:The article discusses the findings and recommendations of a panel assigned to review stalled real estate projects, addressing the reasons behind the delays and suggesting measures to expedite completion. This initiative aims to resolve issues in the real estate sector and enhance consumer confidence in property investments.

CONTEXT:

- In 2023, **Amitabh Kant committee** was constituted to examine stalled real estate projects and to recommend ways to complete the stalled projects.

EXPLAINER:The realty sector, also known as the real estate sector, refers to the industry that deals with properties, land, buildings, and other physical structures. It encompasses various activities related to buying, selling, renting, and developing properties, as well as the associated financial and legal aspects.

ABOUT AMITABH KANT COMMITTEE

- **Set up by:** Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- **Members:**
  - Ministry of Finance;
  - Uttar Pradesh State government;
  - Haryana State government;
  - Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India;
  - National Housing Bank;
  - Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) of Haryana and UP.
- **Tenure:** Need to submit its report in 6 months.

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MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE REPORT INCLUDE:

- The committee's objective was to identify the quantity and locations of legacy stalled projects.
- According to the **Indian Banks Association (IBA),**
  - about 4.12 lakh dwelling units worth Rs. 4.08 lakh crore were under stress, with approximately 44% located in the National Capital Region and 21% in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region.
- The primary reason for stress was deemed to be a lack of financial viability.
- **IBA reported that 60% of the stalled projects had already been purchased**, with a capital commitment of Rs. 1.9 lakh crore.

COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Compulsory Registration:** Projects that meet certain criteria should be registered with the **State Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA).**
  - This applies to projects with land areas exceeding 500 square meters or those intending to construct more than 8 apartments.
- **Registration De-linking:** The committee suggests separating the process of granting registration or sub-leases by land authorities to homebuyers from the recovery of dues from developers.
  - This change would benefit around 1 lakh homebuyers, facilitating prompt registration and sublease execution.
- **Certification Issuance:** RERAs should identify projects lacking no-objection and completion certificates.
  - The process to grant certificates should be expedited, irrespective of developers' outstanding dues to authorities.
- **Rehabilitation Package:** State governments should establish a rehabilitation **package to restart stalled projects, under certain conditions:**
  - Developers must commit to completing projects within 3 years.
  - A Zero Period of 2 years from the COVID pandemic's onset should be included.
  - Developers can engage co-developers to complete the work.
- **Partial Surrender Policy:** Developers can return underutilized lands to authorities in exchange for a waiver of dues related to that land.
- **Collection of Outstanding Payments:** RERA can directly collect outstanding payments from homebuyers, bypassing developers.
- **Occupancy Granting:** The recommendation proposes granting occupancy or possession of substantially completed projects within the next 30 days.
- **Financial Support:**
  - Stalled projects should be included in priority sector financing.
  - The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs should formulate a scheme.
  - The government should consider providing subsidized interest rates or a guarantee scheme similar to those available in the MSME sector.

- Improving the Internal Rate of Return of projects to attract funding.
- **Last Resort:** Judicial interventions, such as utilizing the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, should only be employed as a last resort.
- **Project Viability:** All stakeholders, including developers, financiers, and land authorities, may need to accept a reduced share of what is due to them for project viability.

EXPLAINER:Real estate is a state subject under 7th schedule, hence it falls under the purview of respective state governments.

ABOUT RERA ACT, 2016:

- **Aim:**
  - To protect the interests of homebuyers & boost investment in the real estate sector.
  - To bring transparency & efficiency in sale/purchase of real estate by establishing RERA in each state to regulate real estate sector.
- **Establishment of bodies:**
  - Regulatory Authorities;
  - Adjudicating Officers and Appellate Tribunals.
- **Registration of Real Estate Agents:** All agents dealing in real estate projects need to register with respective State RERAs.
- **Separate Bank Account for each project:** 70% of the amount collected from homebuyers for a project must be maintained in a separate bank account.

WHO WILL IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS?

- **'Land' is a state subject and most of the recommendations of the committee** fall within the purview of the respective state governments.
- **As per Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry officials,** the report has been sent to all states, who will decide on if and what they want to implement.
- **In the case of UP, the NOIDA and Greater Noida authorities have already moved** towards implementing the rehabilitation package envisaged in the report.
  - It remains to be seen if other states will accept the committee's findings and implement the measures recommended by it.
- The committee asked the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to prepare a detailed scheme for using the **Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) Fund.**

ABOUT SWAMIH SCHEME

- In November 2019, the Central Government had launched the SWAMIH Scheme.

- **Objectives:**
  - o To provide priority debt financing for the competition of stalled housing projects falling under the affordable and middle-income housing categories.
  - o To provide relief to real estate developers that requires funding to complete their unfinished projects and consequently ensure the timely delivery of homes to the buyers.
- It is expected that the scheme will aid the growth of real estate sector in India.
- About 1,509 housing projects comprising approximately 4.58 lakhs housing units fulfil the eligibility criteria to benefit from the scheme.

ABOUT SWAMIH FUND

- The **Fund is a government-backed fund, set up** as a **Category-II AIF (Alternate Investment Fund)** debt fund registered with SEBI.
- The Investment Manager of the Fund is SBICAP Ventures, a wholly-owned subsidiary of SBI Capital Markets, which in turn is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the State Bank of India.
- The total commitment of funds to be infused by the Government in the affordable and middle-income group housing sector through the Special Window would be up to Rs. 10,000 crore.
- The maximum finance for any single project is Rs. 400 crore.

EXPLAINER: Alternative Investment Fund means any fund which is a privately pooled investment vehicle which collects funds from sophisticated investors, whether Indian or foreign, for investing it in accordance with a defined investment policy for the benefit of its investors.

CONCLUSION

- The report from the committee underscores the necessity for a holistic strategy that includes developers, financiers, land authorities, and various stakeholders to tackle the challenges posed by stalled real estate projects.
- The effectiveness of these suggestions will rely on the readiness of diverse states and government departments to put the recommended actions into practice.

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AFTER CHANDRAYAAN-3'S LANDING, THE EXPERIMENTS: LUNAR QUAKES AND WATER-ICE ON MOON

EXPLAINER: *Following Chandrayaan-3's successful landing, the article discusses upcoming experiments focused on lunar quakes and the presence of water-ice on the Moon. These investigations aim to deepen our understanding of lunar geology and potential resources, marking significant strides in space exploration.*

CONTEXT:

- Following the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3's lander, its mission of lunar exploration and data collection will commence, operating for a single lunar day, equivalent to 14 Earth days.

EXPLAINER: *A soft landing refers to the successful touchdown of a spacecraft without incurring significant damage to itself or its payloads. In contrast, a hard landing involves damage to the probe, potentially leading to mission failure.*

CHANDRAYAAN-3 INDIA'S SHOT TO THE MOON

The powered descent will begin on August 23, 5:35 pm IST, in 4 broad phases — Rough Braking Phase, Hold Attitude Hold Phase, Fine Braking Phase, Terminal Descent Phase

Earth-bound manoeuvres • Lunar Transfer Trajectory • Moon-bound manoeuvres

Aug 6-Aug 16 Chandrayaan-3's gradually reduced orbit around moon — from 170 km x 4,313 km to 153 x 163 km

Jul 14 Chandrayaan-3 launched

Jul 15 to Jul 25 Chandrayaan-3 completes orbit around Earth

Aug 1 Chandrayaan-3 enters translunar orbit

Aug 5 Chandrayaan-3 enters lunar orbit

CHANDRAYAAN-3 Lander Module: **1,752 kg** (including Rover of 26 kg)

Propulsion Module: **2,148 kg**

PROPULSION MODULE was filled with 1,696.4 kg of fuel during launch and could remain operational for several years to come

Aug 17 Lander separates from Propulsion Module

CHANDRAYAAN-3 Spacecraft (inside the payload fairing)

Lander has four payloads or scientific instrument (ChaSTE, Rambha, ILSA, LRA)

LVM3-M4 VEHICLE

Height **43.5 m** | Lift-off Mass **642 t**

Aug 23 Chandrayaan-3 will soft-land on the moon and explore it with the help of rover

S200 Solid Rocket Boosters

L110 Liquid Stage

ROVER (6-wheeled robotic vehicle)

Life: One lunar day (14 Earth days) | Weight: 26 kg | Power: 26 kg

Graphic: Ritesh Kumar | Source: ISRO

HISTORIC LANDING CONTEXT:

- Chandrayaan-3's landing site is situated near 70 degrees south latitude, marking the closest proximity any spacecraft has achieved to the lunar South Pole.
- **Comprising three components, Chandrayaan-3 includes:**
  - **Lander:** Powered by four adjustable engines, the lander is equipped with a Laser Doppler Velocimeter (LDV).
  - **Rover:** The rover will conduct chemical analysis of the lunar surface. Both the lander and rover bear numerous scientific instruments for experiments on the Moon's surface.
  - **Propulsion Module:** Responsible for transporting the lander and rover from "launch vehicle injection" to a 100-kilometer circular polar lunar orbit before separating from other modules.

ABOUT THE SOUTH POLE

- This region features complex terrain marked by craters and deep trenches, significantly different from the equatorial areas explored by previous lunar missions.
- Certain parts of the southern pole remain in darkness and have never been exposed to sunlight.
- Extreme cold temperatures can plummet to as low as -230 degrees Celsius.
  - These harsh conditions, coupled with rocky terrain and perpetual darkness, pose challenges for electronic equipment functioning effectively.
- Located on the rim of the Aitken basin, the Moon's largest impact basin, the lunar southern pole provides a unique chance to study materials from the Moon's deep crust and mantle.
- **Countries like Japan, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have attempted but failed to achieve lunar landings** at the Moon's southern pole, preceding Russia's attempt.

Upgraded lander

ISRO has made several changes to Chandrayaan-3 to improve its chances of success. Here are a few:

- The lander can regulate the thrust throughout its descent
- The lander carries two cameras, instead of one as before, to detect and avoid hazards
- The lander is equipped with a laser doppler velocimeter to sense the lander's speed in three directions
- The lander carries more fuel to make adjustments in its path, orientation, and speeds
- The fuel is loaded in a larger propulsion tank with safeguards
- to prevent it from sloshing around
- The lander's fifth central engine has been removed and the thrust of the other four has been increased
- The lander's legs have been strengthened to withstand its weight better
- The lander has extra solar arrays to increase the power produced and a battery with a higher capacity
- The lander will be able to choose its landing site from a larger area on the surface
- It will check the site twice for suitability. If it can spot a better site, it can move and land there instead
- If the lander isn't able to measure its altitude as it descends, it will continue descending at a fixed speed
- The lander can communicate with ground stations and the Chandrayaan-2 orbiter during descent

MISSION EXPERIMENTS OVERVIEW:

- **Lander's Experiments:** The **lander hosts four experiments:**
  - o The **Radio Anatomy of Moon Bound Hypersensitive ionosphere and Atmosphere (RAMBHA)** will study changes in electrons and ions near the lunar surface over time.
  - o The **Chandra's Surface Thermo physical Experiment (ChaSTE)** will examine thermal properties of the lunar surface near the polar region.
  - o The **Instrument for Lunar Seismic Activity (ILSA)** will measure lunar quakes and study the Moon's crust and mantle composition.
  - o The **LASER Retroreflector Array (LRA)** is a passive NASA experiment acting as a precise target for lasers in future missions.

- **Therover includes two scientific experiments:**
  - o **The LASER Induced Breakdown Spectroscope (LIBS)** will analyze the chemical and mineral composition of the lunar surface.
  - o The **Alpha Particle X-ray Spectrometer (APXS)** will determine elements like magnesium, aluminium, silicon, potassium, calcium, titanium, and iron in lunar soil and rocks.
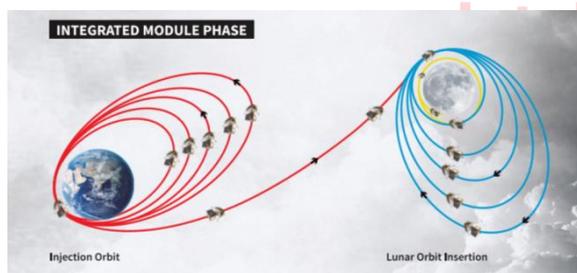
EXPECTED OUTCOMES ENVISIONED:

- **Discovery of Water:**
  - o The Moon's southern polar region, known for perpetually dark craters, is likely to contain water-ice.
  - o India's **Moon Impact Probe (MIP)** in the Chandrayaan-1 mission studied water and hydroxyl molecule concentration in the lunar atmosphere by deliberately crashing near the South Pole.
- **Unveiling Buried Lava Tubes:**
  - o Chandrayaan-1's terrain mapping camera and hyper-spectral imager detected an underground lava tube, offering potential safe habitats for humans in the future.
  - o Such tubes can shield against radiation, meteoric impacts, extreme temperatures, and surface dust storms on the Moon.
- **Magma Ocean Theory:**
  - o The Moon's formation from Earth's separation due to an impact led to surface melting. This concept is known as the magma ocean hypothesis.

- o Chandrayaan-1's M3 payload detected specific lighter-density crystals hinting at past surface liquefaction.
- **Solar Flares and Mineral Mapping:**
  - o Chandrayaan-2's Solar X-Ray Monitor observed solar micro flares and elemental abundance from the solar corona.
  - o The CLASS X-ray Fluorescence experiment mapped about 95% of the lunar surface in X-rays, a pioneering feat.

CONCLUSION:

- Chandrayaan-3's scientific mission demonstrates India's commitment to understanding the Moon's enigmatic nature.
- Through incoming data from its instruments, the mission continues the legacy of its predecessors, advancing knowledge of lunar geology, composition, and mysteries.

BRICS SUMMIT 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Relevant for UPSC GS2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and agreements involving India

EXPLAINER:_The BRICS Summit 2023 addresses global challenges, emphasizing cooperation among member countries. Discussions center around economic growth, sustainable development, and collaborative efforts to address shared concerns._

CONTEXT:

- The 15th BRICS summit in South Africa highlights the prioritization of BRICS expansion and the establishment of a common currency.
- The alliance, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has invited **six more nations:** Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, and Ethiopia.
    - This strategic step aims to strengthen the united representation of the Global South and promote a multipolar global landscape.

ECONOMY
BRICS admits six new members

Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are set to join the core group of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. These 11 countries have a combined population of 3.7 billion.

MEMBERS
NEW MEMBERS

The expansion of the group is part of its plan to build dominance and reshape global governance into "multipolar" world order that puts voices of the Global South at the centre of the world agenda.

BRAZIL RUSSIA INDIA CHINA SOUTH AFRICA
ARGENTINA EGYPT ETHIOPIA IRAN SAUDI ARABIA UAE

Source: brics2023.gov.za | August 24, 2023   @AJLabs ALJAZEERA

ABOUT BRICS:

- **The New Development Bank (NDB)** was **established in 2014** following the Fortaleza declaration.
- **Originally conceptualized by Jim O'Neill,** the grouping was initially comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
  - Collectively, they represent 30% of the world's land area, 42% of the global population, 23% of the world's GDP, and 18% of international trade.
- **Formally inaugurated during a meeting of the Foreign Ministers** of Brazil, Russia, India, and China in 2006.
- **The first summit took place in Yekaterinburg in 2009.**
- BRIC evolved into BRICS in 2010 with the inclusion of South Africa.
- The BRICS leadership rotates among its member countries.
- South Africa holds the chairmanship for the year 2023.
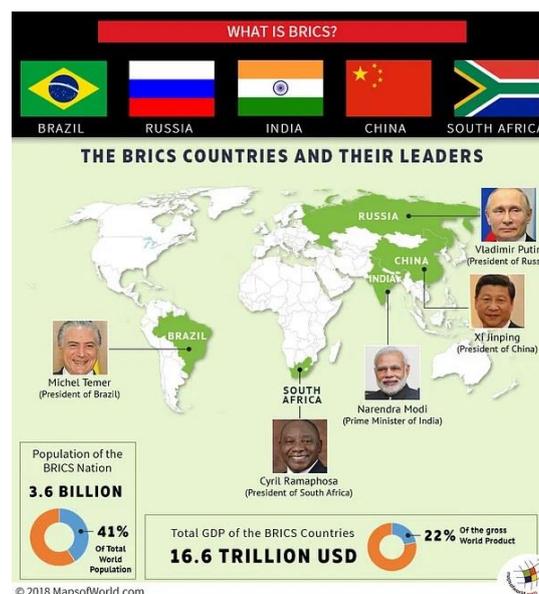
KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS AT THE 15TH BRICS SUMMIT ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- The **Prime Minister has laid out a comprehensive 5-point agenda aimed** at strengthening the bonds among BRICS member nations. **These points encompass**:
  - **Collaborative Space Exploration:** The Prime Minister suggested the creation of the BRICS Research Exploration Consilium, intended to advance research, monitoring, and global cooperation in the field of space exploration.
  - **Education, Skill Development, and Technology Exchange:** Emphasizing the importance of cultivating future-ready societies, the Prime Minister highlighted India's accomplishments in providing accessible education through platforms like DIKSHA, fostering innovation via Atal Tinkering labs, and introducing AI-based language solutions.
    - He expressed readiness to share these initiatives with fellow BRICS nations.
  - **Skill Mapping and Mutual Advancement:** The Prime Minister put forward the concept of utilizing skill-mapping to identify and harness the strengths of each member nation, thereby promoting growth and development through collaborative endeavors.

- **Joint Endeavor for Conservation of Big Cats:** Recognizing the abundant diversity of big cat populations in BRICS countries, the Prime Minister proposed united initiatives within the framework of International Big Cats conservation to safeguard these magnificent species.
- **Repository for Traditional Medicine:** Acknowledging the distinct traditional practices and ecosystems present in BRICS nations, the Prime Minister recommended joint efforts towards establishing a repository for traditional medicines.

THE CALL FOR THE EXPANSION OF BRICS

- A total of 19 nations are expressing their interest in joining BRICS.
- The **current global scenario** marked by the Russia-Ukraine conflict and escalating China-USA tensions, underscores the need to broaden their network of allies and partners, strengthening their respective alliances.
- **BRICS Plus**, a cooperative framework introduced during the Xiamen summit in 2017, seeks to extend the BRICS coalition beyond its original five members.
- The **BRICS New Development Bank (NDB)** has already welcomed countries like the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Bangladesh, and Egypt into its ranks, with numerous others showing a willingness to follow suit.
- The establishment of a vaccine research and development center in 2022 to combat the COVID-19 pandemic has further deepened the collaboration under the **"BRICS Plus" initiative.**
- **"Node" countries are demanding inclusion due to their significant** influence and strategic importance.
  - Without their active involvement, the expansion of BRICS Plus cooperation would lack a substantial foundation, potentially hampering its sustainability and growth.
- **Promoting a new global order:** The aim is to strengthen their stance, especially in relation to the United States and the European Union.
  - Investment is thriving, with intra-BRICS exports' growth rate and foreign direct investment levels into BRICS nations exceeding the global average, according to a UN report.

WHY BRICS PURSUE A COMMON CURRENCY?

- The **joint statement "The Cape of Good Hope"** from BRICS emphasizes the utilization of local currencies in international trade and financial dealings with trade partners.

- **Addressing Sanctions:** Russia introduced an international reserve currency mechanism in 2022 to counter the adverse impacts of sanctions imposed by Western powers like the European Union, United States, and the United Kingdom.
- **Mitigating Western Sanctions:** These sanctions affect fundamental principles of a market economy, free trade, and the sanctity of private property.
- **Balancing Global Dominance:** The objective is to reshape the global geopolitical landscape to align with the economic, geographical, and demographic strengths of BRICS member countries.
- **Promoting Local Currencies:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has permitted 18 countries to conduct trade using the Indian rupee.
- **Rupee-Dirham Agreement:** This initiative aims to link payment and messaging systems between India and the UAE and boost the circulation of the Indian rupee in the Gulf region.
  - While India and Russia initially considered a rupee-rouble arrangement, it was discontinued due to currency conversion costs.
  - On the other hand, China conducts trade in Yuan with more than 120 countries.
- **BRICS Pay:** Launched in 2018, BRICS Pay is a decentralized, multi-currency digital platform for international payments.
  - It facilitates secure and seamless digital transactions in local currencies within the BRICS PLUS format, enabling businesses and individuals to send and receive payments.

BRICS countries make up

- **18%** of global trade
- **23%** of global GDP
- **42%** of global population
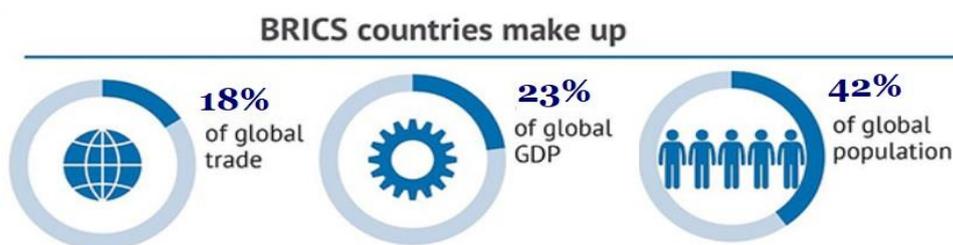
THE NEED FOR BRICS:

- **Shaping New Global Order:** BRICS aims to establish its influence, particularly concerning the United States and the European Union, as well as advocate for a balanced multipolar global order in both economic and political realms.
- **Multipolarity:** It strives to promote a multipolar global order that fosters equilibrium in economics and politics and seeks to distance itself from post-World War II institutions like the World Bank and IMF.
- **De-dollarization:** With a collective 18% share of global trade, BRICS encourages the use of national currencies for trade and envisions a common payment system in the long run.

- **Representation of Global South:** BRICS offers a platform for the voices of the Global South, referring to countries that traditionally had a limited role in international agenda-setting.
- **Economic Growth:** Countries like India and China have witnessed economic ascent, establishing their alternative forums.
- **New Development Bank:** The NDB, headquartered in Shanghai, has invested $30 billion in infrastructure projects since its creation in 2015 with a $100 billion worth.

IMPORTANCE OF THE 15TH BRICS SUMMIT:

- **Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Context:** It's the first in-person summit since 2019, occurring amid significant geopolitical and geo-economic shifts.
- **Response to Ukraine Conflict:** The summit marks the first in-person meeting following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- **Agenda:** The summit focuses on 'BRICS in Africa' and partnerships for growth, development, and inclusive multilateralism.
- **Dialogues and Partnerships:** The summit includes BRICS-Africa Outreach and BRICS plus Dialogue to address various issues.
- **Addressing Global Challenges:** Discussions encompass equitable transitions, education, post-pandemic recovery, and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Political Discussions:** Matters like the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Niger's post-coup situation, and heightened West-Russia tensions are on the agenda.
- **Economic Reforms:** The summit seeks to empower **Emerging Markets and Developing Countries (EMDCs)** in international decision-making, reform **Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)**, and support African trade.
- **BRICS Expansion:** It presents an alternative to developed countries like the G-7, with over 40 countries expressing interest and 19 formally applying for membership.
- **Inclusivity:** South Africa has invited leaders representing the Global South and African Union for sideline sessions.

IMPORTANCE FOR INDIA:

- **Multi-Alignment Strategy:** India employs issue-based alignment with coalitions like the Quad and BRICS for diverse strategic and economic pursuits.
- **Comprehensive Diplomacy:** Participation bolsters economic growth, technology advancements, norm shaping, and security enhancement.

- **Development-Focused Diplomacy:** India's involvement aims to expand BRICS membership and enhance its development-oriented diplomatic approach.
- **Diverse Agenda:** Issues such as energy security, counterterrorism, climate finance, and geopolitical balance are key considerations.
- **Addressing Non-Traditional Security:** BRICS emphasizes non-traditional security threats and economic security within the group.
- **Countering Coercive Practices:** The summit provides a platform to oppose unfair coercive measures like the EU's carbon border tax or unilateral sanctions.
- **Strategic Significance:** The summit follows the military standoff with China in 2020 and signals diplomatic progress.
- **Positive Engagement:** The joint statement following the 19th India-China Corps Commander Level Meeting prior to the summit signifies positive developments.

CHALLENGES:

- **BRICS aspirants like Argentina and Egypt, both part of the "Coffee Club" (United for Consensus)**, are against India's UNSC membership and receive support from China.
- **China's Expansion Strategy:** China aims to expand its influence by transforming BRICS into a China-centric bloc through the BRICS Plus framework.
  - It seeks to bind new members with Belt and Road Initiative loans, boost exports to offset Western market contraction, and assert leadership in the Global South.
- **China's Motivation:** China perceives weakening economic performance in Brazil, Russia, and South Africa, Russia's involvement in the Ukraine war, India's alignment with US-led groups, and BRICS' need to expand for sustained global influence.
- **China's Dominance:** China dominates both SCO and BRICS, prominent alternate groupings that exclude the US.
- **Challenges of Expansion:** BRICS has diverse sizes, perspectives, and views on global power restructuring. Expanding too much could complicate decision-making and slow down progress.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- **Prioritize Convergence:** Focus on economic and social convergence, institution building, trust, knowledge sharing, trade, development, and developmental finance while remaining true to core objectives.

- **Steadfast Focus:** By maintaining commitment to core goals, BRICS can enhance cooperation, mutual understanding, and sustainable development among members.
- **Gradual Expansion:** Expansion should be gradual and aligned with the contributions and compatibility of new countries, without exacerbating ideological divisions.
- **Manage Chinese Strategy:** India must counter Chinese strategy while making BRICS inclusive for equitable power distribution.
- **Rule-Based Approach:** Expansion should adhere to a rule-based order, without allowing "economic hegemony" or an "anti-West agenda."
- **Consensus-Based Inclusion:** New members should be added through consensus, with clearly defined membership principles and criteria established beforehand.

MODI, GREECE PM AGREE ON STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, DOUBLING TRADE BY 2030

Relevant for UPSC GS2: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and agreements involving India

EXPLAINER:*Prime Minister Modi and the Greece PM establish a strategic partnership, aiming to double bilateral trade by 2030. This move underscores the intent to strengthen economic ties and enhance cooperation between the two nations.*

CONTEXT:

- During the visit of Indian Prime Minster Modi to Greece, both the nations has upgraded their relations to a **'strategic partnership'** and pledged to double trade by 2030.

KEY POINTS OF THE VISIT:

- According to the Prime Minister's statement, India will enhance collaboration in defense, security, infrastructure, agriculture, education, and emerging technologies.

- **A new institutional platform for dialogue between the national security advisers** of India and Greece will be established.

- **Both countries have decided to expedite the finalization of a mobility** and migration partnership agreement to facilitate skilled migration.

- Furthermore, **India and Greece have upgraded**

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their bilateral ties to a strategic partnership and have agreed to expand cooperation in political, security, and economic spheres.
  - They have also set the goal of doubling bilateral trade by 2030.

WHAT DOES UPGRADING 'STRATEGIC TIES' MEAN?

- Elevating to a 'strategic relationship' signifies a shared understanding among participating states about the nature of threats in the environment and the role of their combined power in mitigating these threats.
- However, this does not imply forming an 'alliance,' which entails a deeper commitment where member states are treaty-bound to assist each other in the event of a threat materializing.

BACKGROUND OF INDIA-GREECE RELATIONS:

- Diplomatic ties were established between **India and Greece in May 1950,** and India established its **resident Embassy in Athens in March 1978.**
- **On an international level:**
  - The two nations have fostered a positive relationship based on common values of democracy, peace, development, and justice.
  - Shared viewpoints on international matters such as UN reforms and the situation in Cyprus have further strengthened their rapport.
  - Greece has consistently supported India's foreign policy objectives, as seen in their participation in the Six-Nation Delhi Declaration on Nuclear Disarmament in 1985.
- **Bilateral Trade and Cooperation:**
  - Trade between the two nations has grown due to joint projects, ventures, and increased trade volumes.
  - Key Greek exports to India include cotton, various types of scrap, marble, aluminum foils, kiwi fruits, and greasy wool.
- **Indian Diaspora:**
  - Around 10,000 Indian nationals reside in Greece, primarily engaged in agriculture, industry, construction, and small businesses.
  - Some Indian professionals work in sectors like banking, insurance, and software, fostering harmonious relations within the Greek community.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RELATIONS WITH GREECE FOR INDIA:

- **Geopolitical Balance:** Both countries are strategically located at the convergence of Europe, Asia, and Africa.
  - Strengthening ties contributes to regional stability and equilibrium in these regions.

- **Maritime Collaboration:** India's 'Act East' policy aligns with Greece's emphasis on maritime connectivity through its Blue Growth strategy.
  - Enhanced cooperation can boost trade, investment, and connectivity along sea routes.
- **Energy Security:** Greece's involvement in the EastMed Gas Forum corresponds with India's energy security interests.
  - Collaborating in the energy sector can provide India with reliable sources of hydrocarbons.
- **Cultural and Historical Bonds:** Shared ancient civilizations and cultural heritage promote cultural exchanges, tourism, and people-to-people connections, strengthening diplomatic relations.
- **Counterterrorism and Security:** Joint efforts in counterterrorism and security are essential to combat transnational threats and ensure regional stability.
- **Diplomatic Support:** Both nations often concur in international forums, amplifying each other's voices on global matters like climate change, multilateralism, and global governance.
- **Trade and Investment:** Exploring trade diversification and investment prospects can stimulate economic growth in both countries.
- **Defense Cooperation:** Military collaboration can enhance defense capabilities and facilitate expertise exchange in areas such as naval technology and cybersecurity.

CONCLUSION:

- The India-Greece partnership has been strengthened through strategic elevation, fostering diverse collaborations across sectors for mutual progress and stability.

NATIONAL ACTION FOR MECHANISED SANITATION ECOSYSTEM (NAMASTE)"

EXPLAINER:"NAMASTE" is a national initiative aimed at promoting mechanized sanitation solutions, enhancing efficiency, and improving the working conditions of sanitation workers. This effort underscores the importance of modernizing sanitation practices for sustainable urban development and human well-being.

ABOUT NAMASTE SCHEME:

- It has been launched with an objective to ensure safety and dignity of sanitation workers in urban India as well as providing sustainable livelihood to these workers.
- **Ministries involved:** It is launched as a joint initiative of the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE)** and the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).**
- **Implementing agency:** National Safai Karamchari Financial Development Corporation (NSKFDC) would be implementing agency for NAMASTE.
- **Coverage:** 500 cities (converging with AMRUT cities) will be taken up under this phase of NAMASTE.
  - It will be implemented for the period 2022-26.
- **Aims:**
  - Zero fatalities in sanitation work in India;
  - All sanitation work is performed by skilled workers;
  - No sanitation workers come in direct contact with human faecal matter;
  - Sanitation workers are collectivized into SHGs and are empowered to run sanitation enterprises;
  - All Sewer and **Septic tank sanitation workers (SSWs**) have access to alternative livelihoods.

INTERVENTIONS IN THE NAMASTE COMPONENT

- **Profiling of SSWs:**
  - NAMASTE aims to profile Sewer/Septic Tank Workers (SSWs).
  - SSWs' list sourced from relevant Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
  - Detailed profiling conducted through dedicated camps.
- **Occupational Safety Training and PPE Distribution:**
  - Providing SSWs with training in occupational safety.

○ Distributing **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** kits to enhance safety.
- **Safety Devices for SRUs:**
  ○ Assisting Sanitation Response Units (SRUs) with safety devices.
  ○ Enhancing safety during hazardous cleaning tasks.
- **Extending Health Insurance Scheme Benefits:**
  ○ SSWs and families covered under **Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).**
  ○ NAMASTE covering AB-PMJAY premium for previously uncovered manual scavengers and SSW families.
- **Livelihood Assistance:**
  ○ Promoting mechanization and enterprise development.
  ○ NSKFDC supporting sanitation-related equipment/vehicle procurement under **Swachhata Udyami Yojana (SUY),** fostering **"Saniprenure."**
  ○ Continued capital subsidy for self-employment projects of identified scavengers and their dependents.
  ○ Skill development training for identified scavengers and their dependents, accompanied by a monthly stipend.
- **Convergence of MoSJE & MoHUA Programs:**
  ○ Joint responsibility of MoSJE and MoHUA for SSW safety.
  ○ NAMASTE aims to strengthen convergence between both Ministries.
  ○ Leveraging existing allocations from SRMS, SBM, DAY-NULM, and NSKFDC for comprehensive safety measures.
- **IEC Campaign:**
  ○ Collaborative awareness campaigns by ULBs & NSKFDC.
  ○ Utilizing electronic, print media, and prominent hoardings in local languages, English, and Hindi.
  ○ Maximal use of social media platforms for extensive outreach.
- **MIS and Website Implementation:**
  ○ Robust **Monitoring and Information System (MIS)** implemented.
  ○ Dedicated website established for effective monitoring of NAMASTE initiatives.

BIRD SPECIES PLUMMETING IN INDIA, SAYS NEW REPORT: WHAT ARE THE MAJOR THREATS TO THEM?

Relevant for UPSC GS3: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

EXPLAINER:The new report highlights a decline in bird species in India, attributing the drop to major threats like habitat loss, pollution, and climate change. This research underscores the urgent need for conservation efforts and policies to safeguard avian diversity and ecosystems.

CONTEXT:

- A comprehensive report reveals that a significant number of bird species in India are currently experiencing declines or are projected to face declines in the long term.

Warning signs for bird species

A total of 142 bird species in India were found to be declining, while only 28 were increasing, in recent years (annual change over past eight years), according to the State of Indian Birds report 2023 released on Friday. A look at its findings. **By Jayashree Nandi**

CURRENT ANNUAL TREND

942 birds assessed (299 had insufficient data)

142 species declining (of which 64 seeing a rapid decline)

217 species stable (189) or increasing (28) in the last eight years

643 with sufficient data

- 28 Increasing
- 189 Stable
- 78 Declining
- 64 Declining rapidly
- 284 Trend inconclusive

HOW SPECIES ARE FARING

Certain groups of birds are faring particularly poorly, including open habitat species such as bustards and coursers; riverine sandbar-nesting birds; coastal shorebirds; open-country raptors; and a number of ducks, the report said.

- 14 species, including **Indian Roller**, recommended for **IUCN Red List** reassessment
- **Asian Koel** has increased in the past three decades
- Birds that **live in key habitats** like open ecosystems, rivers, and coasts have declined
- **Indian Peafowl** continues to thrive
- Raptors, migratory shorebirds, and ducks have **declined the most**

The Asian Koel (top) shows a dramatic increase since 2000.
Photo by Abhishek Das

Western Ghat endemic birds like the White-bellied Blue Flycatcher (above) are most severely impacted.
Photo by Albin Jacob

THE MAJOR THREATS FACING INDIAN BIRDS

**CLIMATE CRISIS**
Timings of annual events (e.g. migration, nesting, insect emergence) become asynchronous.

For sedentary birds, dealing with climate change will require rapid adaptive changes.

Higher temperatures also cause birds to alter their behaviour, making them more likely to seek shade and spend less time foraging.

Bird species are shifting their ranges to higher latitudes (i.e., away from the tropics and towards the poles) and in mountains, to higher elevations.

DISEASE
Nearly 7% of globally threatened bird species have declined due to avian malaria.

Avian influenza outbreaks in 2020-2021 across India, caused mass mortality of wild birds.

ENERGY INFRA
Collision of birds with rotating wind turbine blades; Displacement of birds from the turbine area due to disturbance

URBANISATION
Urban habitats tend to be unsuitable for rare and specialist species, while promoting common species.

In central Delhi, fruiting trees offer resources for arboreal frugivorous birds such as Brown-headed Barbet and Yellow-footed Green Pigeon. But, urbanisation leads to a homogenisation of bird communities due to the increased abundance of birds adept at exploiting ecological niches.

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ABOUT STATE OF INDIA'S BIRD REPORT (SOIB) REPORT

- The State of India's Birds report emerged from India's participation in the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species in 2020, where countries committed to regular assessments of their bird populations.
- The SoIB report aims to evaluate the conservation status of a wide range of species regularly present in India.
- It is **published by a partnership involving 13 governmental and non-governmental organizations,** including SACON, WII, and ZSI.
- The **report extensively employs data from over 30 million observations** on eBird by more than 30,000 birdwatchers.
- The **report assesses distribution range size, abundance trends over the long term and since 2015**, and information from **the IUCN Red List to categorize Indian species into**
  - Low,
  - Moderate, and
  - High Conservation Priority tiers.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE 2023 REPORT:

- **Decline:** The report highlights a notable decrease in India's bird populations, signifying a subtle, gradual shift in their numbers over time.
- **High Conservation Priority:** Surprisingly, numerous species assumed to be common and widespread have emerged as High Conservation Priority due to a continuous decline in their abundance following substantial reductions in their numbers.
- **Migratory Birds:** The report notes a 50% reduction in the count of long-distance migrant birds, with those that breed in the Arctic but winter in India experiencing an alarming 80% decline.
- **Overall Analysis:**
  - Decrease observed in raptors, migratory shorebirds, and ducks.
  - Increase seen in Indian Peafowl and Asian Koel populations.

MAJOR THREATS TO INDIAN BIRDS:

- **Temperature Rise:** The global average temperature has surged by over 1 degree Celsius since pre-industrial times, adversely impacting not only humans but also avian life.
- **Climate Change:** Bird reproduction and survival suffer due to disturbances in species interactions caused by phenological mismatches, wherein the timing of annual events like breeding, nesting, and migration becomes asynchronous.

- **Mismatched Seasons:** This imbalance occurs between birds and their prey, potentially reducing reproduction and survival rates and leading to detrimental competition.
- **Adaptive Changes:** Escalating temperatures prompt sedentary birds to undergo rapid adaptive transformations.
  - **For instance,** Amazonian birds have shed body weight over five decades to enhance heat dissipation.
- **Dangerous Interactions:** Climate change triggers novel and risky interactions between different species.
  - **For instance,** mosquitoes in Hawaii have ascended to higher altitudes due to rising temperatures.
- **Urbanization:** Urban regions in India with high urbanization rates exhibit fewer bird species, rare species, and insectivorous species.
- **Pollution:** Urban environments introduce noise pollution, compelling birds to alter their singing patterns or abandon habitats. Light pollution can disorient them, leading to building collisions.
- **Food Scarcity:** Urban areas may suffer from inadequate food sources, homogenizing bird communities.
- **Monoculture:** Cultivating a single seed type in a field, known as monoculture, supports fewer bird species than natural forests within the same biome.
- **Human-Induced Deaths:** Collisions with wind turbines result in casualties across a diverse range of species.
  - Transmission lines have also caused fatalities through collisions and electrocutions.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- **Conservation:** Specific bird groups require focused conservation efforts.
- **Systematic Monitoring:** Detailed tracking of small-scale population changes is essential.
- **Research:** Understanding the causes behind declines or increases is crucial for implementing necessary measures and enacting legislation.
- **Community Involvement:** Bird species and habitat conservation necessitate active citizen participation.
- **Awareness and Education:** The general population of India must be educated about the significance and vulnerability of birds and all species.

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CONCLUSION

- Overall, while the report raises concerns about the declining numbers of many bird species in India, it also provides insights into the positive trends and success stories of certain species.
    - This comprehensive assessment serves as a valuable resource for conservation efforts aimed at protecting India's diverse avian populations.

INDIA NEEDS COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Relevant for UPSC GS2: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education

EXPLAINER:The article emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive sexuality education in India, advocating for a holistic approach to educate young individuals about reproductive health, relationships, and consent. Such education is vital for promoting informed choices and fostering a healthier understanding of sexuality.

CONTEXT:

- In a society grappling with distressing incidents of child abuse and sexual assault, the importance of **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)** cannot be emphasized enough.
- Recent events in India underscore the urgent need to safeguard youth and provide them with knowledge to comprehend their bodies, relationships, and consent.

PRESENT LANDSCAPE AND CHALLENGES:

- Alarming child abuse incidents have come to the forefront in India.
  - The **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** reported an alarming 51,863 cases under The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act in 2021, with 64% involving sexual assault.
- Dealing with this distressing issue requires an effective solution that not only addresses the immediate crisis but also tackles its root causes.
  - Comprehensive Sexuality Education offers a means to achieve this.
- However, the **integration of CSE in India has faced obstacles**.
  - Certain sections of society and some State governments have shown reluctance to implement comprehensive sexuality education due to concerns of sexualizing children and deviating from traditional values.
- **Such reservations have led to dilution or discontinuation of existing programs**, perpetuating a cycle of misinformation and hindering informed decisions about sexual health among youth.

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UNDERSTANDING CONSENT AND THE EDUCATION IMPERATIVE:

- Amid these challenges, understanding sexual consent becomes pivotal in comprehensive sexuality education.
  - Consent encompasses more than preventing violation; it nurtures healthy relationships.
- Amid discussions on cases under the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act**, several High Courts, including the Madras, Delhi, and Meghalaya High Courts, have highlighted the criminalization of consensual adolescent relationships.
  - This has prompted calls to reconsider the age of consent.
- Despite legal discussions, the concerning reality remains that numerous Indian teenagers lack awareness of sexual consent.
- A study by the Tinder dating app underscores this gap, revealing that over 64% of young Mumbaikars struggle with giving, seeking, or retracting consent within the context of dating.
- Addressing this gap necessitates not just linguistic comprehension but a cultural shift in how consent is understood and practiced.

EXPLAINER:The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act is a legal framework in India designed to address and prevent sexual offenses against children, providing special provisions and procedures for their protection and justice. It emphasizes the importance of safeguarding minors from sexual exploitation and ensuring their well-being.

COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

- CSE encompasses more than legal frameworks; it embraces holistic well-being, dignity, and gender norms.
- The **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** emphasizes that access to CSE is a fundamental human right that empowers youth to protect their health and dignity.
- UN global guidance advocates commencing comprehensive sexuality education from five years of age, integrating vital lessons about bodies, emotions, consent, and strategies to address violence and abuse.
- **Studies highlight the profound impact of comprehensive sexuality education**.
  - Informed young individuals are more likely to engage in sexual activity responsibly and possess a better understanding of their rights and sexuality.

- In contrast, programs solely advocating abstinence have proven ineffective in achieving these outcomes.

EXPLAINER: The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is a UN agency dedicated to advancing sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, and population-related issues worldwide. It promotes sustainable development and supports programs that empower individuals and communities to make informed choices about their health and well-being.

ADDRESSING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND INEQUALITY

- **Comprehensive sexuality education holds potential to address pervasive issues** like intimate partner violence and gender inequality.
- **UNFPA's Operational Guidance underscores the need to incorporate monitoring** and evaluation components into CSE programs, considering factors such as inequality, gender norms, and power dynamics in intimate relationships.
- By integrating these vital elements, CSE becomes a tool to reshape societal norms and promote healthier relationships.

CHALLENGES AND THE PATH FORWARD

- Implementing effective CSE is not devoid of challenges.
    - Building educators' capacity to deliver accurate and non-judgmental information is crucial.
- Reports also highlight teachers' lack of knowledge in discussing diverse topics within existing programs.

ROLE OF STATE GOVERNMENTS:

- **In India, State governments hold responsibility for sexual education,** allowing them to develop innovative curricula within the UNFPA's framework.
- As custodians of the education system, State governments wield the power to shape the future by prioritizing comprehensive sexuality education.

CONCLUSION:

- Comprehensive Sexuality Education emerges as a beacon of hope in combating child abuse and sexual assault.
    - By embracing CSE, India can empower its youth with knowledge, understanding, and skills to make informed decisions about their sexual health, relationships, and consent.
- Bridging the gap between legal frameworks and comprehensive education is crucial as it equips young individuals to responsibly navigate their sexual lives and contribute positively to society.

AT DELHI SUMMIT, DEMONSTRATE CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

Relevant for UPSC GS3: Climate change

EXPLAINER:*The article urges participants at the Delhi Summit to showcase climate leadership by addressing pressing environmental challenges and committing to sustainable solutions. This event serves as a platform to prioritize global cooperation and implement effective measures for a greener future.*

BACKGROUND:

- **The G-20 member nations collectively produce the majority of the world's fossil fuels** and contribute the most to global greenhouse gas emissions.
- Many of them have committed to achieving **"net-zero" emissions** and reducing fossil fuel consumption.
- It is crucial for the G-20 to act as a unified entity to promote shared climate ambitions through cooperation, coordination, and competitiveness.
- Recent developments show

What is the G20?

The Group of 20 is made up of 19 of the world's biggest economies, as well as the European Union. It formed in 1999 to discuss policy matters and financial stability.

ARGENTINA AUSTRALIA BRAZIL CANADA CHINA FRANCE

GERMANY INDIA INDONESIA ITALY JAPAN MEXICO

RUSSIA SAUDI ARABIA SOUTH AFRICA SOUTH KOREA TURKEY UK

These countries account for **85%** of global GDP

US EU

2/3 of the world's population is from these countries

that **G-20 nations have exhibited some dedication to transitioning towards clean energy:** renewable energy sources accounted for 29% of their energy mix in 2021, a rise from 19% in 2010.

- India, the world's third-largest renewable energy producer, has made significant advancements in this realm over the last decade and aims to increase **renewable energy to 50% of total energy output by 2030.**
- Given increasing demand and the depletion of the world's carbon budget at a faster rate than anticipated, governments must accelerate their transition efforts.

KEY ASPECTS OF CLIMATE LEADERSHIP:

- **Enhancing Governance Structures:**
  - G-20 countries should improve their governance structures at both national and local levels to ensure an equitable transition to clean energy.
    - To ensure inclusivity and fairness throughout the transition, governments need to establish clear governance frameworks that minimize compartmentalization.
  - This involves defining roles and responsibilities across ministries and government levels to develop effective delivery strategies that attract investments.
  - Progress indicators should extend beyond traditional measures, encompassing aspects like net job creation, community resilience, inclusivity, and accessibility.
  - To enhance coordination in energy transition efforts, G-20 nations can establish multi-ministerial task forces or collaborations between governmental and non-governmental entities.
  - Practical frameworks, roadmaps, or action plans can aid other G-20 members in expediting their energy transitions.
- **Facilitating Decarbonization:**
  - The **G-20 should view the transition as an opportunity to diversify member** economies, ensuring long-term economic stability, livelihoods, and revenue sources, as acknowledged by the Indian G-20 chair.
  - Collaborative commitment to green public procurement can accelerate the decarbonization of industries like steel and cement.
  - Effective collaboration within and among G-20 countries is crucial for a comprehensive and successful reform of public procurement.
- **International Financial Institutions:**
  - Global financial institutions should synchronize their investments and risk-taking to rapidly deploy substantial renewable energy and grid infrastructure.

- ○ This coordination will also promote low-carbon industrial innovations and energy efficiency.
- ○ Given that **G-20 countries account for 90% of global steel production and 80% of steel consumption**, they play a pivotal role in boosting low-carbon steel production.
- ○ Encouraging investments in green steel transition in emerging economies requires explicit mandates for international financial institutions, including multilateral development banks and climate financing bodies.
- **Transparency Imperative:**
  - ○ G-20 should lead in streamlining international efforts for equitable energy transitions.
  - ○ The G-20 Energy Transitions and Sustainable Finance Working Groups, along with the **Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JET-Ps),** should enhance openness and accountability.
  - ○ Encouraging fossil fuel-producing nations to transparently disclose their plans and projects related to oil, gas, and coal production, and aligning them with national and global climate goals, are essential.

WHAT LIES AHEAD?

- The G-20 summit offers an important opportunity for attending Heads of State and Government to adopt a strong leader's declaration committing to a shared climate change agenda.
- Recent events have underscored the destructive impacts of climate change.
  - ○ Alone, no nation can effectively combat industrial decarbonization, universal renewable energy deployment, and an inclusive and equitable transformation.
- Governments must effectively monitor green public procurement; establish mandates for low-carbon procurement, train procurement officials, and set time-bound goals to fully harness the potential of this approach.

THE ELECTION COMMISSION — AUTONOMY IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Relevant for UPSC GS2: Powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies

EXPLAINER:*The article discusses the autonomy of the Election Commission, raising concerns about its independence and credibility in the face of political influences. It underscores the importance of safeguarding the electoral process and preserving the institution's impartiality for a robust democracy.*

CONTEXT:

- Disagreements between the government and the judiciary have recently arisen regarding the appointment of the **Election Commission of India (ECI),** marking a new flashpoint in their relationship.

BACKGROUND:

- In a significant move, the Supreme Court of India directed that the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (EC)** be selected by the President of India.
- This decision follows the recommendations of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha or the leader of the largest Opposition party, and the **Chief Justice of India (CJI).**
- This constitutional bench ruling aimed to bolster the ECI's position and authority.

EXPLAINER:*The Election Commission of India (ECI) is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for organizing and overseeing elections in the country, ensuring fair and transparent electoral processes. It plays a pivotal role in upholding democratic principles and maintaining the integrity of elections.*

SIGNIFICANCE OF SUPREME COURT DECISION:

- The unanimous verdict of the five-judge Bench adds substantial weight to its importance.
- **Article 324 of the Constitution** necessitates parliamentary legislation for such appointments.

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- Previously, the senior executives of the ECI were appointed by the President based on the federal government's recommendations.

GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE:

- The current administration has introduced a Bill in the Rajya Sabha, seeking to overturn the Supreme Court's ruling.
- **This proposed Bill advocates for the replacement of the Chief Justice of India** with a high-powered selection committee.
- This committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, includes the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister selected by the Prime Minister.
- **The government's intention is to assert more influence over the nominations of crucial election officials,** which could potentially strengthen its control over the institution.
- **Historical experiences and studies suggest that incumbent governments**, particularly those with authoritarian tendencies, often strive to influence such appointments.

CONCERNS REGARDING THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS:

- **Since the time of the Constituent Assembly debates**, the selection procedure for the CEC and ECs has been widely discussed in political and policy circles, with extensive literature written on the topic.
- **During the Constituent Assembly discussions,** there were suggestions to subject the nomination of the CEC to confirmation by a two-thirds majority in a joint session of both Houses of Parliament.
- Nonetheless, the **responsibility for enacting appropriate legislation** on this matter was left to the Parliament.
- The **recommended committee would comprise the Lok Sabha Speaker**, the Leaders of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, the Law Minister, the Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairperson, and a Supreme Court judge recommended by the CJI.

CONCLUSION:

- Through the current Bill, the government aims to increase its influence over the ECI, possibly leading to concerns about the deterioration of democracy.
- The general public perceives the ECI as a dependable, accountable, and reliable institution, although it's unclear whether this perception is linked to election-related processes, speeches, rolls, or other aspects of electoral conduct.
- Despite this, the current administration continues to emphasize the independence of the ECI as an institution.

CENTRE ANNOUNCES UP TO RS 50 LAKH GRANT FOR TECHNICAL TEXTILES STARTUPS

EXPLAINER:*The government announces grants of up to Rs 50 lakh for startups in the field of technical textiles, aiming to foster innovation and growth in this specialized sector. This initiative encourages entrepreneurship and technological advancements in the field of textiles with a focus on functional applications.*

CONTEXT:

- The **Union Ministry of Textiles has recently introduced the guidelines for the GREAT scheme.**

ABOUT THE GREAT SCHEME:

- The **Grant for Research and Entrepreneurship across Aspiring Innovators in Technical Textiles (GREAT) Scheme** has been designed to aid individuals and companies in transforming prototypes into technologies and products, with a focus on facilitating commercialization.
- **Objective:** The scheme aims to invigorate the growth of the technical textiles startup landscape in India, particularly in specialized segments like biodegradable and sustainable textiles, high-performance and specialty fibers, and smart textiles.
- **Funding:**
  - Under this initiative, a grant-in-aid of up to Rs 50 lakh will be extended over a maximum period of 18 months.
  - Additionally, the Ministry of Textiles will provide 10% of the total grant-in-aid to incubators.
  - Incubatees are only required to contribute a minimum of 10%.
- Prominent incubators such as IITs, NITs, Textiles Research Associations, and Centres of Excellence are instrumental in driving this effort.
- The Ministry of Textiles has also greenlit 26 institutes for upgrading their laboratory infrastructure and training trainers in technical textile applications.
- This scheme is aligned with the National Technical Textiles Mission.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL TECHNICAL TEXTILES MISSION (NTTM):

- **Launched to augment the prevalence of technical textiles in India**, leveraging the sector's remarkable growth rate.
- The mission's primary goal is to establish India as a global frontrunner in the realm of Technical Textiles.

- The **mission encompasses four key components:**
  - Research, Innovation, and Development;
  - Promotion and Market Development;
  - Export Promotion;
  - Education, Training, and Skill Development.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Textiles.
- **Implementation:** It has been approved with an implementation period of four years, starting from FY 2020-21 till FY 2023-24.

CROSS THE BOULDERS IN THE INDUS WATERS TREATY

> **Relevant for UPSC GS2: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India**

EXPLAINER:The article discusses challenges related to navigating across boulders in the context of the Indus Waters Treaty, highlighting the complexities of water distribution between countries sharing the Indus river. It emphasizes the need for cooperative solutions to address issues arising from the treaty.

CONTEXT:

- The **IndusWaters Treaty (IWT), mediated by the World Bank**, has once again become a subject of disagreement between India and Pakistan, with its core principle focusing on equitable allocation rather than substantial harm.

ABOUT OF IWT:

The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)

- The distribution of waters of the Indus and its tributaries between India and Pakistan is governed by the Indus Water Treaty (IWT).
- Was signed on Sept 19, 1960, between India, Pakistan and a representative of World Bank after nine years of negotiations.
- Partition of India cut across the Indus river basin, which has the Indus river, plus five of its main tributaries.

Western rivers
Chenab, Jhelum, Indus

India's rights over these rivers: Limited — can set up certain irrigation, run-of-the-river power plants, very limited storage, domestic and non-consumptive use, all subject to conditions
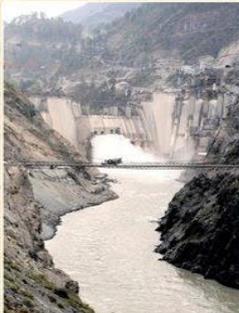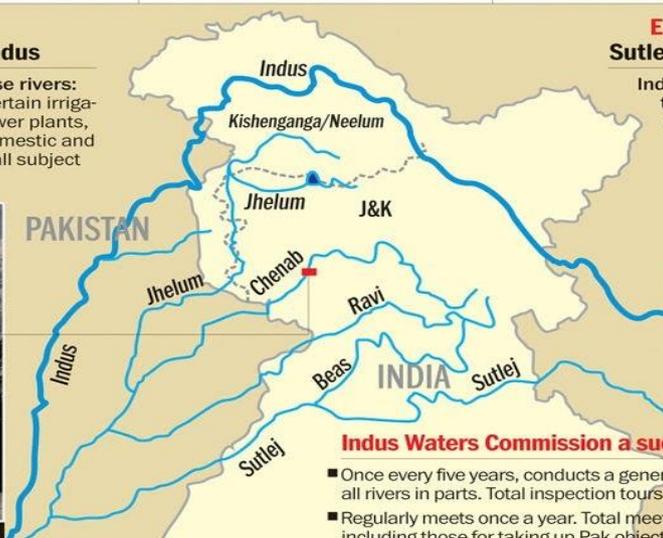
Eastern rivers
Sutlej, Beas, Ravi

India's rights over these rivers: All exclusive rights lie with India.

Indus Waters Commission a success story
- Once every five years, conducts a general inspection of all rivers in parts. Total inspection tours so far: Over 100
- Regularly meets once a year. Total meetings thus far, including those for taking up Pak objections: Over 100

Baglihar dam on Chenab

- **Key Aspects of IWT:**
  - **Water Allocation:**

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- The treaty outlines the distribution of water from the six rivers within the Indus River System between India and Pakistan.
- The **three western rivers**, namely Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum, are allocated for unrestricted use by Pakistan, with certain exceptions for non-consumptive, agricultural, and domestic purposes by India.
- The **three eastern rivers**, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej, are allotted for unrestricted use by India. This arrangement results in 80% of water going to Pakistan and the remaining 20% for India's use.
  - **Permanent Indus Commission:**
    - IWT mandates the establishment of a Permanent Indus Commission with permanent commissioners from both countries.
    - According to the treaty, this commission must meet at least once annually.
  - **River Rights:**
    - While Pakistan holds rights over Jhelum, Chenab, and Indus waters, **Annexure C of IWT permits** certain agricultural uses for India.
    - **Annexure D allows India to construct 'run of the river'** hydropower projects, which don't require the storage of water.
  - **Dispute Resolution Framework:**
    - **Article IX of IWT provides a three-stage dispute resolution** process.
      - Disagreements can be resolved at the Permanent Commission level, or escalated to the inter-government level.
    - If disputes persist, either party can seek the **World Bank's appointment of a Neutral Expert (NE)** to make a decision.
      - In cases of dissatisfaction with the NE's ruling or disputes regarding the treaty's interpretation, the matter can be referred to a Court of Arbitration.

HISTORICAL DISPUTES: A RECAP

- The ongoing contention traces back over a decade when **Pakistan raised concerns about the Kishanganga project in 2006,** followed by objections to the Ratle project in 2012.
- The **Kishanganga issue reached the Court of Arbitration (CoA) in 2010.**
  - The 2013 CoA verdict granted India the right to divert water from the Kishanganga River for power generation, with conditions to maintain a minimum water flow.
  - This timeline underscores the intricate nature of resolving disputes within a treaty framework.

EXPLAINER:The Court of Arbitration (CoA) is a legal institution that resolves disputes through impartial decisions made by a panel of experts. It serves as a platform for settling conflicts outside of traditional courts, focusing on fair and specialized arbitration processes.

THE WORLD BANK'S INVOLVEMENT

- **Despite negotiations led by both countries' Indus Water Commissioners**, unresolved issues regarding spillway configuration persisted.
- Pakistan turned to the World Bank, alleging India's actions violated the IWT and the CoA's ruling.
    - In response, the World Bank suspended work on the Kishanganga and **Ratle projects,** encouraging alternative dispute resolution methods.
- This external intervention highlights the significance of third-party mediation for disputes of international consequence.

KISHANGANGA HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT:

- The Kishanganga project, situated north of Bandipore, Jammu and Kashmir, is a run-of-the-river project featuring a concrete-face rock-fill dam.
- It diverts water from Kishanganga River to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin and has a capacity of 330 MW.
- Construction began in 2007, with Pakistan expressing concerns about its impact on the **Neelum River (Kishanganga in India).**
- The 2013 Hague CoA ruling allowed India to divert water with certain conditions.

LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AND INDIA'S APPROACH:

- In 2016, Pakistan sought a Court of Arbitration, while India favored a neutral expert.
    - Legal proceedings highlighted the complexity of the case.
- In 2023, the **Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)** asserted jurisdiction unanimously.
    - India, disputing the process's legitimacy, refrained from participating, showcasing the intricacies of diplomatic actions within international law.

CHARTING A PATH TO AGREEMENT: REVISITING IWT

- Amid challenges, suggestions emerge to redefine IWT to incorporate principles like **"equitable and reasonable utilization" and the "no harm rule."**
- Achieving these changes requires a conducive diplomatic atmosphere and restored mutual trust, which have waned due to various factors.
- This shift in the treaty reflects an evolving comprehension of the relationship between development and ecological preservation.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

- To find a viable solution, experts recommend involving local stakeholders and specialists in negotiations over shared water resources.
- A collaborative committee with technical experts, climate scientists, and water management professionals from both countries could foster deeper understanding of the complex challenges in the issue.
- This multi-faceted approach underscores the need for comprehensive insights for multifaceted issues.

UTILIZING UNEXPLORED MECHANISMS: ARTICLE VII AND COMMON GOALS

- **Article VII of IWT introduces cooperation mechanisms** that remain untapped. Recognizing their mutual interest in the Indus River System's comprehensive development, India and Pakistan must transcend existing disputes and cultivate a collaborative spirit.
- This provision offers a way to promote cooperation and redefine the dialogue around shared water resources.

ADAPTING TO CHANGING REALITIES

- As the IWT was conceived over six decades ago, its relevance in today's context prompts discussions about potential amendments.
- However, changes require bilateral consensus and trust-building, as unilateral modifications are limited.
  - This adaptable approach acknowledges shifting dynamics and flexible frameworks.

CONCLUSION

- The **intricate narrative of the Indus Waters Treaty continues to shape India-Pakistan relations**, highlighting the challenges of navigating this complex terrain.
- Overcoming these hurdles requires legal expertise as well as a commitment to mutual understanding, cooperation, and shared progress.
- As both nations strive to surmount these challenges, they stand at a crucial juncture in their pursuit of collaborative water resource management.
- By embracing evolving challenges and opportunities, India and Pakistan can reshape their relationship on the foundation of shared resources and harmonious development.

DEADLINE FOR THESE WAGE PAYMENTS USING AADHAAR-BASED PAYMENT SYSTEM (ABPS) EXTENDED TO THIS DATE

EXPLAINER:*The deadline for making wage payments using the Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS) has been extended to a specified date, allowing more time for implementing this payment method. This extension aims to facilitate the transition to ABPS for wage disbursement and streamline financial processes.*

CONTEXT:

- The conclusion of the fourth extension for mandatory payments through the **Aadhaar-based wage system (ABPS)** for **MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act)** workers is imminent.
- A **non-governmental organization (NGO)** has reported that approximately **1.2 crore individuals across the top 5 states -** Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan - will not receive their wages through this method due to their accounts not being enabled for the new system.

POSITION ON PAYMENT FOR MGNREGA WORKERS:

- Among the **leading five states with active MGNREGA workers**, namely U.P., Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, a significant portion of 1.2 crore workers will no longer qualify for payments due to the absence of ABPS-enabled accounts.
- In Assam, with over 63 lakhs workers, 61.2% are ineligible, while in Nagaland, nearly 80% of the 6 lakhs beneficiaries lack an ABPS account.

ABOUT THE AADHAAR-BASED WAGE SYSTEM (ABPS):

- **ABPS employs the unique 12-digit Aadhaar number as the financial address** for workers.
- National Payments Corporation of India established ABPS as a gateway to facilitate government departments and agencies in transferring funds to beneficiaries' Aadhaar-enabled bank accounts.
- **Objective:** The fundamental concept of ABPS revolves around using a person's Aadhaar number as their financial address.
- Instead of providing various account details for bank transfers, individuals only need to share their Aadhaar number, streamlining the process significantly.

- **For ABPS, a worker's Aadhaar details must be linked to their job card** and bank account.
- Aadhaar information must also be linked with the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).**
- Lastly, the **bank's institutional identification number (IIN)** should be mapped with the NPCI database.

ADVANTAGES:

- **Enhanced Financial Inclusion:** ABPS contributes to financial inclusion objectives, facilitating potential financial restructuring of subsidy management programs.
- **Reduced Delays:** ABPS eliminates unnecessary delays, multiple channels, and paperwork present in the existing system, simplifying the process and ensuring timely transfers of benefits and subsidies directly into Aadhaar-enabled bank accounts.
- **Account Efficiency:** Individuals do not require multiple bank accounts for receiving benefits and subsidies from various social welfare schemes.
- **Reduced Fund Misuse:** APBS transfers effectively curb fake beneficiaries and duplicates, minimizing the diversion of funds to unintended recipients.
- **ABPS, along with NACH**, contributes to the government's goal of promoting digital financial inclusion.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES:

- **Misdirected Payments and Rejections:** Challenges extend beyond diverted payments in the Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS), encompassing rejected payments that impact **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** recipients.
- **Consent Dilemma:** Mandating APBS for the economically disadvantaged without explicit consent raises ethical concerns, especially for marginalized beneficiaries.
- **Selective Induction Criteria:** NPCI and UIDAI suggest that Aadhaar-seeded account induction should be based on explicit customer requests, safeguarding educated middle-class individuals.
- **Coercive Implementation for the Underprivileged:** Issues arise due to lack of consent, improper mapping, and symbolic consent, leading to APBS complications and the misdirection of subsidies and pensions.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL AUTOMATED CLEARING HOUSE (NACH):

- The **National Automated Clearing House (NACH)** serves as an online platform streamlining high-volume electronic transactions for banks, corporations, financial institutions, and the government.

- **Established by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI),** NACH is particularly beneficial for banks dealing with bulk and recurring transactions.
- **NACH facilitates the distribution of subsidies, dividends, salaries, pensions,** as well as collection of payments for utilities, loans, investments, insurance premiums, etc.
- **NACH encompasses ECS Credit and ECS Debit**, along with local, regional, and national ECS variations.

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