



RACE IAS

Daily current affairs

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Lokpal to get permanent office at World Trade Centre in Delhi:

Context:

The Lokpal has now got its own office at World Trade Centre in south Delhi.

Background:

Five years after the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act was passed in 2013, Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghosh (retired) was appointed as India's first Lokpal along with eight other members in March 2019.

Lokpal Act of 2013:

- The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.
- Composition: The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.
- The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.
- The States will have to institute Lokayukta within one year of the commencement of the Act.

Jurisdiction and powers of Lokpal:

- The Lokpal can inquire into allegations of corruption against anyone who is or has been Prime Minister, or a Minister in the Union government, or a Member of Parliament, as well as officials of the Union government under Groups A, B, C and D.

- The body also covers complaints against chairpersons, members, officers and directors of any board, corporation, society, trust or autonomous body either established by an Act of Parliament or wholly or partly funded by the Centre and any society or trust or body that receives foreign contribution above ₹ 10 lakh.

Powers:

- The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe.
- Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.
- An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

Sources: the Hindu.

Sealed cover jurisprudence:

Context:

The Supreme Court, in the Media One ban case, has reiterated its intention to examine the legality of governments filing incriminating material in sealed covers without sharing the information with the accused/other party.

- The issue of “sealed cover jurisprudence” came up in the previous hearing on March 15, when the Centre wanted to pass on to the court its internal files regarding the ban in a sealed cover.

What is Sealed Cover Jurisprudence?

It is a practice used by the Supreme Court and sometimes lower courts, of asking for or accepting information from government agencies in sealed envelopes that can only be accessed by judges.

- While a specific law does not define the doctrine of sealed cover, the Supreme Court derives its power to use it from Rule 7 of order XIII of the Supreme Court Rules and Section 123 of the Indian Evidence Act of 1872.

Rule 7 of order XIII of the Supreme Court Rules:

It is stated under the said rule that if the Chief Justice or court directs certain information to be kept under sealed cover or considers it of confidential nature, no party would be allowed access to the contents of such information.

Exceptions:

If the Chief Justice himself orders that the opposite party be allowed to access it.

It also mentions that information can be kept confidential if its publication is not considered to be in the interest of the public.

Section 123 of the Indian Evidence Act of 1872:

- Under this act, official unpublished documents relating to state affairs are protected and a public officer cannot be compelled to disclose such documents.
- Other instances where information may be sought in secrecy or confidence are when its publication impedes an ongoing investigation, such as details which are part of a police case diary.

Reasons for Sealed Covers:

- When the matter pertained to the Official Secrets Act.
- To maintain public confidence in the Government agency.
- Delicate international negotiations or those that relate to sensitive aspects of security.
- Details about survivors of sexual assaults or child abuse which may affect their future life and bring unnecessary shame affecting the Right to Live with Dignity.
- Disclosure sometimes affects the ongoing investigation.

Issues with the Sealed Cover Jurisprudence:

- Against the Principles of Transparency and Accountability.
- Reduces the Scope of Reasoning.
- Obstruction to Fair Trial and Adjudication.
- Arbitrary in Nature.

Sources: the Hindu.

Haryana Panchayat Bills:

Context:

The term of the village panchayats in Haryana had ended in February, 2021. But, next elections are delayed due to multiple petitions filed in the Punjab and Haryana High Court challenging some amendments made by the state government through the Haryana Panchayat Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 2020.

- The amendments in question are about reservation for backward castes and women in the panchayats.

What's the issue?

- The petitions call the amendments "arbitrary, unreasonable, and illegal".
- The petition says that as per the Haryana Panchyati Raj Act, 1994, if the population in the village is half of the scheduled castes, then 50 per cent seats in the panchayat area are required to be filled by the SCs and are specifically reserved for them.

Highlights of the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 2020:

- Provides the right to recall members of Panchayati Raj institutions to those who elected them.
- Gives women 50% reservation in these rural bodies.
- Provides 8% reservation to the "more disadvantaged" among the Backward Classes.
- Allows the recall of village sarpanches and members of the block-level panchayat samitis and district-level zila parishads if they fail to perform.

Procedure to be followed:

1. To recall a sarpanch and members of the two bodies, 50% members of a ward or gram sabha have to give in writing that they want to initiate proceedings.
2. This will be followed by a secret ballot, in which their recall will require two-third members voting against them.

The key mandatory provisions of the 73rd and 74th amendments, are:

- Regular direct elections to all local bodies.
- Setting up of state-level election commission and finance commissions.
- Mandatory reservation of seats for Dalits and Adivasis in every local body, proportionate to their share in the population.
- 33% reservation for women.
- Setting up of District Planning Committees that consolidate plans of rural and urban bodies.

Sources: Indian Express.

Press Freedom Index:

Context:

The 2022 World **Press Freedom Index** (20th edition) was recently published by **Reporters Without Borders**.

- It was released on the World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD) (3rd May).
- The report points to an overall two-fold increase in media polarisation creating divisions within countries, and between countries at the international level.

World Press Freedom Index:

- Published every year since 2002 by Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) or Reporters Without Borders.
- Based in Paris, RSF is an independent NGO with consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF).
- The Index ranks countries and regions according to the level of freedom available to journalists. However, it is not an indicator on the quality of journalism.

- Each country or territory's score is evaluated using five contextual indicators: political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context and safety.

Performance of India:

- India has fallen eight places from 142 to 150 in 2022 out of 180 countries.
- India's ranking, as per the report, fell on the back of increased "violence against journalists" and a "politically partisan media", which has landed press freedom in a state of "crisis" in the world's largest democracy.
- Media in India, among nations reputed to be more democratic, faces pressure from "increasingly authoritarian and/or nationalist governments.
- It also faults India for its policy framework, which is protective in theory but resorts to using charges of defamation, sedition, contempt of court and endangering national security against journalists critical of the government, branding them as "anti-national."

Performance of other countries:

- Norway (1st) Denmark (2nd), Sweden (3rd) Estonia (4th) and Finland (5th) grabbed the top positions.
- North Korea remained at the bottom of the list of the 180 countries.
- Russia was placed at 155th position.

India's Neighbours:

- Nepal has climbed up by 30 points in the global ranking at 76th position.
- The index placed Pakistan at 157th position, Sri Lanka 146th, Bangladesh 162nd and Myanmar at 176th position.
- China was ranked at 175th position.

About the World Press Freedom Day:

- The day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993, following the recommendation of UNESCO's General Conference in 1991.
- The day also marks the 1991 Windhoek Declaration (adopted by UNESCO).
- It is aimed towards the 'development of a free, independent and pluralistic press'.

ISRO mission to Venus:

Context:

After sending missions to the Moon and Mars, the ISRO is now readying a spacecraft to orbit Venus to study what lies below the surface of the solar system's hottest planet, and also unravel the mysteries under the Sulfuric Acid clouds enveloping it.

- ISRO is planning to launch the mission in December 2024.

About Venus:

- Venus is the second planet from the sun and the hottest planet in the solar system with a surface temperature of 500C - high enough to melt lead.
- The planet's thick atmosphere has cranked the surface pressure up to 90 bars.
- A single Venusian rotation takes 243.0226 Earth days. That means a day lasts longer than a year on Venus, which makes a complete orbit around the sun in 225 Earth days.
- The Venusian planetary core has a diameter of about 4,360 miles (7,000 km), comparable to Earth's core.
- Venus is one of just two planets that rotate from east to west. Only Venus and Uranus have this "backwards" rotation.

Historic missions to Venus:

1. **Magellan** - a Nasa mission that ended in 1994.
2. **Venus Express**- A European mission- focused on atmospheric science.
3. **Akatsuki**- Japanese spacecraft- focused on atmospheric science.

NASA's two new missions to Venus:

1. Davinci+:

The Davinci+ (Deep Atmosphere Venus Investigation of Noble gases, Chemistry, and Imaging) mission will:

- Measure the planet's atmosphere to gain insight into how it formed and evolved.
 - Determine whether Venus ever had an ocean.
 - Return the first high resolution images of the planet's "tesserae" geological features (These features could be comparable to continents on Earth).
1. Veritas (Venus Emissivity, Radio Science, InSAR, Topography, and Spectroscopy):

This mission will map the planet's surface to understand its geological history and investigate how it developed so differently than Earth.

- It will use a form of radar to chart surface elevations and discover whether volcanoes and earthquakes are still happening.

Sources: the Hindu.

International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure:

Context:

The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has commenced the **International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure 2022**.

- Heads of states from CDRI member countries including India attended the conference.

About CDRI:

- CDRI is a multi-stakeholder global partnership of national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks, the private sector, academic and knowledge institutions.
- CDRI is led and managed by national governments, where knowledge is generated and exchanged on different aspects of disaster resilience of infrastructure.
- The CDRI Secretariat is based in New Delhi, India.
- Formation: September 23, 2019.

- Members: As of March 2021, 29 members, consisting of 22 national governments and 7 organizations have joined CDRI.

International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure:

ICDRI is the annual international conference of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) in partnership with member countries, organizations and institutions to strengthen the global discourse on disaster and climate resilient infrastructure.

Need for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure:

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) highlights the role of improved disaster resilience of infrastructure as a cornerstone for sustainable development.

The SFDRR includes four specific targets related to loss reduction:

1. Reduce global disaster mortality.
2. Reduce the number of affected people.
3. Reduce direct disaster economic loss.
4. Reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure.

Target (4) on infrastructure is an important prerequisite to achieving the other loss reduction targets set out in the framework.

Sources: the Hindu.

Lapsus\$:

- It is a cyber-crime group said to be based in South America.
- The group is relatively new but has successfully breached major firms like Microsoft.
- It has also publicly taunted their victims, leaking their source code and internal documents.
- Their hacking tactics include phone-based social engineering, SIM-swapping to facilitate account takeover, accessing personal email accounts of employees at target organisations etc.

Why in the News?

On March 22, authentication platform Okta confirmed that hackers from the cyber-crime group Lapsus\$ had tried intruding into its system three months earlier.



Sex ratio at birth in India:

According to the annual report on Vital Statistics based on 2020 Civil Registration System report:

- The Union Territory of Ladakh (1104) recorded the highest sex ratio at birth in the country in 2020, followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Tripura and Kerala.
- Lowest sex ratio at birth was reported by Manipur (880), followed by Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (898), Gujarat (909), Haryana (916) and Madhya Pradesh (921).
- In 2019, the highest sex ratio at birth was reported by Arunachal Pradesh (1024), followed by Nagaland (1001).

Sex ratio at birth is number of females per thousand males.

Gender ratio

A look at **top five** and **bottom five** States and UTs in terms of their sex ratio at birth, as per the 2020 Civil Registration System report



Top 5 States/UTs

Ladakh (1,104)

Arunachal Pradesh (1,011)

A&N Islands (984)

Tripura (974)

Kerala (969)

Bottom 5 States/UTs

Manipur (880)

Dadra and Nagar Haveli
and Daman and Diu (898)

Gujarat (909)

Haryana (916)

Madhya Pradesh (921)

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