

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN INTERIM BUDGET AND VOTE-ON-ACCOUNT?

The Finance Minister is all set to present her sixth Budget in a row and since it is a general election year, the government will be allowed only to present an Interim Budget or Vote-on-account instead of a regular full Budget.



About Interim Budget vs Vote-On-Account:

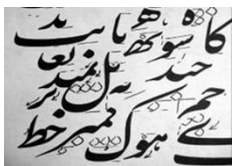
- An interim budget serves as a framework for managing provisional expenditures over a short duration, usually spanning a few months, until a new government takes office at the central level.
- An interim budget generally includes the current state of the economy, plan and non-plan expenditures and receipts, changes in tax rates, revised estimates of the current financial year, and estimates for the coming financial year.
- Despite being presented for the entire year, similar to a regular budget, the interim budget is subject to constraints imposed by the Election Commission.
 - These constraints aim to prevent the government from implementing policies that could unduly influence the general public before the commencement of voting.
- The Parliament passes a Vote-on-account to meet essential expenditures such as salaries of central government staff, funding of ongoing projects, and other government expenditures.
 - In other words, it accounts for only expenditures to be borne by the outgoing government for a period of two months, which may be extended to four months on special circumstances.
- The interim budget serves as a financial plan during a transitional period, typically when there are only a few months left in the current government's tenure. The vote-on-account can be approved within the framework of the interim budget.

- Like a full budget, an **interim budget** will be **discussed and passed in the Lok Sabha**, and the case of a **vote-on-account**, it will be **passed without any formal discussion** as such.
- An **interim budget can propose changes in the tax regime**, whereas a **vote-on-account cannot change the tax regime** under any circumstances.

Vote-On-Account is a **parliamentary approval for withdrawing money** from the Consolidated Fund of India **from April to June/July** or until the new Government presents its full-fledged budget.

- It can be **termed an advance grant**, interim arrangement, and authorisation for the outgoing government to draw the money from the above-said fund and **meet short-term expenditures**.
- As far as validity is concerned, the **interim budget is valid throughout the year** whereas the **vote-on-account is valid only for a period of two to four months**.

FARSI LANGUAGE



The External Affairs Minister recently announced that the Government of India has decided to include Farsi (Persian) as one of the classical languages in India under the New Education Policy.

About the Farsi Language:

- Farsi, also **known as the Persian Language**, is the most widely spoken member of the **Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian languages**, a subfamily of the **Indo-European languages**.
- It is the **official language of Iran**, and two varieties of Persian known as **Dari and Tajik** are the **official languages in Afghanistan and Tajikistan**, respectively.

- Significant populations of **Farsi speakers** can be found in other **Persian Gulf countries** (Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates), as well as **large communities in the US**.
- It has about **62 million native speakers**, ranking it among the world's **20 most widely spoken** first languages.

Key Facts about Classical Languages in India:

- **Criteria** evolved by the Government of India to determine the declaration of a language as a Classical language are as under: -
 - High antiquity of its early **texts/recorded history** from 1500 to 2000 years;
 - A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a **valuable heritage by generations of speakers**;
 - The **literary tradition be original** and not borrowed from another speech community;
 - The **classical language and literature being distinct from modern**, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.
- **Currently, six languages** enjoy the 'Classical' status: **Tamil** (declared in 2004), **Sanskrit** (2005), **Kannada** (2008), **Telugu** (2008), **Malayalam** (2013), and **Odia** (2014).
- **The benefits** it provides once a language is notified as a Classical language:
 - Two major **annual international awards** for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages.
 - A **Centre of Excellence** for Studies in Classical Languages is set up.
 - The University Grants Commission is requested to create, to start with **at least in the Central Universities**, a certain number of **Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages** so declared.”

WHAT IS THE WINDFALL TAX?



About the Windfall Tax:

- It is a **tax levied** by governments **against certain industries** when **economic conditions allow those industries** to experience **significantly above-average profits**.
- The term “**windfall**” refers to an **unexpected rise in profits**, and the tax on windfall gains is known as the windfall tax.

When is it imposed?

- When the **government notices a sudden increase in an industry's revenue**, it imposes this tax.
- However, these **revenues cannot be linked to anything the company actively pursues**, such as its business strategy or expansion.
- Rather, it is **related to a one-off external event** for which the business is not responsible.
- Consequently, a Windfall Tax is imposed on an industry's profits when it experiences a sharp increase in revenue due to unrelated external events.
- A recent **example is the sudden rise in the profits of the oil and gas industries due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict**.
- The unexpected windfalls are taxed by the government over and above the normal tax rates.

The most **common industries** that fall target to windfall gains tax **include oil, gas, and mining**.

- **Purpose:**
 - **Redistribution of unexpected gains** when high prices benefit producers at the expense of consumers;
 - To **fund social welfare schemes**;
 - As a **supplementary revenue stream** for the government;
 - As a way for the Government to **narrow the country's widening trade deficit**.

EXERCISE AYUTTHAYA

Recently, the maiden Bilateral Maritime Exercise -Ayutthaya' between the Indian Navy (IN) and Royal Thai Navy (RTN) was conducted.



About Exercise Ayutthaya:

- The India-Thailand Bilateral Exercise is being named 'Ex-Ayutthaya', which translates to 'The Invincible One' or 'Undefeatable'.
- It symbolises the significance of two of the oldest cities Ayodhya in India and Ayutthaya in Thailand, the historic legacies, rich cultural ties and shared historical narratives dating back to several centuries.
- Indigenously built Indian Naval ships Kulish and IN LCU 56 participated in the inaugural edition of the exercise.
- With the institution of a Bilateral Exercise, both navies have taken a step towards strengthening operational synergy and progressively increasing the exercise complexity.
- During the maiden edition of the exercise, participating units from both navies conducted **surface and anti-air exercises** including weapon firing, seamanship evolutions and tactical manoeuvres.
- The 36th edition of **India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol (Indo-Thai CORPAT)** was also conducted along with the maiden bilateral exercise.
- Maritime Patrol Aircraft from both navies participated in the **Sea Phase of the exercise**.
- As part of the Government of India's vision of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region), the Indian Navy has been proactively engaging with countries in the Indian Ocean Region towards enhancing regional maritime security.
- The Indian Navy and Royal Thai Navy have maintained a close and friendly relationship which has strengthened over the years.

'ONE VEHICLE, ONE FASTAG' INITIATIVE



About the 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' initiative:

- The National Highways Authority of India suggested tagging users

to complete the **Know Your Customer (KYC)** process by the end of January 31 to avoid deactivation.

- The move aims to enhance the efficiency of the Electronic Toll Collection system and provide seamless movement at the Toll Plazas.
- The new arrangement Of ‘One Vehicle, One FASTag’ has also been introduced to discourage **user behaviour of using single FASTag for multiple vehicles** or linking multiple FASTags to a particular vehicle.
- The initiative was taken after the recent reports of multiple FASTags being issued for a particular vehicle and FASTags being issued without KYC **in violation of RBI’s mandate.**

Key points about FASTag

- It is a device that employs **Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)** technology for making **toll payments directly** while the vehicle is in motion.
- It is an RFID passive tag used for making toll payments directly from the customer's linked prepaid or savings/current account.
- It is affixed on the windscreen of the vehicle and enables the customer to drive through toll plazas, without stopping for any toll payments.
- The toll fare is directly deducted from the linked account of the customer.
- It is also vehicle-specific and once it is affixed to a vehicle, it cannot be transferred to another vehicle.
- FASTag can be purchased from any of the **National Electronic Toll Collection (NETC)** Member Banks.
- If a FASTag is linked to the prepaid account, then it needs to be recharged/topped up as per the usage of the customer.

BRU REFUGEES AND THEIR REHABILITATION

Why in news?

- The Tripura government has allocated land for the rehabilitation of the last batch of Mizoram Bru refugees.
- These refugees were granted permanent settlement in **Tripura** through a Home Ministry-initiated quadripartite agreement signed in January 2020.

Bru refugees

- Brus, also referred to as **Reangs** is a tribal community indigenous to northeast India.
- They have historically resided in parts of Mizoram, Tripura, and Assam.
- In the state of Tripura, the Brus are a designated Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
- While many Brus of Assam and Tripura are Hindu, the Brus of Mizoram converted to Christianity over the years.

Bru-Reang Refugee Crisis

- Most Brus residing in Tripura today have suffered more than two decades of internal displacement.

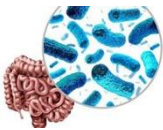
They were forced to leave their homes due to ethnic persecution, mainly from Mizoram.

- It all started in 1995 when different groups in Mizoram demanded that Brus be eliminated from Mizoram's electoral rolls as they were not indigenous inhabitants.
 - Being ethnically distinct from the majority of Mizos, the Brus are often referred to as "Vai" in the state, meaning outsiders or non-Mizos.
- Tensions escalated after the Brus retaliated against the Mizos' attempts to disenfranchise them.
 - They organized themselves into an armed group, the **Bru National Liberation Front**, and a political entity, the Bru National Union.
 - They also demanded the creation of a separate Bru Autonomous District Council (ADC) in western Mizoram as per the provisions of the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution.
- Hence, the resultant ethnic clashes forced many Brus to migrate to neighbouring Tripura in 1997.

- Today, roughly 35,000 Reangs continue to reside in north Tripura's Kanchanpur camp as refugees, as per Home Ministry estimates.
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WHAT IS GUT MICROBIOTA?

Scientists are finding that the gut microbiota may be linked to heart health, some cancers, and even the colour of urine.



- The human gut microbiota refers to the **trillions of microbes**, such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites, **that live in the human gut**.
- Previously, people referred to the gut microbiota as the microflora of the gut.
- The gut microbiome is the environment they live in.
- **Establishment of the human gut microbiota:**
 - **Infants inherit their first gut microbes during vaginal delivery or breastfeeding** (chestfeeding).
 - **Later, your diet and other environmental exposures introduce** new microbes to your biome.
- The gut microbiota **assists in a range of bodily functions**, including:
 - **harvesting energy from digested food**
 - **protecting against pathogens**
 - **regulating immune function**
 - **strengthening the biochemical barriers** of the gut and intestine
- Changes in microbiota composition can affect these functions.

Disease:

- While there are beneficial bacteria in the gut, there are **also harmful bacteria that can enter the Gastrointestinal (GI) tract** and cause infection.
- These **infections include food poisoning** and other **GI diseases** that result in diarrhoea and vomiting.

- **Low microbial diversity** in the gut also has **links to obesity and type 2 diabetes.**
 - The status of the gut microbiota also has links to **metabolic syndrome.**
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GENTOO PENGUIN

Recently, a photographer spotted an extremely rare all-white Gentoo penguin in Chilean Antarctica.



About Gentoo penguin:

- It is exclusively found in the **Southern Hemisphere** between 45 and 65 degrees south latitude.
- Within this range, gentoos are found on the Antarctic Peninsula as well as many sub-Antarctic islands.
- One of the most predominant locations gentoos inhabit is the **Falkland Islands** in the South Atlantic Ocean.

Habitat: Gentoo penguins typically are found along the shoreline. This allows the penguins to be able to quickly access food while remaining close to their nest.

- The major difference between gentoo penguins and other penguin species is their head markings.
- Gentoos feature two white wedges around their eyes that are connected by a medium-sized line across the tops of their heads.
- Their heads are mostly covered in black feathers but small flecks of white feathers can also be found.

Conservation Status

- **IUCN Red List: Least Concern**
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