

## Monetization Of Company Database

### ❖ Context

- The **Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA)** is looking into the possibility of monetizing the vast database of firms operating in India.
- The ministry has held meetings with **credit rating firms**, which rely on government data sourced from third-party agencies, to evaluate the possibility.

### ❖ Key Highlights

- The database is now available to users through the MCA21 portal on payment of ₹100 per company.
- **Data available on MCA21 are sold by third-party aggregators** for as much as ₹1,500 per firm after doing some value addition.
- The ministry is considering selling data sets in user-friendly formats, making them more valuable and accurate than the data provided by third-party aggregators.
- Monetizing the data could lead to a new source of revenue generation for the ministry.

### ❖ MCA21

- MCA21 is an **e-Governance initiative** that enables an **easy and secure access of the MCA services** to the corporate entities, professionals and citizens of India.
- The application is designed to **fully automate all processes related to the proactive enforcement and compliance of the legal requirements** under the Companies Act, 1956, New Companies Act, 2013 and Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008.

### ❖ MCA21 3.0

- The ministry is **revamping MCA21** and is increasingly using technology to oversee compliance and improve ease of doing business.
- It expects the upgradation of the website to help in quicker data analysis and spotting compliance-related trends of over **1.4 million active firms and over 220,000 limited-liability partnerships**.
- **Early detection of trends**, such as auditors quitting assignments prematurely, is expected to help improve regulatory oversight and policymaking.
- The new version will **link up with the systems of other financial and corporate sector regulators**, exchange data and alert authorities in case of violations.
- It will allow the ministry to hold compliance **enforcement drives** and **automate electronic notices** to defaulters.
- The version is expected to be launched and deployed in phases and will include company and LLP modules, e-adjudication, e-consultation, e-book, learning management and compliance management system driven by data analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning.

## Anti Defection Law

### ❖ Context

- Recently, **Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu** said the time has come to **amend the anti-defection legislation** in the country **to plug existing loopholes**. He said that there is **no clarity in the law about the timeframe for the action** of the House Chairperson or Speaker in the anti-defection cases.

### ❖ About Anti-Defection Law

- The anti-defection law was **passed in 1985 through the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act**. It added the **Tenth Schedule** to the Indian Constitution. This provision **prevents elected members from joining another political party** due to reward of office or other similar considerations.
- It **lays down the process by which a legislator may be disqualified** on grounds of defection.
- The decision on questions as to disqualification on ground of defection are referred to the **Chairman or the Speaker of such House**.
- The decision of the presiding officer **can be challenged in a court of law**.
- The law **does not specify a time frame** in which such a decision has to be made.
- Last year, the Supreme Court observed that anti-defection **cases should be decided by Speakers in three months' time**.

### ❖ Grounds of Disqualification

- If an elected member from a party **voluntarily gives up the membership of his party**.
- If a member **votes against the directive of the party** or ignores the whip. An **independent member joins a political party** after getting elected.
- A **nominated member joining a political party after six months** of getting nominated.

### ❖ Exceptions

- The **law will not be applicable if 2/3rd members of a party** have given their consensus for merging with another.
- **On being elected as the presiding officer** of the House, if a member voluntarily gives up the membership of his party or rejoins it after he ceases to hold that office, he won't be disqualified.

### ❖ Significance

- The anti-defection law has **provided stability to elected governments across the country**.
- It has **prevented ruling parties from indulging in horse trading** that was seen before the law.

## Face to Face Centres



## International Religious Freedom Report 2022

### ❖ Context

- Recently, the **US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** released its annual **International Religious Freedom Report 2022**.

### ❖ Key Highlights

- The Report's **primary focus is on two groups** of countries namely **Country of Particular Concerns (CPC)** and **Special Watch List**.
- For the **third consecutive year** USCIRF has recommended to the US State Department to **designate India as a "Country of Particular Concern"**.
- India is among 15 countries to have been accorded the dubious honor.
- The **other countries** under this category are Afghanistan, Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Vietnam.
- **Religious Freedom:** Freedom of religion or belief is an expansive right that includes the freedoms of thought, conscience, expression, association, and assembly.

### ❖ Concerns Raised about India

- On India particularly, the report states, "In 2021, **religious freedom conditions in India significantly worsened**."
- During the year, the **Indian government escalated its promotion and enforcement of policies**—including those promoting a Hindu-nationalist agenda—that negatively affected Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and other religious minorities.

### ❖ Country of Particular Concern (CPC)

- It is a **designation by the US Secretary of State of a nation** engaged in **severe violations of religious freedom** under IRFA (International Religious Freedom Act of 1998).

### ❖ Special Watch List

- A "Special Watch List" country is one that is **deemed not to meet all the CPC criteria** but engages in or tolerates severe violations of religious freedom.

### ❖ US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

- USCIRF is an **independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government agency**.
- It was **created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA)**.
- **Mandate:**
  - It monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) abroad..
  - It makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.
  - It tracks the implementation of these recommendations.
- **Headquartered:** Washington DC.
- The recommendations of USCIRF are **not binding on the US State Department**.
- **India does not recognize the view of USCIRF.**

## News in Between the Lines

### Kuril Islands



### ❖ Context

- Recently, **Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook for 2022** described the Kuril Islands as being under Russia's "illegal occupation".

### ❖ Key Highlights

- This is the first time in about two decades that Japan has used this phrase to describe the dispute over the Kuril Islands. According to Tokyo, Japan's sovereignty over the islands is confirmed by several treaties like:
  - **The Shimoda Treaty of 1855**, the 1875 Treaty for the exchange of Sakhalin for the Kuril Islands (Treaty of St. Petersburg).
  - **The Portsmouth Treaty of 1905** signed after the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 which Japan had won.
  - Russia, on the other hand, claims the **Yalta Agreement (1945)** and the **Potsdam Declaration (1945)** as proof of its sovereignty and argues that the **San Francisco Treaty of 1951** is legal evidence that Japan had acknowledged Russian sovereignty over the islands.



### ❖ About Kuril Islands

- It is **known as Northern Territories** and **South Kurils** in Japan and Russia respectively.
- The Kuril Islands are a **chain of islands** stretching from the Japanese island of Hokkaido to the southern tip of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula.
- The islands **separate the Okhotsk Sea from the North Pacific Ocean**.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It consists of <b>56 islands and minor rocks</b>.</li> <li>• The <b>dispute is concerning four islands</b>.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Iturup or Etorofu Island.</li> <li>▪ Kunashir or Kunashiri Island.</li> <li>▪ Shikotan Island.</li> <li>▪ Habomai Island.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The islands are <b>part of the Ring of Fire belt</b> of geologic instability circling the Pacific. It <b>contains at least 100 volcanoes</b>, of which 35 are still active, and many hot springs.</li> <li>• <b>Earthquakes and tidal waves are common phenomena</b> over these islands.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self-replicating mRNA Covid-19 Vaccines</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Context</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recently, a self-amplifying mRNA vaccine has shown promising results against Covid-19 in ongoing phase 1/2/3 trials.</li> </ul> </li> <li>❖ <b>Key Highlights</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The vaccine, <b>ARCT-154</b>, has been developed by Arcturus Therapeutics Holdings, based in San Diego, California, and its trials are in progress in Vietnam.</li> <li>• It <b>offered 95% protection against severe Covid-19</b> and death, and 55% against Covid infection, Arcturus said in a press release.</li> </ul> </li> <li>❖ <b>Self-replicating mRNA Covid-19 Vaccines</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An mRNA vaccine, such as those from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, use messenger RNA that encodes the spike protein of the coronavirus.</li> <li>• The <b>mRNA directs the cell to produce copies of the spike protein</b>, so that the <b>immune system will recognise the spike</b> if and when actual infection takes place, and mount a response.</li> <li>• A <b>self-amplifying mRNA vaccine is an improvement on the traditional RNA platform</b>.</li> <li>• It <b>encodes four extra proteins</b> in addition to the vaccine antigen, and these <b>enable amplification of the original strand of RNA</b> once inside the cell. The basic advantage is that it <b>requires a smaller dose</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Gaia 20eae</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Context</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recently, <b>Indian astronomers from the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES)</b>, an autonomous institute under the Department of Science &amp; Technology, have <b>discovered Gaia 20eae</b>.</li> <li>➤ It is the <b>latest member of episodically accreting young stars</b>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>❖ <b>Episodically Accreting Young Stars</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Episodically accreting young stars are <b>young, low-mass stars</b> that have <b>not initiated hydrogen fusion</b> in their core and are fuelled by gravitational contraction and deuterium fusion (pre-main-sequence phase of the star). These pre-main-sequence stars are <b>surrounded by a disc from which it steadily feeds on the matter</b> from the disc-shaped region of gas and dust surrounding the star to gain mass.</li> <li>• This process is known as <b>mass accretion</b> from the circumstellar disc of the star. On occasions their <b>feeding rate increases</b>. This is known as the periods of enhanced mass accretion from their circumstellar disc.</li> <li>• During such episodes, the <b>brightness of the star increases by 4-6 magnitudes in the optical bands</b>.</li> <li>• So far <b>25 such rare groups of stars have been discovered</b>.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>EU-India Tech Trade Council</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Context</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ India and the European Union (EU) has agreed to establish a Trade and Technology Council during the visit of European Commission President to India.</li> </ul> </li> <li>❖ <b>Key Highlights</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decision to set up such a council will be the <b>first for India</b> with any of its partners and <b>second for the EU</b>, following the first one with the US.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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- Both sides agreed that rapid changes in the geopolitical environment highlight the need for joint in-depth strategic engagement.
- The Trade and Technology Council will provide the **political steer and the necessary structure to operationalise political decisions**, coordinate technical work, and report to the political level to ensure implementation and follow-up in areas that are important for the sustainable progress of European and Indian economies.

## Malaria Free Districts



- ❖ **Context**
  - The Health Minister informed, on the occasion of **World Malaria Day i.e. 25 April**, that 124 districts in the country have reported “zero” malaria cases.
- ❖ **Key Highlights**
  - The number is short of the target set by the **National Strategic Plan for Malaria elimination 2017**, which aimed at having **448 districts to be declared malaria-free with an annual parasite index of less than 1**.
  - The **annual parasite index (API)** is the number of confirmed malaria cases per 1,000 population. Malaria cases have declined by 86.45% and 79.16% reduction in malaria-related deaths has been observed in 2021, as compared to 2015.
- ❖ **National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2017-22)**
  - It has been developed based on the **National Framework for Malaria Elimination (NFME)** of the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), Government of India and **WHO’s Global Technical Strategy for Malaria Elimination (2016-2030)**. National Framework for Malaria Elimination (NFME) in India has set 2030 as eliminating malaria and goals of NSP are in consonance with overall goals.
  - Goals under NSP:
    - Eliminate malaria from all low (Category 1 - API<1) and moderate (Category 2 - API - 1-2) endemic states/UTs (26) by 2022.
    - Reduce incidence of malaria to less than 1 case per 1000 population in all States/UTs and the districts and malaria elimination in 31 states/UTs by 2024.
    - Interrupt indigenous transmission of malaria in all States/ UTs (Category 3) by 2027. Prevent re-establishment of local transmission of malaria in areas where it has been eliminated and to maintain malaria-free status of the country by 2030.

## 91<sup>st</sup> Amendment



- ❖ **Context**
  - A **PIL** has been filed in **Bombay High Court** challenging the “**lifetime status of cabinet minister**” recently accorded by Goa government to a politician who was former CM and former Speaker.
- ❖ **Key Highlights**
  - It had also been decided by the Cabinet that in future, those who complete 50 years and hold posts like CM and Speaker, will be given cabinet status even after their retirement.
  - According to the PIL, this is the first time that any state government has taken such a step.
- ❖ **What the PIL contends**
  - Currently, Goa is 12-member cabinet and the **Cabinet status to an ex-CM raises the number of Cabinet ranks to 13** which is more than the ceiling mandated by the 91st Amendment of the Constitution.
  - The Amendment inserted **clause 1A in Article 164** which says that the **total number of Ministers, including CM, in the Council of Ministers in a state shall not exceed 15% of the total numbers of MLAs**, provided the number of ministers, including CM, shall not be less than 12.
  - As Cabinet Minister for life, the person will be entitled to a staff of 12 which would cost the exchequer Rs. 90 lakh a year, government accommodation, vehicle and unlimited free travel for him and spouse.

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