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Weekly Update (24th July - 31st July 2023)

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE 'FREE MOVEMENT REGIME' ALONG THE INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER

Why is it in the news?

- I) The illegal migration of tribal Kuki-Chin people into India from Myanmar is one of the key issues in the ongoing ethnic conflict between the Meiteis and Kukis in Manipur.
- II) While the majority Meiteis have accused these illegal migrants and the alleged "narco-terror network" along the Indo-Myanmar Border (IMB) of fomenting trouble in the state, the Kukis have blamed the Meiteis and the current Chief Minister, a Meitei himself, of using making this a pretext for "ethnic cleansing".
- III) Hence, questions have been raised on the Free Movement Regime (FMR) that facilitates migration across the IMB.

What is the Free Movement Regime on the IMB?

- I) The border between India and Myanmar runs for 1,643 km in the four states of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. The FMR is a mutually agreed arrangement between the two countries that allows tribes living along the border on either side to travel up to 16 km inside the other country without a visa.
- II) The FMR was implemented in 2018 as part of the Narendra Modi government's Act East policy at a time when diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar were on the upswing. In fact, the FMR was to be put in place in 2017 itself, but was deferred due to the Rohingya refugee crisis that erupted that August.

Why was such a regime conceptualised?

- I) India's borders with both Bangladesh and Myanmar are complex. The border between India and Myanmar was demarcated by the British in 1826, without seeking the opinion of the people living in

the region. The border effectively split people of the same ethnicity and culture into two nations without their consent. Even the current IMB is a reflection of the line drawn by the British.

- II) People in the region have strong ethnic and familial ties across the border.
 - a) In the Moreh region of Manipur, there are villages where some homes are in Myanmar.
 - b) In Nagaland's Mon district, the border passes through the house of the chief of Longwa village, splitting his very home into two.
- III) Apart from facilitating people-to-people contact, the FMR was supposed to give an impetus to local trade and business. The region has a long history of trans-border trade through customs and border haats.
- IV) Given the low-income economy of the region, such exchanges are vital for the sustenance of local livelihoods. For the border people in Myanmar, towns in India are closer for business, education, and healthcare than those in their own country.

Why is the FMR being discussed critically now?

- I) Although beneficial to local people and helpful in improving Indo-Myanmar ties, the FMR has been criticised for unintentionally aiding illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and gun running.
- II) The Indo-Myanmar border is almost entirely unfenced; in Manipur less than 6 km of the border has been fenced. The border runs through forested and undulating terrain, and is difficult to monitor.
- III) Since the military coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, the ruling junta has launched a campaign of persecution against the Kuki-Chin peoples. This has pushed large numbers of Myanmarese tribals across the country's western border into India, especially into Manipur and Mizoram, where they have sought shelter.
 - a) Mizoram, where a large section of the population has close ethnic and cultural ties with people across the border, has set



up camps for more than 40,000 refugees, despite protests from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

- b) Manipur too has received a chunk of illegal migrants over the past year and a half. A committee set up by the state government to identify such migrants recently put their number at 2,187.

Recently, Manipur Chief Secretary wrote to the Assam Rifles, expressing concern over reports of 718 new infiltrations from Myanmar, and asked the paramilitary force to identify and deport them.

The Manipur government has alleged that village chiefs have been illegally settling migrants from Myanmar in new villages in the hills, leading to deforestation. An eviction drive against these new villages became the flashpoint between Kukis in the hills and the government leading to violence in the state. (The Kuki and Naga peoples live in the hills that surround the Imphal valley, whereas the valley itself is home to the majority Meiteis.)

Is there a problem of drug trafficking or terrorism related to the FMR?

- I) According to a paper, a number of insurgent groups such as the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People's Liberation Army (PLA), the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), and small groups of Kukis and Zomis have built camps in Sagaing Division, Kachin State and Chin State (in Myanmar).
- II) They took shelter there, obtained arms, trained cadres, and, most importantly, engaged in illegal activities such as smuggling drugs and selling weapons to raise funds. This is possible because of the porous borders and frequent misuse of FMR. Therefore, managing and administering the border areas effectively is pertinent for reducing drug trafficking and illegal cross-border movement on unfenced borders, according to the paper.

Should the FMR be removed?

- I) The regime has been reviewed from time to time, and most experts agree that the FMR needs better regulation. As the crisis in Myanmar escalated and the influx of refugees increased, India suspended the FMR in September 2022.
- II) However, revoking FMR entirely may not be favoured by the locals. Villagers seemed to be enjoying dual

citizenships and were entitled to move freely across the border before the outbreak of Covid-19 by virtue of the FMR.

Also, locals in Phek district, Nagaland, stated that the Myanmar villagers preferred to visit the Indian side for education, trade and medical facilities. For them, the nearest Myanmar town is far away.

- III) The Meiteis of Manipur wanted the border to be sealed, locals in Moreh pointed out that some of their ancestral lands were on the Myanmar side, and "complete fencing" was not the best option.
- IV) Hence, due to the changing socio-politico-economic condition in Myanmar and the dynamic demographic profile, illicit activities along with border crimes along the IMB, it is imperative for central government to tackle the issue by pursuing 'killing the snake without breaking the stick' approach."

ISSUE OF STAPLED VISA

Why is it in the news?

- I) Recently, India withdrew its eight-athlete wushu contingent from the Summer World University Games beginning in Chengdu after China issued stapled visas to three athletes from the team who belong to Arunachal Pradesh.
- II) Wushu is the Chinese term for martial arts. Two hundred and twenty-seven Indian athletes are participating in 11 other sports at the games that are held every two years, and are officially known as the FISU World University Games.

What is a stapled visa?

- I) A stapled visa is simply an unstamped piece of paper that is attached by a pin or staples to a page of the passport and can be torn off or detached at will. This is different from a regular visa that is affixed to the passport by the issuing authority and stamped.
- II) China has made it a practice to issue stapled visas to Indian nationals from Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. It says the visas are valid documents, but the Government of India has consistently refused to accept this position.

Why does China do this?

- I) Passports, visas, and other kinds of immigration controls reiterate the idea of a nation-state and its sovereignty which is inalienable and inviolable. A passport is the certificate of its holder's identity and



citizenship. Since nation-states reserve the right to control and regulate who enters or leaves their borders, a passport and visa entitle their holders to travel freely and under legal protection across international borders.

- II) China disputes India's unequivocal and internationally accepted sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh.

It challenges the legal status of the McMahon Line, the boundary between Tibet and British India that was agreed at the Convention Between Great Britain, China, and Tibet at the Simla Convention of 1914. It is this disagreement that lies at the heart of Chinese claims over the position of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and its repeated transgressions into Indian territory.

- III) China claims some 90,000 sq km of Arunachal Pradesh as its territory. It calls the area "Zangnan" in the Chinese language and makes repeated references to "South Tibet". Chinese maps show Arunachal Pradesh as part of China, and sometimes parenthetically refer to it as "so-called Arunachal Pradesh".
- IV) China makes periodic efforts to underline this unilateral claim to Indian territory, and to undermine the sovereignty of India over parts of Indian territory. As part of these efforts, it issues lists of Chinese names for places in Arunachal Pradesh — it has issued three such lists in 2017, 2021, and in April this year — and takes steps such as issuing stapled visas.

ISRAEL PASSES CONTENTIOUS LAW AMID PROTESTS

Why is it in the news?

- I) Passing a key section of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's controversial judicial reform plans, the Israeli Parliament has limited the country's Supreme Court's ability to overturn decisions made by government ministers.
- II) The development has come amid mass protests against the proposed changes across Israel. While critics allege that the sweeping reforms would undermine democracy and fuel institutional corruption, the government and conservatives believe the changes are necessary to restore power to elected representatives instead of "interventionist judges".

What is the new measure that has been passed?

- I) Under the new law, the Supreme Court cannot overrule the national government using the legal standard of "reasonableness" — a concept that judges previously used to strike down decisions made by lawmakers and ministers.
- II) Netanyahu's government has argued that the change would help democracy foster in the country as it gives more power to the elected legislators in comparison to unelected judges. Opponents, however, see it as a move that would help the ultra-right government enact orthodox and illiberal policies without any intervention of the judiciary.

What are the other proposed reforms?

The government first officially announced its plans to make changes in the judicial system back in January. Apart from reasonableness, there are three other major reforms that have been proposed.

- a) First, the government wants to enable the 120-member Parliament, or Knesset, to override any Supreme Court judgement by a simple majority of 61 votes unless those rulings are unanimous.
- b) Second, a law that would give a greater role to lawmakers in the appointment of Supreme Court judges. As of now, a committee comprising professionals, justices and lawmakers elevate judges to the top court. The new change would provide "lawmakers a majority in the committee, with most coming from the right-wing and religiously conservative ruling coalition".
- c) Third, a new measure that would allow ministers to choose their own legal advisors instead of using independent professionals.

Why is Netanyahu's government changing Israel's judicial system?

- I) Conservatives and the right-wing in Israel have for a long time seen the judiciary as a left-leaning impediment to its legislative agenda.
- II) For instance, the ruling ultra-right coalition seeks more power in a bid to overturn court judgements that expanded social reforms to support the LGBTQ community and barred previous governments from constructing Israeli outposts on private Palestinian land. Essentially, they want to rein in the Israeli judiciary, known for its fierce independence, through a series of laws.



G-20'S JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

Why is it in the news?

- I) The G-20 Summit is to be held in September this year. However, Sherpas (senior members of the staff of the heads of state and government) and negotiators at various G-20 ministerial meetings and working groups have been unable to issue a single Joint Communiqué so far.
Instead, given the stand by Russia and China to oppose the paragraphs on the war in Ukraine contained in the statements that have been issued till now, India has been forced to issue a series of "Chairman's Summary and Outcomes Documents" at the various meetings.
- II) These include the three meetings of the all-powerful G-20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, to ones on Tourism, Education, Labour, Crime and Digital Security and even the Space economy.

Why does a Joint Communiqué matter?

- I) Since its inception in 1999, and upgradation to a leader's level summit in 2008, the G-20 grouping of the world's biggest economies has always managed to find a consensus within the countries and issue a joint declaration at the end of every summit.
If that doesn't take place in New Delhi this September, it would be an ignoble first for the grouping, and could even raise questions over whether the G-20 is sustainable in its present form.
- II) After the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, G-8 leaders had suspended Russia, changing the grouping to G-7. However, the G-20 summit in Brisbane, Australia that year managed to issue a joint declaration without mentioning the Crimean conflict, and even managed a "family photo" with all the leaders including Russian President Vladimir Putin.
In 2022, the Indonesian G-20 presidency faced tense moments as the declaration was negotiated until the very last moment of the summit. Mr. Putin didn't attend, and no "family photo" was allowed, but it managed to issue a document.
- III) During its tenure as President, India wishes for the best possible outcome at the G-20 summit, and hence its negotiators on the "Sherpa track", who collate the final document, are putting sustained efforts into ensuring a resolution to the logjam over Ukraine.

Why has the current presidency continued with the 'Bali Paragraphs' in its documents?

- I) Indian officials maintain that a lot of hard work went into the formulation of the "Bali Paragraphs", and therefore they have been imported into India's G-20 documents.
- II) According to them, the Bali formulation can be divided into three parts:
 - a) The references to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions "deploring" Russia's war in Ukraine, which are from the UN and cannot be modified.
 - b) Second, the statement that "most members" strongly condemned the war in Ukraine, refers to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conventions for "qualifiers" where "most" means 62.5% or 12 of the 20 G-20 members.
 - c) Third, the use of Prime Minister Modi's phrase — "This era is not of war" — is universal and doesn't refer to any one country or war. Meanwhile, the additional line that the G-20 is not a forum for security issues, but for economic issues arising from security concerns, like the impact of the Ukraine war on fuel, food and fertilizer prices, is unimpeachable.
- III) The Indian Sherpa Amitabh Kant has also made it clear that developing countries did not create the Ukraine conflict, nor is the war India's priority at the G-20. Instead, India wants to leave the intractable issues for the end, keeping the focus on the induction of the African Union as a member of the G-20, development goals, digital public infrastructure, gender-led empowerment, reform of multilateral development banks and other priorities.

Why are Russia and China opposing?

- I) Russia and China oppose the language on Ukraine, even though it is taken from last year's Bali G-20 document that they signed. Both the countries have now refused to endorse the "Bali Paragraphs" in every G-20 meeting under India's presidency, albeit for different reasons.



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Russia says the language at Bali no longer holds true as it does not include increased U.S. and European military support to Ukraine, or the increased sanctions against Russia that followed.

China has said that it doesn't believe the G-20, essentially an economic forum, should discuss "geopolitical issues" as it hasn't in the past two decades, indicating the Bali statement was an exception.

An added problem could be the footnote by South Africa in the latest meeting of G-20 Labour Ministers, that insists that "Sherpas have not concluded discussions" on the "Bali Paragraphs", indicating that unless this is resolved soon, the issues over Ukraine may see more pushback from other countries to India's hopes for a consensus.

- II) However, Russia, in the last two meetings, appears to have accepted the second, more generic paragraph from Bali that speaks about the problems of conflicts generally, indicating some progress.

What are the chances of a Joint Communiqué now?

- I) With a number of Ministerials including the 3rd Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting done, the Sherpa track will kickstart the draft "Delhi Declaration" negotiations from August 1, and try to nail all the areas of differences including U.S.-China tussles over debt sustainability, privacy issues over digital public infrastructure and so forth, and chip away at the most significant differences over the Ukraine war.
- II) Further, Indian negotiators have been taking suggestions from other countries including its two other "troika" colleagues: Indonesia, which hosted the G-20 in 2022, and Brazil that will host the G-20 in 2024.



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SOCIAL ISSUES

ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES (E-CIGARETTES)

Why is it in the News?

Recently, the Health Ministry has launched an online portal to report violations of the ban on e-cigarettes.

More about the news

- I) The Indian government has banned E-cigarettes under the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Act (PECA) which came into force in 2019.
- II) Despite a formal ban, e-cigarettes and vapes are available at cigarette shops and various online market places. The online portal has been launched to facilitate reporting of violations under the act.

What are Electronic Cigarettes (E-Cigarettes)?

- I) E-cigarettes are electric devices that produce an aerosol by heating a liquid that usually contains nicotine—the addictive drug in regular cigarettes—flavourings, and other chemicals that help to make the aerosol. Users inhale this aerosol into their lungs.
- II) E-cigarettes are also known as “e-cigs,” “e-hookahs,” “mods,” “vape pens,” “vapes,” “tank systems,” and “electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS).”
- III) E-cigarette are less harmful than regular cigarettes as they contain aerosol with fewer toxic chemicals than the deadly Mix of 7000 chemicals in smoke from regular cigarettes.

What are the problems with the E-cigarettes?

- I) The possibilities of the product exploding (incidents have been reported globally) and accidental consumption of the liquid inside the e-cigarette, which leads to death.
- II) They can contain some harmful substances such as nicotine, heavy metals like lead, volatile organic compounds, and cancer-causing agents. According to a study, it can damage immunity, disable cells in the lungs and cause inflammation.
- III) These products are sold without appropriate or sometimes even incorrect health warnings. Most e-

commerce websites sell e-cigarettes as therapeutic products which enable people to quit smoking.

What are the arguments against the Ban?

- I) The cigarettes, chewing tobacco and related products continue to be legal in India, selective banning of e-cigarettes seems to be an arbitrary exercise of executive authority.
- II) “Vaping” or use of e-cigarette is regarded as the **social and cultural phenomenon** that must be regulated and taxed like other “sin goods” to the point of disincentivising their use, instead of a blanket ban.
- III) The basis of e-cigarette promotion is its safety vis-à-vis conventional cigarettes. E-cigarettes are claimed to contain nicotine minus the carcinogens in traditional cigarettes and are promoted as safer alternatives to traditional tobacco product.
- IV) As seen in the case of alcohol ban, **total prohibition** does not work in many countries. The total prohibition promotes underground dark economy for the sin goods.

India's Position

- I) As e-cigarettes contain nicotine and not tobacco, these do not fall within the ambit of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003.
 - a) Section 4 of the COTPA: Prohibition of smoking in public places;
 - b) Section 5: Prohibition of advertisement of cigarettes and other tobacco products;
 - c) Section 6: Prohibition of sale of cigarettes or other tobacco products to anyone below the age of 18 years and in a particular area.
- II) According to a report the compound annual growth rate of the Indian e-cigarette industry was at 63.38 per cent in the period 2013-2019.

Way Forward

The Indian government should impose appropriate restrictions on the sale and advertisement of e-cigarettes, including proper health warnings, in order to plug the existing regulatory vacuum.



GLOBAL REPORT ON THE FOOD CRISES (GRFC) 2023

Why is it in the News?

- I) The Global Report on the Food Crises (GRFC) 2023 released recently estimated that between 691 million and 783 million people in the world suffered from hunger in 2022. While the two pandemic years did not record a growth in food insecurity, the data for 2022 shows levels far higher than pre-pandemic 2019.
- II) This year's report records the historic moments that had an impact on the assessment — a pandemic and ensuing economic crisis, a war (in Ukraine), soaring prices of food, and agricultural inputs.
- III) The GRFC is produced by the Food Security Information Network in support of the Global Network against Food Crises, and involves 16 partners to achieve a joint consensus-based assessment of acute food insecurity in countries.

What is food security?

- I) Food security is defined (from the World Food Summit of 1996) as “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active, and healthy life”.
- II) The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population is based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).

What are the key findings?

- I) The Global Report starts with a qualified assertion that hunger is no longer on an alarming path upwards at the global level, but still far above pre-COVID pandemic levels, and that the world is far off track towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 — Zero Hunger.
- II) It sets the global contexts preceding and during the year under assessment, particularly paying attention to the increasing phenomenon of urbanisation, and its effects on food security.
- III) As per the report, new estimates of FIES confirm that for 2022, no progress was made on food insecurity at the global level. Following a sharp increase from 2019 to 2020, the global prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity remained unchanged for the second year in a row, but remained far above pre-COVID-19-pandemic levels.

In 2022, an estimated 2.4 billion people did not have access to adequate food. This is still 391 million more people than in 2019.

- IV) Global hunger, measured by yet another metric — the prevalence of undernourishment — remained relatively unchanged from 2021 to 2022 but is, again, far above pre-COVID-19-pandemic levels, affecting around 9.2% of the world population in 2022 compared with 7.9% in 2019.
- V) However, stunting, another key metric, defined as the condition of being too short for one's age, among children under five years of age has declined steadily, from 204.2 million in 2000 to 148.1 million in 2022. Simultaneously, child wasting, caused by insufficient nutrient intake or absorption, declined from 54.1 million in 2000 to 45 million in 2022. In terms of children who are overweight or obese, the study indicated a non-significant increase from 5.3% (33 million) in 2000 to 5.6% (37 million) in 2022.
- VI) The revised analysis presented in this year's report shows that almost 3.2 billion people worldwide could not afford a healthy diet in 2020, with a slight improvement in 2021. The cost of a healthy diet increased globally by 6.7% between 2019 and 2021. It also projects that almost 600 million people will be chronically undernourished in 2030.

What are the key drivers of food insecurity?

- I) The report notes the following reasons as being responsible: slowing down due to lockdowns, economic downturns, and other pandemic-related disruptions in 2020 that led to job losses and reduced incomes for many people; the Ukraine war; governmental policies that may not be entirely favourable; and increasing urbanisation that drives changes through the agrifood systems.
- II) The report's comparison of food insecurity among rural, peri-urban and urban populations reveals that global food insecurity is lower in urban areas.

What are the solutions ahead?

- I) Supporting healthier food outlets as key for enabling access to healthy diets. Policy incentives are necessary to encourage shops to sell greater amounts of fresh and minimally processed foods. The report calls for addressing multiple



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infrastructure and regulatory gaps to improve nutritional safety and quality of street food.

- II) The GRFC also suggests building rural infrastructure, including quality rural and feeder roads to connect remote farms and enterprises to main road networks.
- III) Other public investments need to support linkages between (mainly small) farms and small and medium enterprises which include warehousing, cold

storage, dependable electrification, access to digital tools and water supply.

- IV) It underlines several times the role of local governments as fundamental actors in leveraging multilevel and multi-stakeholder mechanisms that have proved effective in implementing essential policies for making healthy diets available and affordable for all.

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

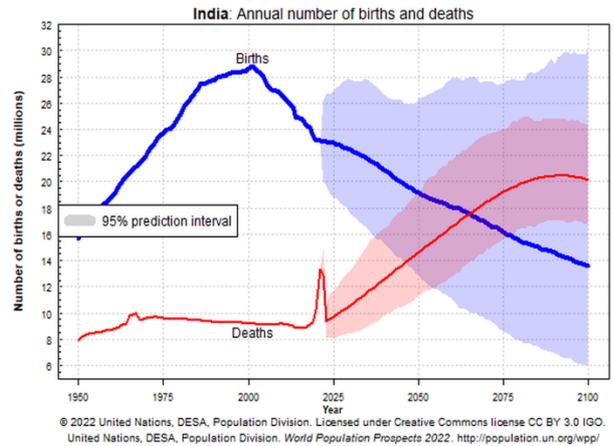
PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS ACT

Why is it in the news?

- I) Recently, the Registration of Birth and Death (RBD) Amendment Bill, 2023 was tabled in the Lok Sabha. The proposed changes will make birth certificates a necessary document to unlock basic services, such as voting, education, and food welfare schemes. The Centre is also likely to mandate Aadhaar during the registration process.
- II) This real-time, dynamic national-level population database will also be linked with other demographic databases: ration cards and passports, voter rolls and the National Population Register for efficient and transparent delivery of public services and benefits. This will avoid a multiplicity of documents to prove date and place of birth in the country.

How are births and deaths currently registered?

- I) The mandatory documentation of births and deaths is governed by the RBD Act passed in 1969 and State Rules framed using the Model Rules, 1999. The Act was implemented to promote uniformity and comparability in the registration of Births and Deaths across the country.
Births, stillbirths and deaths are to be registered within 21 days of occurrence; violating the provisions is a punishable offence, incurring a fine of ₹5.
- II) The Act requires States and Union Territories to maintain individual databases on the Civil Registration System (CRS). CRS comes under the operational control of the Registrar General of India (RGI).
- III) Between 2010 and 2019, the registration level of birth increased from 82.4% to 92.7%, and registered deaths increased from 66.4% to 92% — the increase was attributed to the growing population, greater awareness and the interconnected pathways of welfare services (a birth certificate may be required to get an Aadhaar card, for instance.)



(United Nations - World Population Prospects 2022 report)

- IV) 17 States and UTs use the portal to register births and deaths. Others — including Gujarat, Punjab, New Delhi, and Jammu & Kashmir — either maintain separate portals or update the portal partially.
Some States have digitised and integrated their data with individual State Resident Data Hubs (a storehouse of Aadhaar details, demographic data and photographs.)
- V) The proposed amendments will bring individual databases onto a common platform, a repository that the RGI (which operates under MHA) will maintain.
State-specific data is currently sent as annual statistical reports to the RGI. The Bill, however, compulsorily requires States to share granular, real-time data, by giving the RGI access to the Application Programming Interface.
The central data reservoir will be updated in real-time, without any human interface and independent of location. For instance, an individual will be automatically added to the electoral roll when they turn 18, and removed after their death.
- VI) This database can be used to update other portals, including the National Population Register (the first block for building a pan-India National Register of Citizens), electoral register, Aadhaar, ration card, passport, driving License databases and such other databases at the National level as may be notified through the insertion of a Section 3A in the Act.
- VII) MHA's annual report in 2021 pointed to the need of updating NPR again, first collated in 2010 and



updated in 2015 with Aadhaar, mobile and ration card numbers, in order to incorporate the changes due to birth, death and migration.

NPR figures will also be revised post the Census, and if new amendments are passed, MHA may access data for census enumeration via NPR. The Census Act of 1948 bars sharing any individual's data with the State or Centre, a restriction that the NPR can bypass.

- VIII) The draft Bill will make birth certificates a mainstay of daily life — a 'passport' which assigns individuals a unified marker governing their mobility, allowing access to basic services such as voting, admission into schools and colleges, and registration of marriage.

Any other amendments?

- I) The Bill expands the demographic scope, amending the word "oldest male" to "oldest person" to refer to the individual responsible for providing information.
- II) It also accommodates "non-institutional adoption," "child born to a single parent/unwed mother from her womb" and "orphan, abandoned, or surrendered child in childcare institution".
- III) Individuals or institutions withholding information will incur a penalty of ₹1,000 per birth or death. An amendment to Section 12 states concerned authorities will be required to issue birth and death certificates within one week.
- IV) The proposal also mandates that medical institutions provide a certificate as to the cause of death to the Registrar and a copy to the nearest relative.

Why does India want to change the registration process?

- I) Registering deaths presents a unique challenge due to a lack of monetary incentives and cultural norms, more so for women and infants.

A study examining NFHS-5 data found the likelihood of death registration was significantly lower for females than males; one reason was that women's deaths don't accrue property benefits. Poor compliance creates a data gap, allowing for misguided policies and pushing of people into blind spots.

- II) Two, an updated, timely and accurate database paints a clear picture of a population's needs, estimates trends, identifies the target group for public welfare policies and influences long-term healthcare uses.
- III) The Union Government previously experimented with SERVAM (a Unified Beneficiary Database) which interlinked the NPR, birth and death registration database, the Socio-Economic Caste Census, the PDS, NREGA, pension and LPG —with the objective of avoiding duplications and efficiently targeting beneficiaries.
- IV) The MHA's National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) project, which proposed interlinking 20 population databases as a counter-terrorism measure in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. NATGRID would collate information from passports, PAN cards, NPR, vehicle registration, other databases to offer real-time 360-degree profiles of individuals to Central and State agencies.
- V) States including Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have undertaken real-time governance (Telangana's Aadhaar-voter ID linking exercise resulted in over 20 lakh voters being deleted from the base).

What do experts say?

- I) The highly automated, digitised processes (similar to those proposed under the RBD Act) risk excluding individuals unable to present standard identification documentation, and greater decentralisation leaves people vulnerable to exploitation by those facilitating the registration process. The 2022 survey in Bihar found that CRS staff demanded bribes for providing certificates which are available free of cost.
- II) Moreover, inaccurate data plagues the system; attempts to link Aadhaar to voter ID cards resulted in 55 lakh voters being deleted from the system, and scams have been organised around issuing fake Aadhaar cards; Names of more than five crore workers were found to be missing from the MGNREGS scheme. The NRC, which will tap into the database of NPR under the Citizenship Rules, 2003, left out more than 19 lakh people in Assam during the pilot exercise.
- III) Hence, tying birth and death registrations with other demographic repositories risks widescale exclusions and misuse of data.



THE JAN VISHWAS (AMENDMENT OF PROVISIONS) BILL, 2023

Why is it in the news?

The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, seeks to redefine the regulatory landscape of the country with decriminalisation of minor offences under 42 Acts to reduce compliance burden and promote ease of living and doing business in the country.

What does the Bill propose?

- I) The Jan Vishwas Bill aims to decriminalise around 180 offences across 42 laws governing environment, agriculture, media, industry and trade, publication, and other domains that create barriers to the ease of doing business in the country.
- II) It seeks to completely remove or replace imprisonment clauses with monetary fines, to provide a boost to the business ecosystem and improve the well-being of the public.
- III) The Bill also proposes compounding of offences in some provisions.
- IV) Broadly, the draft proposes the following changes in existing Acts:
 - a) Decriminalising of offences
 - b) The Bill removes all offences and penalties under the Indian Post Office Act, 1898.
 - c) Changes in grievance redressal mechanisms and the appointment of one or more Adjudicating Officers for determining penalties. These officers can conduct inquiries into violations of the respective Acts and even summon individuals for evidence.
 - d) A periodic revision of fines and penalties for various offences in the specified Acts. The Bill proposes an increase of 10% of the minimum amount every three years.

What is the need for such a law?

- I) Micro, small and medium-scale businesses are the backbone of the Indian economy and contribute significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For these enterprises to make a shift to the formal sector and generate jobs and income, there must be effective and efficient business regulations in place that eliminate unnecessary red tape.
- II) Currently, there are 1,536 laws which translate into around 70,000 compliances that govern doing

business in India. These excessive compliances have proved onerous for business enterprises, especially MSMEs.

According to a 2022 report on imprisonment clauses in business laws, among the 69,233 unique compliances that regulate business in India, 26,134 have imprisonment clauses as a penalty for non-compliance. The legislation, rules and regulations enacted by the Union and State governments have over time created barriers to the smooth flow of ideas, organisation, money, entrepreneurship and through them the creation of jobs, wealth and GDP. Further the report added that an average enterprise in the manufacturing sector with more than 150 employees deals with 500-900 compliances a year that cost nearly Rs 12-18 lakh a year. It found that two out of every five (37.8%) compliances carry imprisonment clauses.

- III) The Jan Vishwas Bill envisages decluttering the system and shedding the baggage of archaic and obsolete laws.
- IV) Besides 'decriminalisation', the Bill is also aimed at reducing judicial burden. As per the National Judicial Data Grid, as of July 2023, out of a total of 4.4 crore pending cases, 3.3 crore cases are criminal proceedings.
- V) Hence, the Bill seeks to reduce compliance and remove the fear of imprisonment for minor offences, to give an impetus to businesses and improve ease of doing business and living, thus bolstering 'trust-based governance'.

Which are the key provisions under consideration?

- I) There are a total of 42 laws under the purview of the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2023. These are administered by different Union ministries, including finance, agriculture, commerce, environment, road transport and highways, food production and distribution, and electronics and IT.
- II) Some of the key suggestions in the draft legislation includes:
 - a) The Indian Forest Act, 1927:
 - # Trespassing, permitting cattle to trespass; cutting timber; or causing damage in felling a tree in a reserved forest is a punishable offence with a jail term of up to six months, or a fine up to Rs 500, or both.



- # The Bill removes the clause of imprisonment. Only a fine of up to Rs 500 will be imposed in addition to compensation for damage done to the forest. The Bill also removes the jail term clause for burning trees near a reserved tree.
- b) The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981:
The Bill proposes to replace imprisonment for lapses with heavier penalties. For instance, failure to comply with provisions that bar an industrial unit from operating in an air pollution control area will be liable to pay a penalty of up to Rs 15 lakh. The offence currently attracts a jail term of up to six years along with a monetary penalty.
- c) The Information Technology Act, 2000:
The Bill proposes to remove Section 66A which provides for punishment for sending offensive messages or false information through a communication service. For breach of confidentiality and privacy, the Bill proposes a penalty of Rs 5 lakh. The offence is presently punishable with imprisonment up to two years, with a fine up to Rs 1 lakh, or both.
Disclosing personal information in breach of a lawful contract is punishable with imprisonment of up to three years and/or a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh. The proposed Bill replaces it with a penalty of up to Rs 25 lakh.
- d) The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:
The Bill suggests a penalty of Rs 1 lakh to Rs 15 lakh for inadvertent compliance breaches, such as being unaware of excess discharge of pollutants under Sections 7 and 9 of the Act. The offence currently carries an imprisonment of five years and a fine of Rs 1 lakh.
- e) The Copyright Act, 1957:
The proposed law omits the penalty for making false statements for deceiving or influencing an authority or officer. The offence is presently punishable with imprisonment which may extend to one year, or fine, or both.
- f) The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988:
Under Section 192A, a person using a motor vehicle without a valid permit faces a jail term of up to six months and a fine of Rs 10,000. The Bill proposes the same jail term but omits the compulsion of paying a fine of Rs 10,000.
- g) The Railways Act, 1989:
A person caught begging or selling goods without a permit in a railway carriage or at a railway station is liable for punishment. The Bill removes the punishment clause for beggars. It sets a clause of a jail term of up to one year or a fine of a maximum of Rs 2,000 for illegal hawkers, or both.
- h) The Cinematograph Act, 1952:
Unauthorised tampering of an already certified film will be punishable with up to three years in jail, a fine of up to Rs. 10 lakhs, or both. It also proposes a penalty of up to Rs 10,000 for a person showing an adult movie (A-rated) to a minor.
- i) The Patents Act, 1970:
If a person wrongly claims a patent on an article sold by him, he will be liable to pay a penalty of up to Rs 10 lakh, and a further penalty of Rs 1,000 per day in case of a continuing claim. The offence is presently punishable with a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh.
- j) The Agricultural Produce (Grading & Marking) Act, 1937:
The Bill removes the provision of jail term for unauthorised marking of an article with a grade designation mark and its sale. Instead, it proposes a penalty of Rs 5 lakh.
- k) The Trade Marks Act, 1999:
Falsely representing a trademark as registered is punishable with imprisonment of up to three years, with a fine, or both. The Bill proposes a penalty of Rs 25,000-Rs 1 lakh.
- l) The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006:
For the sale of unsafe food, the Bill proposes imprisonment for three months with a fine of up to Rs 3 lakh. Currently, the jail term for the



offence is not more than six months, while the fine goes up to Rs 1 lakh.

Similarly, for providing misleading or false information, a person can be jailed for up to three months, with a fine extending to two lakhs. The Bill proposes that the offence be punishable by a fine extending to Rs 10 lakh.

m) The High Denomination Bank Notes (Demonetisation) Act, 1978:

The Bill decriminalises offences under the Act, which was used to remove high-value banknotes as legal tender in 1978.

Are there any concerns?

- I) The Bill uniformly substitutes imprisonment clauses with monetary fines or penalties, which according to experts is not a good enough attempt at 'decriminalisation'.
- II) The PRS Research Institute has raised concerns related to the appointment of adjudicating officers under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act and the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. Currently, contraventions of both laws are prosecuted in court only upon a complaint by specified authorities, or by a person giving these authorities 60 days' notice of their intention to file a complaint. The Bill empowers Adjudicating Officers to decide penalties under both Acts, and to file complaints in court under the EP Act. Appeals against their orders lie with the National Green Tribunal. Under both Acts, the officer would be of the rank of Joint Secretary to the central government or above, or a Secretary to the State government. This new process of adjudication raises a few issues. Further, there is significant technical input involved in legal proceedings for offences under the Air Act. These Adjudicating Officers may lack the technical competence necessary to decide all penalties under the Air Act and the EP Act.
- III) Another issue that has been raised is that many offences proposed to be removed in the Bill have nothing to do with its objective of decriminalising to promote ease of doing business— like theft or misappropriation of postal articles.

DEBATE OVER ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN MANIPUR UNDER RULE 267

Why is it in the news?

Recently, Opposition in parliament insisted to invoke Rule 267 of the Rajya Sabha rulebook, to discuss the Manipur issue in the Upper House.

What are the rules for raising a matter in Rajya Sabha?

- I) Both Houses of Parliament function by rules that regulate the procedure and conduct of its business and provide for instruments that can be used by elected representatives to highlight issues of public interest.

In Rajya Sabha, these are known as the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Council of States, in effect since 1964.

- II) If an MP wants to ask questions, initiate or participate in a debate, or raise an issue of public interest, the Rajya Sabha rulebook requires the legislator to first inform the presiding officer— the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

This prior information, called notice, must be submitted in writing to the Secretary-General for the consideration of the Chairman. For example, an MP should give a 15-day prior notice to ask starred or unstarred questions and a three-day advance notice for half-an-hour discussions.

- III) The Secretariat compiles notices moved by individual MPs along with the legislative business and other government agenda into a "list of business," which is then circulated to all Rajya Sabha MPs ahead of the day's proceedings.

- IV) An MP can usually take up a matter or initiate a discussion only if the issue finds a mention in the day's list, as per the rules. However, there are instances when an issue of public importance needs urgent attention. In such instances, the MPs invoke Rule 267 in the Upper House.

What are the provisions of Rule 267?

- I) Rule 267 allows for the suspension of rules in the pre-decided business of the day with the approval of the Chairman to debate an issue of importance. Under the section "suspension of business," the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business define Rule 267 as an instance where "any Member, may,



with the consent of the Chairman, move that any rule may be suspended in its application to a motion related to the business listed before the council of that day and if the motion is carried, the rule in question shall be suspended for the time being.”

- II) An MP must give a notice to the Secretary-General of the House before 10 a.m. on the day they seek suspension of business to raise an urgent matter. It is up to the Chairman to admit the motion for suspension of rules. In case the Chair allows, the Motion is put to vote.
- III) The rule, however, does not apply in cases where specific provisions already exist for the suspension of a rule.
- IV) Notably, Rule 267 is different from the adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha, which allows for an “adjournment of the business of the House to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance,” subject to the Speaker’s approval.

What is the precedence on Rule 267?

- I) Rule 267 has been invoked a total of 11 times since 1990 to debate issues like the Gulf War and corruption. While Shankar Dayal Sharma accepted four notices under Rule 267 between 1990 and 1992, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat admitted three such notices.
- II) Interestingly, the last instance when the Chairman allowed a discussion under Rule 267 was more than seven years ago in 2016, when then Vice-President Hamid Ansari admitted a motion for a debate on demonetisation.
- III) The Rule was invoked three other times under Mr. Ansari’s chairmanship. His successor, Venkaiah Naidu, did not admit a single motion under the Rule when he served as the ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha from 2017 to 2022.

How is Rule 267 different from Rule 176?

- I) The ongoing face-off between members of the Opposition and the Treasury benches in the Upper House is majorly due to differences over the duration of discussion on the ethnic violence in Manipur. The Opposition insists that a discussion on the serious situation in the northeastern State must be held after the suspension of all business of the day.

Members have submitted over 70 notices under Rule 267 in this regard since July 20, but the Chairman has rejected all so far, despite the Opposition citing precedents.

- II) The Government, meanwhile, maintains that it is ready for a short-duration discussion under Rule 176. As the name suggests, debates under Rule 176 are short discussions that do not last for more than two-and-a-half hours. Similar to Rule 267, the Chairman decides if the notice under Rule 176 is admissible. If it is admitted, the Chairman in consultation with the Leader of the Council (or Leader of the House) fixes the date on which the matter may be taken up for discussion.
- III) There is, however, no requirement for a formal motion or voting. The member who has given notice may make a short statement and the Minister shall reply shortly. Any member who has previously intimated to the Chairman may be permitted to take part in the discussion. As per the rules, the Chairman can also prescribe a time limit for speeches “if he thinks fit.”

THE DNA TECHNOLOGY (USE AND APPLICATION) REGULATION BILL 2019

Why is it in the News?

- I) Recently, the government withdrew the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill 2019 from the Lok Sabha, ending a 20-year effort to build a new regulatory framework for the use of DNA fingerprinting technology in the criminal justice system.
- II) The Bill, introduced in Parliament multiple times, faced opposition on grounds of the accuracy of DNA technology, potential threats to individual privacy, and the possibility of abuse.
- III) The present Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in July 2019 and was referred to the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology. The committee submitted its report in February 2021, recommending several changes in the draft.
- IV) But instead of introducing a fresh Bill with changes, the government decided to withdraw it altogether, its decision made easy by the fact that the main provisions of the Bill have already been enacted as part of another law, the Criminal Procedure



(Identification) Act, that was passed by both houses of Parliament last year.

About the DNA Bill

- I) The Bill had three primary objectives.
 - a) First, it sought to set up a DNA profiling board as the regulatory body, one of the functions of which would be to provide accreditation to laboratories authorised to carry out DNA sample tests.
 - b) The Bill also provided for the creation of databases — DNA Data Banks — for storing of DNA information collected from convicts and accused. This database could be indexed and searched for matching samples from crime scenes.
 - c) And third, it sought to facilitate collection of DNA samples from the convicts and accused.
- II) The Bill contained extensive provisions detailing the proposed functioning of this new system, and had checks and balances for preventing abuse or misuse.
- III) The use of DNA technology for identification purposes is already prevalent in India. In the criminal justice system, DNA fingerprinting is often relied upon, and is considered valid evidence.
- IV) However, in the absence of a regulatory mechanism, the use of this technology was extremely limited. According to the Department of Biotechnology, about 3,000 DNA tests are carried out every year, which represents just about 2-3 per cent of the potential requirement.

An increase in testing capacity could be extremely important in cases of missing children, about one lakh every year, and identification of unclaimed bodies in disasters and accidents, nearly 40,000 every year.
- V) The new regulatory framework would have also led to the development and adoption of standards and best practices for carrying out DNA tests, and for the storage and maintenance of DNA samples.

What were the objections to the bill?

- I) The primary objections were on grounds of privacy, utility and possibility of misuse. DNA information can be very intrusive, revealing not just identification traits but also many other features that can be liable for misuse.
- II) Critics pushed for inclusion of as many safeguards into the Bill as was possible. Several rounds of discussions, with Members of Parliament, legal experts, law enforcement professionals, activists, and civil society were held. A number of changes were made in the original draft.
- III) In recent years, apprehensions were raised about the possibility of this law being used for racial profiling. It was even argued that the police could not be trusted to seek DNA tests in their investigations. The Parliamentary Standing Committee had objected to the setting up of DNA banks in every state, and suggested that one national DNA bank was sufficient.

Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill

- I) Unable to get the DNA Bill passed in Parliament, the government last year included several of its provisions in the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill that was brought in to replace the Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920.
- II) The provisions related to collection, storage, access and sharing of DNA information, that were part of the DNA Bill, have more or less been included in the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill. This Bill was introduced and passed by both Houses of Parliament within three days in April 2019.
- III) With a 2005 amendment to the Criminal Procedure Code opening the door for the legal use of DNA fingerprinting technologies, and the 2019 Act authorising law enforcement agencies to collect, store and share DNA information under prescribed conditions, the immediate needs for the use of DNA technology in criminal investigations have been taken care of.

Way Forward

Though the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill is passed, what is left out is the creation of the regulatory environment, the development and adoption of standards and best practices in DNA testing, and capacity building in this area through accreditation of more laboratories equipped to handle DNA tests.



PETITION TO BRING POLITICAL PARTIES UNDER RTI ACT

Why is it in the news?

Recently, the Supreme Court agreed to hold a detailed hearing on a bunch of petitions seeking to bring political parties under the ambit of RTI.

About Political parties

- I) A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government. They agree on some policies and programmes for the society with a view to promote the collective good.
- II) Election commission of India (ECI) has categorised three kinds of political parties in the country: National, State/ Regional and Registered / unrecognised Parties.
- III) Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- IV) A party seeking registration under the said Section with the Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Commission in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

What are the arguments in favour of inclusion of political parties under RTI?

- I) Political parties get considerable benefits from the government, including bungalows.
- II) Petitions highlighted that there are instances of corruption and indirect funding to political parties.
- III) Petitions suggest to declare the political parties, registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, a 'Public Authority' under Section 2(h) of the Right to Information Act, 2005, to make them transparent and accountable to the people and curb use of black money in elections.

It also said that a body or entity does not become a political party in the legal sense until the Election Commission under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act registers it. Therefore, this registration lends it the colour of Public Authority.

- IV) Recently, the Central Information Commission said political parties should be brought under purview of RTI Act
- V) The people of India must know the source of expenditure incurred by political parties and by the candidates in the process of election.

What are the arguments against inclusion of political parties under RTI?

- I) Political Parties have argued that opening up to RTI may lead to an undemocratic infringement into their confidential discussions, including their respective attitude to the government and plans to organise agitations against the "wrong policies of the government".
- II) The Union government has also opposed, reasoning that parties cannot be compelled to disclose their internal functioning and financial information under the RTI Act as this would hamper smooth internal working and fester into a weak spot for political rivals with malicious intentions to take advantage of.
- III) It had argued that there were already provisions in the Income Tax Act, 1961, and Representation of the People Act, 1951, demanding "necessary transparency regarding financial aspects of political parties".
- IV) Also, the information about a political body was already in public domain on the website of the Election Commission.

Supreme Court's observations

The Supreme Court said political parties may "have a point" in being concerned that bringing them under the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act may lead to situations where they may be asked to disclose even details such as candidate selection or other deliberations.

SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

What are the general arguments in favour of its inclusion?

- I) Except for the political strategy, other **matters relating to finance and administration need to be made available to public** because political parties are public institutions, receiving money from public.
- II) **Electoral Bonds are not promoting transparency in political funding** as donors remain anonymous to public. Infact, not only funding but **expenditure**



made by political parties, especially during the time of elections should be made public.

- III) Currently in India, there is no ceiling on expenditure incurred by the political parties at the time of elections.
- IV) **Political Parties are already under the RTI Act as they have not challenged the Central Information Commission's verdict of 3rd June 2013** (Political Parties are public authorities under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act); though they have also not complied with the order yet.
- V) **RTI act is a very balanced act.** There is a **section 8(1)** in the act that has ten exemptions within it. If a political party comes under the ambit of RTI act, then this section will **safeguard them from disclosing all types of information.**

What are the general arguments against its inclusion?

- I) **Law needs to be amended:**
 - a) Section 2(h) of RTI act defines public authority as the one which is created by or under the constitution or by the Parliament.
 - b) **Political Parties are formed under the act of Parliament** i.e., under the Representation of People Act, which is **not the same thing as being created by the Parliament.**

Therefore, until and unless the law is changed, it will be difficult to bring political parties under the ambit of RTI act.

- II) Political Parties have **apprehension** that disclosure of information under RTI act may give **advantage to their competitors.**
- III) **Political parties do not want to disclose their internal working as well as their decision-making system.**

Conclusion

- I) Political Parties are the most important organ of the state and like any other department they should also develop systems and processes to document their proceedings.
- II) Political Parties wield immense power to control the government and vital state organs. Thus, a transparency act that applies on all branches of the government can be applied to the institutions that form and control the government taking other factors into account.

CANNABIS MEDICINE PROJECT

Why is it in the news?

- I) Jammu is set to lead India's first Cannabis Medicine Project.
- II) The project is a collaboration between CSIR-IIIM Jammu and a Canadian firm under PPP.

What is its Significance?

- I) After getting all the approvals, the project will be able to produce export quality drugs meant for different kinds of neuropathies, diabetic pains etc.
- II) It has the potential to produce those kinds of medicines which have to be imported from foreign countries.
- III) This kind of project will give an impetus for huge investment in the state.
- IV) Since J&K and Punjab are affected by drug abuse, this kind of project will spread awareness.

About Cannabis

- I) Cannabis is a generic term used to denote the several psychoactive preparations of the plant *Cannabis sativa*. The major psychoactive constituent in cannabis is delta 9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).
- II) The Mexican term 'marijuana' is frequently used in referring to cannabis leaves or other crude plant material in many countries.
- III) Cannabis is by far the most widely cultivated, trafficked and abused illicit drug. Half of all drug seizures worldwide are cannabis seizures.
- IV) About 147 million people, 2.5% of the world population, consume cannabis (annual prevalence) compared with 0.2% consuming cocaine and 0.2% consuming opiates.

Cannabis in India

- I) The central law that deals with cannabis (weed or marijuana) in India is the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.
- II) The NDPS Act prohibits the sale and production of cannabis resin and flowers, but the use of leaves and seeds of the cannabis plant is permitted, with the states having the power to regulate and form the state rules for it.
- III) Odisha is a state in which weed is legal in India and people commonly use 'chillums' to smoke weed within the state's territory. Uttarakhand is the first state in India to allow commercial cultivation of Hemp.



ZERO FIR

Why is it in the news?

In recent incidents of violence and crime in Manipur, the concept of Zero First Information Report (FIR) has come to the forefront.

What is a Zero FIR?

- I) When a police station receives a complaint regarding an alleged offence that has been committed in the jurisdiction of another police station, it registers an FIR and then transfers it to the relevant police station for further investigation.
- II) This is called a Zero FIR. No regular FIR number is given. After receiving the Zero FIR, the relevant police station registers a fresh FIR and starts the investigation.

When was the provision of Zero FIR established?

- I) The provision of Zero FIR came up after the recommendation in the report of the Justice Verma Committee, which was constituted to suggest amendments to the Criminal Law in a bid to provide for faster trial and enhanced punishment for criminals accused of committing sexual assault against women, according to a 2020 circular released by the Puducherry government. The committee was set up after the 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape case.
- II) According to the provision, a Zero FIR can be filed in any Police Station by the victim, irrespective of their residence or the place of occurrence of crime.

What is the purpose of a Zero FIR?

- I) The objective of a Zero FIR is to ensure the victim doesn't have to run from pillar to post to get a police complaint registered.
- II) The provision is meant to provide speedy redressal to the victim so that timely action can be taken after the filing of the FIR.

What is an FIR?

- I) The term first information report (FIR) is not defined in the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973, or in any other law, but in police regulations or rules, information recorded under Section 154 of CrPC is known as First Information Report (FIR).
- II) According to Section 154 ("Information in cognizable cases"), "every information relating to the

commission of a cognizable offence, if given orally to an officer in charge of a police station, shall be reduced to writing by him or under his direction, and be read over to the informant; and every such information, whether given in writing or reduced to writing as aforesaid, shall be signed by the person giving it, and the substance thereof shall be entered in a book to be kept by such officer in such form as the State Government may prescribe". Also, a copy of the information as recorded shall be given forthwith, free of cost, to the informant.

- III) In essence, there are three important elements of an FIR:
 - (a) The information must relate to the commission of a cognizable offence;
 - (b) It should be given in writing or orally to the head of the police station; and
 - (c) It must be written down and signed by the informant, and its key points should be recorded in a daily diary.

SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

I) Cognisable Offences:

- (a) In cognisable offences, an officer can take cognizance of and **arrest a suspect without seeking a court's warrant** to do so, if she has "**reason to believe**" that the person has **committed the offence** and is satisfied that the arrest is necessary on certain enumerated bases.
- (b) Within **24 hours** of the arrest, the officer must have **detention ratified by a judicial magistrate**.
- (c) According to **177th Law Commission Report**, cognisable offences are those that require an immediate arrest.
- (d) Cognizable offences are generally **heinous or serious in nature** such as murder, rape, kidnapping, theft, dowry death etc.
- e) The **FIR is registered only in cognizable crimes**.

II) Non-Cognisable Offences:

- (a) In case of a non-cognizable offence, the police cannot arrest the accused **without a warrant** as well as cannot start an investigation **without the permission of the court**.
- (b) The crimes of forgery, cheating, defamation, public nuisance, etc., fall in the category of non-cognizable crimes.



NATIONAL BROADCASTING DAY 2023

Why is it in the news?

July 23 marked the National Broadcasting Day in India.

More about the news

- I) All India Radio is India's Public Service Broadcaster, the Radio vertical of Prasar Bharati having the motto – 'Bahujan Hitaya: Bahujan Sukhaya'.
- II) The Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC) came into being on July 23, 1927.
- III) The famous Akashvani tune was composed by Indian Jewish refugee Walter Kauffman in 1930.
- IV) In 1936, the Indian State Broadcasting Service became All India Radio (AIR).
- V) The AIR came under the purview of the Department of Information and Broadcasting in British India in 1941.
- VI) In 1957, the Vividh Bharati Services started.
- VII) All India Radio (AIR) has been officially known since 1956 as 'Akashvani'. The name Akashvani (voice or announcement from the skies) was formally adopted by the national broadcaster in 1956. The name was derived from a poem of the same name by Rabindranath Tagore in 1938.
- VIII) Recently, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) has decided to enforce a provision of the law by which the radio vertical of Prasar Bharati will now be called only Akashvani.

What is its Organizational Structure?

- I) The Directorate General, All India Radio functions under Prasar Bharati. Prasar Bharati is a statutory autonomous body established under the Prasar Bharati Act and came into existence in 1997. It is the Public Service Broadcaster of the country under the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting.
- II) AIR has a three-tier system of broadcasting. These three levels of programmes are the National, Regional and Local each having distinct audiences.
- III) Today, Akashvani is one of the world's largest networks. Its programmes from the External Services Division are broadcast in 11 Indian and 16 foreign languages, reaching more than 100 countries.

What is the Significance and Reach of AIR?

- I) Broadcasting Giant: AIR plays a crucial role in disseminating information and entertainment, reaching a vast audience across the country.
- II) Multilingual and Diverse: Broadcasting in 23 languages and 146 dialects, AIR caters to the linguistic and cultural diversity of India.
- III) Accessibility: With around 260 radio stations, AIR serves nearly 92% of the total area, making it accessible to almost the entire population of the country.

RURAL BIAS IN NATIONAL SURVEYS

Why is it in the news?

Recently, the Government of India has appointed a panel under the chairmanship of Pronab Sen, former Chief Statistician of India to review the methodology of the National Statistical Organisation (NSO).

Why is there a need for review?

- I) This happened in the backdrop of articles by Shamika Ravi and Bibek Debroy arguing that the usage of outdated survey methodology by national surveys such as the National Sample Survey (NSS), National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), have systematically underestimated India's development. According to them, this archaic methodology has failed to capture reality in the recent past as the Indian economy has been incredibly dynamic in the last 30 years.
- II) On the other hand, P. C. Mohanan and Amitabh Kundu have reasoned that there is no systematic underestimation of development by these national surveys. Therefore, there is no need for restructuring and overhauling the survey methodology just because it doesn't suit certain narratives of development. However, they accept that there may be errors, which should be minimised. They also advocate the usage of appropriate sample weights to make the national sample adequately representative.

Why is it important?

- I) National level data is a key resource for research, policymaking and development planning, so it is of utmost importance to understand and analyse both claims in the light of existing evidence.



- II) The NFHS data is being conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with the International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS) as the nodal agency.

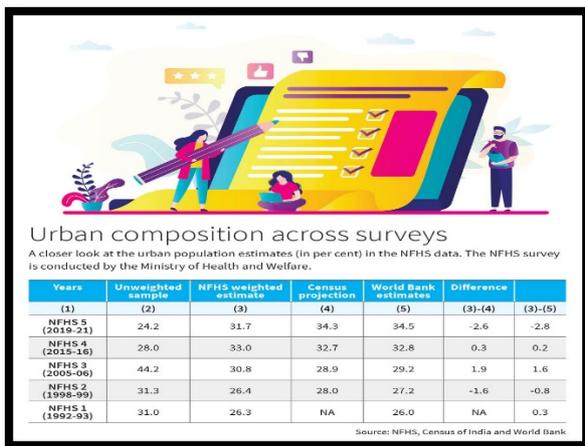
Does the NFHS have a rural bias?

- I) According to Ms. Ravi and Mr. Debroy, one of the ways in which national surveys like the NFHS are underestimating Indian development is through “rural bias in terms of representation”. In other words, the survey methodology, which depends heavily on the last Census data, systematically overestimates the rural population.
- II) However, the examination of five rounds of NFHS data doesn’t show any such systematic bias towards rural population. For instance, if we match the estimates of the urban population by the NFHS with the corresponding World Bank estimates and urban percentage projections from the Census figures of 1991, 2001 and 2011, it is clear that there is no evidence of any systematic rural bias (Table).

systematic relation with either rural or urban bias in estimation.

For example, NFHS-1 with its near correct estimation of urban population had the lowest urban response rate at 94.5%, while NFHS-5 with its underestimation of urban population had the second lowest urban response rate of 95.6%.

- II) Nonetheless, no response or not, there seems to be room for improvement in minimising the errors and the way sample weights are assigned. A cursory glance at the percentages of the urban sample in the unweighted sample indicates that assigning appropriate weights may help to correct the errors to a great extent.
- III) In NFHS 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 the unweighted percentages of urban sample were 31.0%, 31.3%, 44.2%, 28.0% and 24.2% respectively (Table). If the sample weights are appropriately assigned, after taking into account all possible sources of error, then underrepresentation of either rural or urban seems to get corrected to a large extent.



What next?

- I) The Pronab Sen Committee needs to address these concerns to make the sample adequately representative rather than go for a complete overhaul of the survey methodology.
- II) In the name of removing systematic rural bias in survey methodology, which does not seem to exist in the first place, let us not import systematic urban bias rampant in policymaking, planning and financing to national level surveys. Let us remove the bias where it actually exists.

- III) On the other hand, there is evidence of rural population underestimation by NFHS-3. Overestimation of rural population seems to have taken place by NFHS-2 and NFHS-5. Only NFHS-1 and NFHS-4 estimates seem to be really close to World Bank estimates and projections based on Census data. However, these errors seem random rather than systematic.

How can we minimise such errors?

- I) Generally, there are higher percentages of no-response in urban areas compared to rural areas. However, this also does not seem to have any

THE NEW DATA PANEL TO IMPROVE INDIA’S STATISTICS

Why is it in the news?

- I) Recently, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has formed a new Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) to advise on official data generated by the National Statistical Office (NSO).
- II) This panel, chaired by former National Statistical Commission chief and India’s first Chief Statistician Pronab Sen, will replace another committee headed by him that was formed in 2019 to advise on economic data.



What is different about the new committee?

- I) The Standing Committee on Economic Statistics was mandated to review the framework for economic indicators such as those pertaining to the industrial and services sectors, along with labour force statistics.
- II) This meant its focus was limited to reviewing high-frequency data like the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and the Consumer Price Index (CPI), apart from surveys and enumerations like the Economic Census, Annual Survey of Industries and the Periodic Labour Force Survey.
- III) The SCoS, has enhanced terms of reference that enable it to advise the Ministry not just on all existing surveys and data sets, but also identify areas where data gaps exist, suggest ways to fill them and carry out pilot surveys and studies to finetune new approaches for capturing better data. The new committee is also half the size of the 28-member panel that was reviewing economic data.

Why does it matter?

- I) In recent years, the credibility of some of NSO's data, especially the results of various household surveys traditionally carried out by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) have come under a cloud, with even top government officials questioning their approach and outcomes.
- II) In 2019, the government had decided to junk the results of two major NSSO household surveys carried out in 2017-18 — to assess the employment and consumption expenditure levels in Indian households — by claiming they suffered from “data quality issues”.
The actual rationale for withholding the outcome of the last surveys, carried out soon after demonetisation and the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), is believed to be that they revealed distress in households.
A similar dilemma had arisen for policy makers when these surveys, carried out every five years, revealed a not-so-enthralling picture when they were conducted in 2009-10, soon after the global financial crisis. But the government went ahead and published those findings and decided to do fresh surveys in 2011-12 to filter out the ill-effects of the 2008 crisis.
- III) However, after the 2017-18 Surveys were junked, a fresh Household Consumption Expenditure Survey

(HCES) was started only last July and its results may take at least another year to be finalised. In the absence of this data, India's key economic indicators such as retail inflation, GDP or even the extent of poverty, usually revised based on evolving consumption trends, continue to be based on the 2011-12 numbers, and are divorced from contemporary ground realities. It compels the government to rely on proxy data such as Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) account numbers to gauge employment trends and the National Family Health Survey to assess poverty levels.

How can the SCoS bridge the trust deficit surrounding official data?

- I) While it can advise the Statistics Ministry on individual surveys and data sets, the new panel is also expected to help address issues raised “from time to time” on the results and methodology of surveys.
- II) With survey design and features evolving, the panel can seek to sensitise data users about the nuances involved to ensure better interpretation of the numbers. Most importantly, the SCoS, which will help the NSO finalise survey results and, the independent National Statistical Commission that is empowered to assess whether any official data is fit for release, must seek to rebuild the credibility of India's statistics.

ONEWEB TO SET UP INDIA'S FIRST 'SATELLITE NETWORK PORTAL SITE' IN GUJARAT

Why is it in the News?

Recently, the Gujarat government through its Department of Science and Technology (DST) signed a memorandum of understanding with OneWeb India Communications Pvt Ltd for setting up a 'satellite network portal site' — a first for India — at Mehsana in Gujarat.

About the Satellite network portal site and the technology involved

- I) Satellite broadband technology or satellite telephony is not a new concept and with satellite constellations in the low Earth orbit (LEO) gaining traction with StarLink, Kuiper and OneWeb among many



others, the world is increasingly moving towards relying on LEO satellite communications.

- II) LEO satellites operate at an altitude of 500 to 1,200 km, making it ripe for high-speed and low latency — a lower time lag between a user seeking data, and the server sending that data, compared to geostationary Earth orbit positioned satellites.
- III) OneWeb has 648 satellites orbiting at 1,000-1,200 km making 13 orbits per day, covering the entire globe. The satellite network portal (SNP) site will be serving as a signal and data downlink and uplink terminal or base station on the ground, an intermediary for data transmission through satellite tracking antenna systems.
- IV) As per the financial year 2021-2022 annual report of OneWeb, it had nine operational SNP sites serving the live coverage area and at the time, had agreements to build 38 SNPs in 27 different countries.

Investment, Infrastructure, Regulatory Approvals

- I) OneWeb India Communications plans to invest up to Rs 100 crore in this project, which would, according to the Gujarat government, create 500 direct and indirect jobs, including jobs requiring telecom, electronics and instrumentation engineers.
- II) Twenty-five acres of land has been acquired for the project by OneWeb, according to Gujarat government officials, and once the civil infrastructure is in place, technical and scientific testing shall be undertaken on the curvature of the land area and how it will interact with the satellites and the tilt of antennas.
- III) Apart from civil infrastructure, setting up an SNP will also require a slew of regulatory approvals from the

Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) and spectrum allocation from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

OneWeb's growing footprint in India

- I) Though OneWeb is UK-based, India's Bharti Enterprises serves as a major investor and shareholder in the company, and Bharti Enterprises' founder Sunil Bharti Mittal serves as OneWeb's executive chairman.
The annual report of OneWeb for the financial year 2021-22 noted that the company's launch schedule was impacted by geo-political tensions arising from the Russia-Ukraine war and as a result, the six remaining launches required for our first generation of satellites (GEN 1) global coverage were postponed.
- II) This, however, worked in India's favour which ended up launching 36 GEN 1 satellites of OneWeb in March this year from aboard Launch Vehicle Mark-3 from Sriharikota.
- III) For the SNP set-ups in India, OneWeb India Communications will be receiving the capacity from the UK parent company to sell in India. Meanwhile, OneWeb has appointed Hughes Communications India Private Ltd (HCIPL) — a joint venture between Hughes and Bharti Airtel Limited — as its distributor, which will sell the end-user services in India.
- IV) Earlier, HCIPL and OneWeb, in January 2022, announced a strategic six-year Distribution Partner agreement to provide low Earth orbit (LEO) connectivity services across India, to deliver services to enterprises and government with OneWeb capacity, especially in areas outside the reach of fibre connectivity.

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HISTORY

TILAK'S BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Why is it in the news?

- I) July 23 is the birth anniversary of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, whom Mahatma Gandhi called “the Maker of Modern India”, and Jawaharlal Nehru described as the “the Father of the Indian Revolution”. However, the epithet Tilak is most identified with is ‘Lokmanya’, or the beloved of the people, and it also best encapsulates Tilak’s contribution to the Indian freedom struggle in taking the movement to the masses.
- II) Tilak has been criticised for giving the freedom struggle a communal shade — his mass mobilisation programmes like the celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi and Shivaji Jayanti revolved around Hindu festivals and heroes — and for his conservative stand on women’s emancipation and caste reforms.
- III) But in the words of Gandhi, “No man preached the gospel of Swaraj with the consistency and the insistence of Lokmanya”. It was in this unstinting pursuit of swaraj (self-governance, or freedom from foreign rule) that Tilak uttered his famous line: “Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it”.

Tilak’s stand on ‘swaraj’

- I) Tilak was born on July 23, 1856. A lawyer, scholar, and journalist (he ran the newspaper Kesari in Marathi and Maratha in English), Tilak joined the Indian National Congress in 1890. Initially, his stance was not very different from that of the Congress, of demanding reforms and more rights for Indians, but not necessarily a total revolution.
- II) According to AK Bhagwat and GP Pradhan’s Lokmanya Tilak – A Biography, though Tilak used strong language in condemning governmental oppression or injustice he does not seem to have gone beyond the moderate demand of a few constitutional rights. In general, his articles (in Kesari and Maratha) lend support to the Congress demands from 1885 to 1895.

In one crucial respect, Tilak was different from the Congress even in this period. Where the leaders of the Congress spoke in the high-flown 19th century English, imitating Burke and Macaulay, Tilak translated these thoughts in the homely idiom of the people.

- III) However, soon, Tilak grew impatient with the Congress’s moderate approach of prayers and petitions for a more just British rule. Along with Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal, Tilak became part of the Lal Bal Pal troika, which advocated complete freedom from the British as the goal, and the pursuit of unconstitutional means, including violence, to attain that goal. The chasm between the moderates and the extremists widened, and the Congress eventually split in 1907.
- IV) However, Tilak’s famous quote on Swaraj came in 1916, the year he rejoined the Congress after his conviction and imprisonment in a sedition case.

‘Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it’

- I) Tilak was released from a six-year prison term in Mandalay in 1914, and plunged back into political life. By 1916, he had rejoined the Congress, signed the Lucknow Pact with Muhammad Ali Jinnah to find a way for Hindus and Muslims to work together, and founded the All India Home Rule League with GS Khaparde and Annie Besant.
- II) It was in 1916, in Belgaum in Karnataka, that Tilak is believed to have uttered his famous words of Swaraj being a birthright.
- III) Tilak’s statement is a simple but complete counter of such sentiments: he says swaraj, or the right to govern oneself, is fundamental and he as an Indian was born with it. Indians didn’t have to prove they were capable of ruling themselves, or that they would govern themselves better than the British. Freedom was simply an inalienable birthright, and every Indian was entitled to that right. Similar ideas had been laid down in the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789 in France, which said freedom was a “natural and inalienable” right of every man, and that the aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of Man.
- IV) Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had referred to this statement by Tilak in a speech on July 23, 2007, when commemorative coins featuring Tilak were released on his 151st birth anniversary.
- V) Recently, PM Narendra Modi also invoked this remark in 2018. Speaking in his Mann ki Baat programme around Tilak’s birth anniversary, PM Modi said, “Lokmanya Tilak evoked self-confidence among our countrymen and gave the slogan ‘Swaraj is our birthright and I shall have it’. Today is the time to say that good governance is our birthright and we will have it.”



GEOGRAPHY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

HIMACHAL FLOODS: A MAN-MADE DISASTER

Why is it in the news?

- I) Flash floods during this year's monsoon season have caused unprecedented damage to both lives and assets in Himachal Pradesh. The death toll has crossed 150, and the estimated total loss amounts to ₹10,000 crore.
- II) Although climate change is expected to have played a hand in causing the high precipitation leading to these flash floods, human induced disasters resulting from planned development have played a significant role in causing such colossal losses. In the last five years (before 2022), 1,550 people lost their lives and nearly 12,444 houses were damaged.

Is climate change the only reason for the rain and floods?

- I) The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) VI report has clearly stated that the Himalayas and coastal regions of India will be the hardest hit by climate change.
- II) In the Himalayas, there is a noticeable pattern of increased precipitation occurring in shorter periods of time.
The India Meteorological Department data shows that the normal rainfall during this period is expected to be between 720mm and 750 mm. However, in certain instances, it has exceeded 888 mm in 2010 and 926.9 mm in 2018.
- III) This year, the precipitation so far has been attributed to the combined effect of the south-west monsoon with western disturbances. The total rainfall from June to date was 511 mm.

Should the development model be reworked?

- I) Apart from climate change, anthropogenic factors have also significantly contributed to the disaster.
- II) The State's development model initiated after it came into being in 1971 had been successful in

transforming Himachal Pradesh into an exemplar of development for mountain States.

- III) This model, known as the Dr. Parmar model (named after the founding Chief Minister, Dr. Y.S. Parmar), focused on exemplary land reforms, robust state-led investment in social welfare, and a strong emphasis on human resources. These efforts resulted in Himachal Pradesh ranking second in social development indices.

By the 1980s, electricity had reached every household, there was improved connectivity in remote areas through health care centres, many schools came up, there were major advancements in agriculture, and a shift towards the apple and off-season vegetable economies fostered both economic and social vibrancy.

- IV) However, the advent of liberalisation led to significant changes, with the Central government demanding stringent fiscal reforms and mountain States being forced to generate their own resources for fiscal management.
- V) The exploitation of natural resources, including forests, water, tourism, and cement production, became a major focus for development. This led to the rapid construction of hydropower projects, often causing damage to rivers and their ecosystems, widening of roads without proper geological and engineering assessments, expansion of cement plants altering land use patterns, and a shift in agricultural practices to cash crop economies that affected the landscape and river systems.

Is building hydropower projects wrong?

- I) The pursuit of hydropower projects became a dominant focus for hill States, with their capacity measured in terms of megawatts (MW) to attract investments.

Notably, there was a significant shift in funding priorities of multilateral agencies. Prior to 2000, these agencies were opposed to financing large hydropower projects, but they changed their stance



and started providing funding for such ventures, making finance readily available for these projects.

- II) One of the main reasons for the devastating impact of floods in the region is the uncontrolled construction of these hydropower projects, which have essentially transformed mountain rivers into mere streams. The technology employed, known as “run of the river” dams, diverts water through tunnels burrowed into the mountains, and the excavated material (muck) is often disposed of along the riverbeds.

During periods of higher precipitation or cloudbursts, the water returns to the river, carrying the dumped muck along with it. This destructive process is evident in rivers like Parvati, Beas and Sutlej, as well as many other small hydropower dams. Moreover, long tunnels spanning 150 km have been planned or commissioned on the Sutlej River causing significant harm to the entire ecosystem.

- III) Currently, there are 168 hydropower projects in operation, generating 10,848 MW of electricity. Further, it is projected that by 2030, 1,088 hydropower projects will be commissioned to harness 22,640 MW of energy. This surge in hydropower projects raises concerns about the inevitability of impending disasters in the region.

What about tourism?

- I) The development-driven road expansion is aimed at promoting tourism and attracting a large number of visitors. The road-widening projects, often carried out by the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), involve transforming two-lane roads into four-lane roads and single lanes into two-lane roads. The development model follows a public-private-partnership (PPP) approach, emphasising the need to complete these projects rapidly. However, this has resulted in bypassing essential geological studies and mountain engineering skills.
- II) Traditionally, mountainous regions are not cut with vertical slits but are terraced, minimising the damage to the environment. Unfortunately, in both the four-lane projects in Manali and Shimla, the mountains have been cut vertically, leading to massive landslides and damage to existing roads. Restoring these roads after such disasters is a time-consuming process, often taking months or even years.

The consequences of such road expansions are evident during even normal rainfall, as it leads to slips and slides, amplifying the magnitude of the destruction during heavy rain or floods.

How have cement plants harmed the environment?

- I) The establishment of massive cement plants and extensive cutting of mountains in districts like Bilaspur, Solan, Chamba have resulted in significant land use changes that contribute to flash floods during rainfall.
- II) The cement plants alter the natural landscape, and the removal of vegetation leads to reduced capacity of land to absorb water.

How have crop patterns changed?

- I) A silent transformation is occurring in agriculture and horticulture patterns, leading to significant shift in both landholdings and produce. More farmers are now embracing a cash crop economy over traditional cereal farming. However, this shift has implications for the transportation of these crops to markets within a short timeframe owing to their perishable nature.
- II) In response to this need, roads are being constructed hastily without considering essential land cutting and gradient requirements. Modern excavators are employed in construction, but without creating proper drains or designated areas for dumping muck.

Consequently, when it rains, the water finds its own path, carrying the dumped muck along with it and depositing it into the river ecosystem. As a result, even during normal rainfall, rivulets and rivers experience rapid swelling.

- III) Although the total designated road length in the State is around 1,753 km, the total length of all roads including the link and village roads is more than 40,000 km.

Way Forward

- I) A Commission of Inquiry need to be instituted to bring the major stakeholders — the people — on board and discuss both the policy framework failures, as well as the peculiar aspects of the projects undertaken.

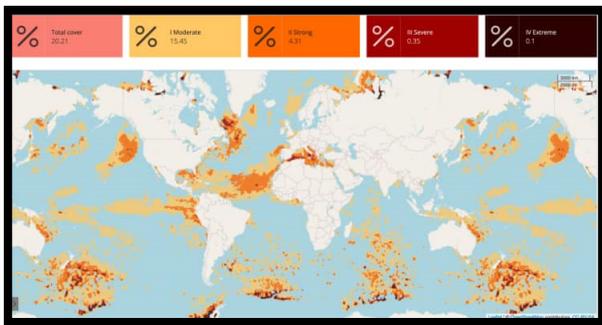


- II) A new architecture is required to empower local communities over their assets. The losses faced in the forms of culverts, village drains, small bridges, schools, other social infrastructure must be compensated; and this can be done if the assets are insured and the custodians are local communities. This will help to rebuild the assets quicker.
- III) With climate change a reality, humans should not add to the problem, but make adequate changes in infrastructure planning to avert disasters that the State has been witnessing since June.

MARINE HEAT WAVES

Why is it in the news?

- I) In April, the average daily global sea surface temperature reached 21.1 degrees Celsius, breaking the previous record of 21 degrees Celsius in 2016. And since then, ocean temperatures have remained at record-high levels, giving rise to marine heat waves (MHWs) around the globe.
- II) At present, MHWs have gripped the north-east Pacific, the southern hemisphere in the southern Indian Ocean and the Pacific, the north-east Atlantic, tropical North Atlantic, and the Mediterranean, according to a recent forecast of the non-profit science organisation Mercator Ocean International.



(Present marine heat waves across the world)

- III) MHWs can have debilitating effects on both marine ecosystems and humans. They may cause the deaths of several marine species, alter their migration patterns, lead to coral bleaching and even impact weather patterns. MHWs can make storms stronger and severely affect coastal communities.

What are marine heat waves?

A marine heat wave is an extreme weather event. It occurs when the surface temperature of a particular region of the sea rises to 3 or 4 Degree Celsius above the average temperature for at least five days. MHWs can last for

weeks, months or even years, according to the US government's agency National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

What is the impact of marine heat waves on ocean life?

- I) Although an increase of 3 or 4 Degrees Celsius in average temperatures may not be much for humans, it can be catastrophic for marine life. For instance, MHWs along the Western Australian coast during the summer of 2010 and 2011 caused some "devastating" fish kills — the sudden and unexpected death of many fish or other aquatic animals over a short period and mainly within a particular area.
- II) A different study revealed that the same MHWs destroyed kelp forests and fundamentally altered the ecosystem of the coast. Kelps usually grow in cooler waters, providing habitat and food for many marine animals.
- III) Another example is when high ocean temperatures in the tropical Atlantic and Caribbean in 2005 led to a massive coral bleaching event.
 - a) A 2010 study showed that more than 80 per cent of surveyed corals had bleached and over 40 per cent of the total surveyed had died. Corals are very sensitive to the temperature of the water in which they live. When water gets too warm, they expel the algae known as zooxanthellae, living in their tissues, causing them to turn entirely white. This is called coral bleaching.



(A Bleached Coral)

- b) Coral bleaching has severe consequences as it reduces the reproductivity of corals and makes them more vulnerable to fatal diseases. Not only this, thousands of marine animals depend on coral reefs



for survival and damage to corals could, in turn, threaten their existence.

- IV) MHWs also fuel the growth of invasive alien species, which can be destructive to marine food webs. Additionally, they force species to change their behaviour in a way that puts wildlife at increased risk of harm — MHWs have been linked to whale entanglements in fishing gear, according to a report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

How do marine heat waves affect humans?

- I) Higher ocean temperatures, which are associated with MHWs, can make storms like hurricanes and tropical cyclones stronger. With warmer temperatures, the rate of evaporation escalates and so does the transfer of heat from the oceans to the air. When storms travel across hot oceans, they gather more water vapour and heat. This results in more powerful winds, heavier rainfall and more flooding when storms reach the land — meaning heightened devastation for humans.
- II) Moreover, only marine wildlife isn't dependent on coral reefs. According to NOAA, half a billion people depend on reefs for food, income, and protection. So, when MHWs destroy these reefs, humans relying on them also bear the brunt.
- III) According to the IUCN report, MHWs have profound socio-economic impacts for coastal communities. For example, in 2012, an MHW over the northwest Atlantic Ocean caused marine species that like warm water to move northwards and migrate earlier than they usually did, affecting fisheries targeting those species in the United States. All of these disastrous consequences are set to become even worse as the

world continues to get warmer, making MHWs more intense and longer.

How is global warming affecting marine heat waves and oceans?

- I) A 2018 study, 'Marine heatwaves under global warming', showed that with the soaring global temperatures, MHWs have become longer-lasting, more frequent and intense in the past few decades. Between 1982 and 2016, the study detected a doubling in the number of MHW days, and this number is projected to further increase on average by a factor of 16 for global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius relative to preindustrial levels and by a factor of 23 for global warming of 2.0 degrees Celsius. More significantly, it stated that 87 per cent of MHWs are attributable to human-induced warming.
- II) Research suggests that the oceans have absorbed 90 per cent of the additional heat caused by the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels and deforestation in recent decades. This has increased the global mean sea surface temperature by close to 0.9 degree Celsius since 1850 and the increase over the last four decades is around 0.6 degree Celsius.
- III) To make matters worse, El Nino — a weather pattern that refers to an abnormal warming of surface waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean — conditions have set in for the first time in seven years. Scientists and experts suggest that El Nino will trigger extreme heat and increase the likelihood of breaking more temperature records in different regions of the world.



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ECONOMY

RBI'S PROPOSAL FOR INTEROPERABILITY OF CREDIT AND DEBIT CARDS

Why is it in the news?

- I) Recently, the apex banking regulator Reserve Bank of India (RBI) floated a draft circular seeking comments from stakeholders about mandating that card issuers provide their customers with the choice of multiple card networks.
- II) It also proposes to restrain issuers from entering into exclusive agreements with card networks.

What exactly has the RBI proposed and why?

- I) The most important of the proposals entail that card issuers, or the concerned bank of the customer, provide them with the option to choose among the multiple card networks available. This would be either at the time of issue or at any other subsequent time.
- II) At present, the customer when applying for a credit or debit card cannot opt for a network of their choice. They cannot choose from among the authorised networks, such as American Express, Diners Club International, Mastercard, RuPay or Visa.
Instead, the customer would have to accept the network the bank may have a tie-up or an affiliation with — precisely what the RBI proposes to address. The regulator observed that the arrangements existing between card networks and card issuers (banks and non-banks) are not conducive to the availability of choice for customers.
- III) The regulator has also proposed that cards be issued across more than one network, with issuers not entering into any arrangement or agreement with card networks that would restrict customers from availing the services of other card networks.

How would this be implemented?

- I) RBI has proposed that the proposals be effective from October 1 this year. This would be extended to existing customers at the time of amendment or renewal.

- II) Fresh agreements would by default draw the provisions from the date the circular is enforced.

How important are cards in our ecosystem?

- I) As per the latest RBI data, the number of outstanding credit cards grew approximately 1.43% on a month-on-month basis to 87 million credit cards in May. The number of debit cards on the other hand stood at 974 million – a 0.7% increase compared to the prior month.
- II) The primary reasons for increased card payments have been increased awareness alongside the availability of adequate infrastructure – both for face-to-face and online. For instance, in the month of May, there was an 11% increase in the number of transactions done using credit cards at e-commerce platforms and 10.8% in terms of volume.

What are some potential advantages?

- I) Each payment network offers a certain bouquet of offers and advantages. The ability to choose thus would help consumers opt for something that suits their needs.
- II) Additionally, they could port to some other provider as and when the requirement changes, thus enabling more control. This would, in turn, also help market dynamics by increasing competitiveness and associating closer with the end consumer.

SEBI TO REVIEW DELISTING NORMS AND MAY CHOOSE THE 'FIXED PRICE' METHOD

Why is it in the News?

- I) The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is reviewing delisting regulations for listed companies in an attempt to rein in the manipulation of shares of a company that has opted for delisting from the stock exchanges.
- II) According to the capital markets regulator, it may allow companies to delist shares at a fixed price, as against the current 'reverse book-building' process.



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What does Delisting of securities mean?

- I) Delisting means removing the securities of a listed company from a stock exchange. Once delisted, the securities of that company can no longer be traded on the stock exchange.
- II) Delisting can be either voluntary or compulsory. In voluntary delisting, a company decides on its own to remove its securities from a stock exchange; in compulsory delisting, they are removed as a penal measure for the company not making submissions or complying with requirements set out in the listing agreement within the prescribed timeframes.
- III) If a company wants to delist its securities, it needs to buy back 90% of the total issued shares.

What is the reverse book-building process and fixed price mechanism?

- I) As of now, the process for delisting a company from stock exchanges involves a reverse book-building process. In this method, shareholders of the

company place offers to sell their securities back to the promoters or large shareholders who hold significant influence over the company's policies. Based on these offers, a delisting price is computed. However, Sebi has raised concerns about potential manipulations in this process.

- II) To address these concerns, Sebi is considering a new approach that would allow a promoter to place a fixed-price offer for delisting, and shareholders can then decide whether to accept the offer or not. This fixed price mechanism is aimed at providing a more transparent and straightforward process for delisting, reducing the scope for manipulation and ensuring fair treatment of all shareholders.
- III) However, SEBI clarified that it is not in favour of suspending trading in the shares of a company during the delisting process. This means that trading in the company's shares will continue even if a delisting offer is being considered, providing investors with the flexibility to make informed decisions.



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ENVIRONMENT & BIODIVERSITY

MANGROVE CELL

Why is it in the News?

Recently, West Bengal announced the setting up of a 'mangrove cell' in the State, on the occasion of the International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem.

More about the News

- I) West Bengal is a home to about 40% of the mangrove forests in India.
- II) The mangrove cell has an action plan for the plantation of mangroves.
- III) It will also look at maintenance and coordinate with NGOs.
- IV) The cell will also generate funds from private and international sectors.

About Mangroves

- I) Mangroves are a group of trees and shrubs that live in the coastal intertidal zone.
- II) There are about 80 different species of mangrove trees. All of these trees grow in areas with low-oxygen soil, where slow-moving waters allow fine sediments to accumulate.
- III) Mangrove forests only grow at tropical and subtropical latitudes near the equator because they cannot withstand freezing temperatures.



- IV) Many mangrove forests can be recognized by their dense tangle of prop roots that make the trees appear to be standing on stilts above the water.
- V) This tangle of roots allows the trees to handle the daily rise and fall of tides. The roots also slow the

movement of tidal waters, causing sediments to settle out of the water and build up the muddy bottom.

- VI) Mangrove forests stabilize the coastline, reducing erosion from storm surges, currents, waves, and tides.
- VII) The intricate root system of mangroves also makes these forests attractive to fish and other organisms seeking food and shelter from predators.
- VIII) Their soils are highly effective carbon sinks, sequestering vast amounts of carbon.

THE MADHAV GADGIL REPORT ON WESTERN GHATS

Why is it in the news?

Recently, a landslide in Maharashtra's Raigad district brought back into focus the 2011 Dr Madhav Gadgil report on conservation of the Western Ghats.

What does the report state?

- I) In 2010, then Union Environment Minister appointed the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), to be chaired by ecologist Dr Madhav Gadgil. The commission submitted its 552-page report to the Centre in August 2011.
- II) The report recommended classifying 64 percent of the Western Ghats, spread over six states, into Ecologically Sensitive Zones called ESZ 1, ESZ 2 and ESZ 3. It also recommended designating the entire region as an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA).
- III) Almost all developmental activities like mining, construction of thermal power plants, dams were to stop along with the decommissioning of similar projects that have completed their shelf life in ESZ 1.
- IV) For Goa, WGEEP recommended an indefinite moratorium on new environmental clearances for mining in ESZs 1 and 2, a phasing out of mining in Ecologically Sensitive Zone 1 by 2016, and continuation of existing mining in Ecologically Sensitive Zone 2 under strict regulation with an effective system of social audit.
- V) In the Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts of Maharashtra, the panel advised that in ESZs 1 and 2, no new polluting (red and orange category)



industries, which would include coal-based power plants, should be permitted to be established, and the existing red and orange category industries should be asked to switch to zero pollution by 2016. Further, it found that plains and coastal tracts in these districts were under severe environmental and social stress.

- VI) In all the zones, genetically modified crops should not be allowed, use of plastic bags be prohibited, Special Economic Zones should not be permitted, new hill stations should not be allowed, changing the land use from farmland to non-farm land and the stoppage of diversions of rivers to protect the ecology of the region, and public lands should not be converted into private lands.
- VII) The report also suggested a bottom-to-top approach instead of a top-to-bottom approach in governance of the environment, indicating decentralization and more powers to local authorities. It recommended the establishment of a Western Ghats Ecology Authority under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, as a professional body to manage the ecology of the region and to ensure its sustainable development.
- VIII) Another major recommendation was a ban on growing single commercial crops like tea, coffee, cardamom, rubber, banana and pineapple, which have led to fragmentation of forest, soil erosion, degradation of river ecosystems and toxic contamination of the environment.
- IX) The panel had urged the Ministry of Environment and Forests to take critical steps to involve citizens, including proactive and sympathetic implementation of the provisions of the Community Forest Resources of the Forest Rights Act.
- X) It also stated that new settlement patterns and development are resulting in hill-cutting and physical changes in slope profile due to roads, terracing and construction.

What was the need for this report?

- I) The Gadgil commission was formed by the Ministry of Environment in 2010 to study the impact of population pressure, climate change and development activities on the Western Ghats.
- II) Accorded the World Heritage status by UNESCO, the Western Ghats are a 1,600-km-long mountain chain running the western coast of the country covering six

states — Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala.

- a) These Ghats are home to high mountain forests, which moderate the tropical climate of the region and present one of the best examples of the monsoon system on the planet.
- b) They are home to 325 globally threatened flora, fauna, bird, amphibian, reptile and fish species. About 60 percent of the mountain range is in Karnataka.

What was said about its implementation?

- I) Stakeholder states resisted the implementation of the recommendations of the Gadgil panel amid fears of hindrance to development and loss of livelihood.
- II) In August 2012, then Environment Minister constituted a High-Level Working Group on Western Ghats under former Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) chief Dr K Kasturirangan, which found that of the nearly 1,750 responses it had examined, 81% were not in favour of the Gadgil recommendations. In particular, Kerala had objected to the proposed ban on sand mining and quarrying, restrictions on transport infrastructure and wind energy projects, embargos on hydroelectric projects and inter-basin transfer of river waters, and also the complete ban on new polluting industries.

How Kasturirangan-led panel formulates report to replace WGEEP and what next?

- I) While the Gadgil panel recommended 64 percent area in the Western Ghats, a report by a panel led by Dr K Kasturirangan notified only 37 percent of the area as ecologically sensitive.
- II) It also split the Western Ghats into cultural (human settlements) and natural (non-human settlements) regions. It was suggested that cultural lands be designated as an ecologically sensitive area (ESA).
- III) It also consisted of red, orange and green categories. The red list entailed a ban on mining, stone quarrying, thermal plans and certain construction and township projects. The orange category had activities that would be regulated and taken up with appropriate permissions, while the green category allows all agricultural and horticultural activities and commercial activities.
- IV) In 2017, the Environment Ministry issued a draft notification, demarcating an area of 56,285 square km in the Western Ghats as ESA as opposed to the



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59,940 square km recommended by the Kasturirangan committee.

In Kerala, this was brought down to 9,993.7 square km from the Kasturirangan committee recommendation of 13,108 square km as part of ESA.

- V) By 2022, the Centre announced a high-powered committee constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF & CC) to conduct physical landscaping and submit a detailed report in a year's time.



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