

ETPBS

❖ Context

- The Ministry of Law and Justice in response to a question in the Lok Sabha stated recently that the government was exploring the possibility of allowing **online voting for non-resident Indians (NRI)**.

❖ Key Highlights

❖ Current provisions for NRI voting

- Prior to 2010, the NRI's name was deleted from electoral rolls if he or she stayed outside the country for **more than six months at a stretch**.
- After the passing of the **Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 2010**, eligible NRIs who had stayed abroad beyond six months have been able to **vote, but only in person** at the polling station where they have been enrolled as an overseas elector under **Section 20A**.
- In the case of overseas voters, their **address mentioned in the passport is taken as the place of ordinary residence** and chosen as the constituency for the overseas voter to enrol in.
- **Yet, the provision of having to visit the polling booth in person has discouraged eligible voters** from exercising their mandate.
- The government in **2017** tried to remove this restriction by allowing overseas voters to cast their vote through a proxy voter. The bill lapsed due to dissolution of LS.
- The ECI has approached the government to permit NRIs to vote via postal ballots similar to a system that is already used by service voters.

❖ What is ETPBS and how does it function?

- The **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961** was amended in **2016** to allow service voters to use the **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System** or ETPBS.
- Service voters means a **member of the armed Forces of the Union**; or a member of a force to which provisions of the Army Act, 1950 applies.
- Under this system, **postal ballots are sent electronically to registered service voters**.
- The service voter can then **download** the ETPB (along with a declaration form and covers), **register their mandate** on the ballot and **send it to the returning officer** of the constituency **via ordinary mail**.
- The post will include an **attested declaration form** (after being signed by the voter in the presence of an appointed senior officer who will attest it).
- The postal ballot must reach the returning officer by 8 a.m. on the day of the counting of results.
- For this facility to commence, the Law Ministry has to amend the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961.
- With increasing mobility of citizens across countries for reasons related to work, the **postal ballot method has been recognised by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance** (an intergovernmental organisation that works to support democratic processes and institutions) as a means to allow overseas voters to exercise their right.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)

❖ Context

- Recently the Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said that the free trade agreement between India and the UAE is likely to come into effect from May 1 this year.

❖ Key Highlights of the Deal

- **Reducing Tariff :**
 - It will allow **90% of the country's exports duty-free access** to the Emirates.
 - The CEPA is likely to benefit about **\$26 billion worth of Indian products** that are currently subjected to **5% import duty by the UAE**.
 - It is set to reduce tariffs for **80 percent of goods**.
 - Indian exports are set to get zero duty access within a further 5 to 10 years, including electronic goods, chemicals and petrochemicals, cement etc.
- **Expediting Market Access :**
 - UAE has agreed to allow market access for medicines from Indian companies **within 90 days of approval** in the US and UK.

❖ Significance of the Deal

- It is expected to **boost bilateral trade to \$100 billion** in the next five years.
- Indian exporters will also get access to the much **larger Arab and African markets**.
- India's **labor intensive and employment generating industries** expected to gain the most from the pact.
- This pact will create **investment opportunities** for Indian investors .

❖ India-UAE Economic Relations

- UAE is India's **third-biggest trading partner** behind the US and China.
- India was the **UAE's largest export destination** and second-largest trade partner in 2019.
- **Bilateral trade** between both nations stood at \$43.3 billion as of 2020-21.
- India imported \$10.9 billion of **crude oil** from the UAE in 2019-2020.

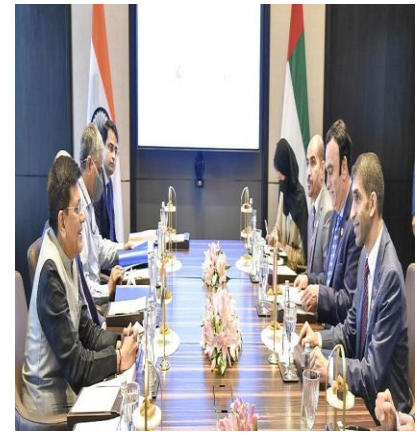
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- **Investments :**
 - It also focuses on expediting work on a dedicated investment zone for UAE companies and joint ventures, focusing on **setting up a food corridor and establishing a dedicated IndiaMart** in the Jebel Ali Free Zone.
- **Safeguard Mechanism :**
 - The deal provides a safeguard mechanism for both countries' businesses against an unnecessary surge in the flow of products.

❖ India's CEPA

- Apart from negotiations with the UAE, India has long-standing negotiations underway with Canada.
- **India has signed CEPAs with South Korea and Japan.**
- India has been looking to advance a CEPA with Bangladesh.



Barrier Reef is Being Devastated by Another Mass Bleaching Event

❖ Context

- Recently, the **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)** has confirmed that the reef has witnessed a **sixth mass coral bleaching event**.

❖ Key Highlights

- The news gets even more alarming as it is the **first time that bleaching has occurred in a cooler La Nina year**.
- The previous mass bleaching events were in **1998, 2002, 2016, 2017 and 2020**.

❖ Great Barrier Reef (GBF)

- The GBF is the **world's largest coral reef system** composed of over **2,900 individual reefs** and 900 islands stretching for over 2,300 kilometers.
- The reef is **located in the Coral Sea**, off the coast of Queensland, Australia.
- It was **world heritage listed in 1981 by UNESCO** as the most extensive and spectacular coral reef ecosystem on the planet.
- Since 1985, the Great Barrier Reef has **lost more than two-thirds of its corals**.

❖ Coral Reef in India

- Gulf of Mannar.
- Andman and Nicobar Island.
- Lakshadweep Island.
- Gulf of Kutch.

❖ Major Coral Protection Initiatives

- Global Coral Reef Alliance (GCRA).
- Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.
- The Global Coral Reef R&D Accelerator Platform.
- International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI).

❖ Coral Ecosystem

- **Coral polyps** are tiny and fleshy sea anemones that live in **tropical and subtropical oceans and seas**.
- Corals have a **symbiotic relationship** with microscopic algae called **zooxanthellae** that live in their tissues.
- It assists the coral in **nutrient production** through its **photosynthetic activities**.
- The **host coral polyp** in return provides its zooxanthellae with a **protected environment to live within**, and a steady supply of carbon dioxide for its photosynthetic processes.
- The corals can feed by day through photosynthesis and by night through predation.
- **Corals are highly susceptible to quick changes**. They grow in regions where **climate is significantly stable for a long period of time**.

❖ Coral Bleaching

- When the **symbiotic relationship becomes stressed** due to increased ocean temperature or pollution, the algae leave the coral's tissue.
- Coral is left bleached and vulnerable.
- Without the algae, the coral loses its major source of food, turns white or very pale, and is more susceptible to disease.
- The leading cause of coral bleaching is **rising water temperatures**.

News in Between the Lines

Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (MRSAMs)

❖ Context

- Recently, DRDO conducted two successful flight tests of the **Indian Army version of Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (MRSAM)** at Integrated Test Range, Chandipur off the coast of Odisha.

❖ Key Highlights

- **Developed by :**
 - DRDO and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).
- **Features :**
 - The MRSAM weapon system comprises **multi-function radar, mobile launcher system and other vehicles**.

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- The mobile launcher can transport, place and launch eight canisterised missiles.
- These can be fired either in single mode or in ripple firing mode in a vertical firing position.
- The missile's management system uses the radar to track and correctly identify the target, calculates the distance from it and gives all the information to the Commander for a decision to be made on interception.
- It is equipped with fins and canards to stabilize its flight and provide it maneuverability.
- It has Army, Navy and Air Force variants.
- The missile itself is 4.5 meters in length with a weight of around 275 kg.
- **Speed and Range :**
 - The missile can move at a maximum speed of Mach 2 (twice the speed of sound).
 - It can engage multiple targets upto a range of 70 km.
- **Significance :**
 - The missile will replace the aging Air Defense systems of the Army.
 - These tests are the major milestones for an 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat'.

Open Defecation-Free (ODF) Plus Villages



❖ Context

- Recently, The country has crossed a milestone of 50 thousand open defecation-free (ODF) Plus villages.

❖ Key Highlights

- Among the top performing States are **Telangana** with 13 thousand 960 ODF Plus villages followed by **Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh**.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen Phase-II** was launched in February 2020 with the aim to ensure that all villages in the country can declare themselves as **ODF Plus by the end of 2024**.
- The mission towards becoming **ODF Plus has several components including :**
 - **Biodegradable waste management** including the **GOBARdhan Scheme**.
 - Gray water management.
 - Plastic waste management.
 - Fecal sludge management.
- ODF Plus villages have been **divided into following three categories** to showcase their progress:
 - Aspiring,
 - Rising.
 - Model.

Variable Refresh Rates (VRR)



❖ Context

- According to a report by *About Chromebooks*, **Google is said to be testing support for variable refresh rates (VRR)** in the Chrome OS 101 Dev Channel,

❖ Key Highlights

- The feature could **improve gaming experience on Chromebooks**.
- Several other device makers have used a form of the **VRR** in their products to provide superior experience, particularly in gaming.

❖ About VRR

- Refresh rate is **the number of times a display is capable of refreshing in a second**.
- It is **measured in hertz (Hz)**.
- So, a 30 Hz or a 60 Hz display can refresh 30 or 60 times per second, respectively.

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- The higher the refresh rate, the better the quality of viewing experience.
- Displays with over 120 Hz can deliver a smoother and more comfortable viewing experience.
- This is necessary while playing video games or watching videos.
- VRR supports a wide range of refresh rates, allowing its refresh rate to change in real-time based on the frames-per-second (FPS) rate coming from a source device such as a gaming console.
- For example, displays that support refresh rates from 10 Hz to 120 Hz, or 1Hz to 120 Hz, can adjust to different content styles for a seamless entertainment or gaming experience.

TEJAS Project



❖ Context

- The Ministry for Information and Broadcasting launched the “Training for Emirates Jobs And Skills (Tejas)” project at the Dubai Expo.

❖ Key Highlights

- It is aimed at **skilling, certification and overseas employment of Indians**. The project is expected to create a **10,000-strong Indian workforce in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)** during its initial phase.
- The working condition of Indian workers in the Gulf countries has been a matter of concern for the government.

Affinity Test



❖ Context

- The Supreme Court's has decided to refer the question to determine whether a person belongs to a ST to a larger Bench for an authoritative decision.

❖ Key Highlights

- The Supreme Court wants to fix foolproof parameters to determine if a person belongs to a Scheduled Tribe and is entitled to the benefits due to the community. According to the **Census 2011**, there are said to be **705 ethnic groups notified as Scheduled Tribes (STs)**.
- Over **10 crore Indians are notified as STs**, of which 1.04 crore live in urban areas. The **STs constitute 8.6% of the population** and 11.3% of the rural population.

❖ Shilpa Vishnu Thakur v State of Maharashtra case:

- The Bombay High Court in *Shilpa Vishnu Thakur v State of Maharashtra* in 2009 held that the **affinity test was an “integral part” of the verification process for caste certificates**. Scrutiny committees could easily determine the authenticity of a claim by running an affinity test **on the basis of ethnicity and anthropology**.
- The HC had said that the term ‘affinity’ meant the ‘association’ of the applicant for a caste certificate with a Scheduled Tribe into which he or she has been born.

❖ Anand v Committee for Scrutiny and Verification of Tribe Claims case:

- However in 2011, the SC in *Anand v Committee for Scrutiny and Verification of Tribe Claims* Affinity test said that the **Affinity test may not be regarded as a litmus test** for establishing the link of the applicant with a Scheduled Tribe.
- The court reasoned that with the **migrations, modernisation and contact with other communities**, these communities tend to **develop and adopt new traits** which may not essentially match with the traditional characteristics of the tribe.
- And thus, the claim by an applicant cannot be disregarded on the ground that his present traits do not match his tribes’ peculiar anthropological and ethnological traits, deity, rituals, mode of marriage, death ceremonies, method of burial of dead bodies etc.

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Dzukou valley



❖ Context

- A Naga tribal group has blocked the vehicular movement on NH-2, along Nagaland-Manipur border over a boundary dispute in Kezoltsa area.

❖ Key Highlights

- **NH-2 (earlier called NH-39) connects Nagaland to Manipur.**
- **Kezoltsa is a forested area located near Dzukou valley on the border.**
- The valley has been the **bone of contention between Mao Nagas of Senapati (Manipur) and Southern Angami Nagas of Kohima (Nagaland).** The Angamis claim it to be part of their ancestral land and unfairly made part of Manipur by the British in the colonial era .
- Situated at an altitude of 2452 m above sea level, the valley is famous for its wide range of flowers in every season but the most famous one is the **Dzüko Lily** and it is found only in this valley.

MCLR vs T-bill rates



❖ Context

- With the **glut in liquidity continuing to squeeze margins**, a clutch of state-run lenders is trying to convince top-rated private and state-owned borrowers to avail loans benchmarked to the marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR) instead of rates linked to treasury bills.

❖ Key Highlights

- **MCLR is an internal rate of bank while treasury or T-bills rate is an external benchmark.**
- While, RBI has mandated banks to lend to retail and small business customers based only on an external benchmark, **corporate loans are primarily linked to MCLR.** However, **public and private sector AAA rated companies tend to raise credit on T-bill rates** as it turns out cheaper.
- **MCLR is based on bank's deposit rates while T-bill is based on repo rates.** Thus, while MCLR takes time to adjust, T-bill rates react sharply to the changes in repo rates.
- As Monetary Policy Committee may increase repo rate in future to tame inflation, T-bill rate may become more than MCLR.

The Indian Antarctic Bill 2022



❖ Context

- The Indian Antarctic Bill 2022, that aims at having India's own national measures for protecting the Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystem.

❖ Key Highlights

- The Indian Antarctica Bill 2022 is in pursuant to India's accession to **Antarctic Treaty, 1959 and the Protocol on Environment Protection (Madrid protocol) to the Antarctic Treaty.**
- India has two fully functioning base stations in Antarctica named **Maitri was established in 1988**, and **Bharati was established in 2012.** Another one **Dakshin Gangotri was established in 1983** but it is not functional currently. The **Ministry of Earth Sciences** has piloted the **Indian Antarctica Bill.**
- The enforcement of such laws will confer jurisdiction on the courts of India to deal with any dispute or crimes committed in certain parts of Antarctica.
- Apart from ensuring fulfillment of obligations of India under the **Antarctic Treaty of 1959, to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources of 1982, and to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty of 1998** and to ensure the **comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystems.**
- The Bill objectives include **promoting Antarctica as a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science and to ensure that Antarctic does not become the scene or object of international discord.**

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