

UPHOLDING THE AUTONOMY OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION

Context

- A Constitutional bench of Supreme Court has reserved its judgment, related to the method by which the Election Commission of India (ECI) is constituted and Election Commissioners (EC) are appointed.
- The article discusses the fourth branch institutions, their importance, how these institutions perform in India and emphasizes upon the issue of independence of the ECI.

Fourth branch institutions and their importance

- According to the classical understanding of modern democracy, there are 3 wings of state - the **legislature, the executive, and the judiciary**.
- The task of the Constitution is to allocate powers between these 3 wings, and to ensure that there is an adequate degree of **checks and balances between them**.
- However, in contemporary times, the healthy constitutional democracies need what are known as “**fourth branch institutions**” (or integrity institutions), to provide an infrastructure of implementation of basic rights of citizens.
- Hence, there is need to ensure that these fourth branch institutions are functionally independent from the political executive since these are the **vehicles for implementing rights against the executive**.

Fourth branch institutions in the Indian context

- The fourth branch institutions in India are established **either by constitution or by law**. E.g., Election Commission, Lokpal, CAG, Public Service Commission(s), etc., by constitution and CBI, NHRC, RBI etc., by law.
- Though the Constitution protects the independence of these institutions to some degree, but the power of appointment of officials to these institutions **lies exclusively with the executive**.

ECI and petition to reform appointment procedure

- **In India, Article 324 (2)** of the Indian Constitution provides that the Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, as the President may from time-to-time fix.
 - Their appointment shall be subject to **law made by Parliament**. However, such a law has not been enacted yet.
 - In the absence of such a law, the **President** has been making appointments as per the recommendations of the Prime Minister.
- **Petition to reform the appointment procedure of EC:**
 - In 2015, a PIL was filed in SC contending that executive making appointments to ECI has degraded its independence over time.
 - It claimed that the current system of appointments violates Article 324(2) of the Constitution and is hence unconstitutional.
 - The SC in 2018 referred the PIL to a five-judge Constitution bench for authoritative adjudication.

SC's observations on the procedure for appointing an EC

- In the absence of a law to oversee such appointments, the **silence of the Indian Constitution** is being **exploited**.
- The government ensures that the person nominated does not serve the full six years by picking someone close to 65, thus undermining independence.
- Any ruling party at the Centre "likes to perpetuate itself in power," can appoint a '**Yes Man**' to the post under the current system.
- The bench also mooted the idea of including the Chief Justice of India (CJI) in the committee which appoints Election Commissioner to ensure "neutrality" and independence of the poll panel.

AYURSWASTHYA YOJANA

Currently, the Ministry of Ayush is running a Scheme namely, AYURSWASTHYA Yojana.



What is AYURSWASTHYA Yojana?

- It is a **Central Sector Scheme**.
- It is having **two components**
 - **AYUSH and Public Health (PHI)** and
 - **Centre of Excellence (CoE)** from the Financial Year 2021-22 by merging two erstwhile schemes of this Ministry namely
- Central Sector Scheme of Grant-in-Aid for Promotion of AYUSH Intervention in Public Health Initiatives (PHI) and
- Central Sector Scheme for assistance to AYUSH organizations (Government / Non-Government Non-Profit) engaged in AYUSH Education/ Drug Development & Research / Clinical Research etc. for upgradation to Centre of Excellence (CoE).
 - Under the Centre of Excellence component of AYURSWASTHYA Yojana, financial assistance is provided to eligible individual organizations/institutes for establishing and upgrading their functions & facilities and/or for research & development activities in AYUSH.
 - The objectives of the Centre of Excellence component of AYURSWASTHYA Yojana are:
 - To support **establishment of advanced/ specialized AYUSH medical health unit** in reputed AYUSH and Allopathic institutions both in Government and Non-Government sector.
 - To support creative and innovative proposals for **establishment and upgradation** of both functions and facilities of reputed institutions to strengthen competencies of AYUSH professionals in education technology, research & innovation and such other fields necessary for promotion of AYUSH at national as well as international level.
 - To support **creative and innovative proposals for prestigious organizations** which have well-established buildings and infrastructure, and wish to work for AYUSH systems to the level of Centre of Excellence.
 - The maximum admissible financial assistance under the Centre of Excellence component of AYURSWASTHYA Yojana, to an organization/institute is **10.00 crores for maximum period of three years**.

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Recently, Six sites have been added to India's tentative list of UNESCO world heritage sites.



About:

- Three heritage sites were added to the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage sites namely; **the Sun Temple at Modhera and Vadnagar town from Gujarat and rock-cut relief sculptures of Unakoti of Tripura.**
- According to UNESCO, A Tentative List is an **inventory of those properties which each nation intends to consider for nomination.**

Sun Temple of Modhera

- The Sun Temple, Modhera dedicated to Surya dev (The Sun God), is one of the remarkable gems of temple architecture in India.
- It is an exemplary model of the **Maru-gurjara architecture style** of the 11th century of western India under the **patronage of the Solanki dynasty**. The age of the temple may be inferred from its style belonging to the **reign of Bhimadeva I (1022-1063 CE)**.
- It consists of the main temple shrine (garbhagriha), a hall (gadhamandapa), an assembly hall (Sabhamandapa or rangamandapa) and a sacred pool (Kunda) which is now called Ramakunda.
- This east-facing temple is **built of bright yellow sandstone**.
- Other sun temples in India are 8th century CE **Martand Sun Temple in Kashmir** and the 13th century CE **Sun temple at Konark**.

Rock-cut relief sculptures of Unakoti

- The site of Unakoti Rock-cut relief sculptures is located in the north-eastern part of Tripura, which was **built during 8th to 12th CE**.

- The vertical surface of the Unakoti hills was used by the ancient people to carve various **mythological scenes** such as the different iconographic forms of Siva, Ganesh, Uma-Maheshwara.
- The images found at Unakoti can be **classified into two categories:**
- **Majestic rock-cut images** on the vertical surface of the hill and fallen boulders.
- **Loose sculptures** of smaller and medium sizes scattered on the hill.
- **The influence of Buddhism** is also seen in the sculptures of the region. There are **various depictions of Boddhisattavas, Buddha and Buddhist motifs** also found here.
- Many images found in this area also suggest the presence of religious sects such as **Sakta, Tantric, Bajrayanis and Nathayogis.**

Vadnagar

- Vadnagar was situated at a strategic location where two major ancient trade routes crossed each other. One of them joined central India with the Sindh and further northwest regions while another connected the port towns on the Gujarat coast to northern India.
- Vadnagar town is a **multi-layered and multi-cultural mercantile settlement** with its history stretching back to nearly 8th Century BCE.

ARNALA

Recently, the ARNALA ship is inducted into the Indian Navy.



About:

- The ARNALA ship is built under **ASW SWC Project.**
- Arnala class of ships will **replace the ABHAY class ASW Ships** of the Indian Navy and are designed to undertake **anti-submarine operations** in coastal waters and **Low-Intensity Maritime Operations (LIMO)** including subsurface surveillance in littoral waters.
- The ship has been named Arnala to signify the strategic maritime importance accorded to **the island of Arnala by the great Maratha warrior, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.**

What is ASW SWC Project?

- It is the **Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft** project under which many ships are being built for the Indian Navy
 - The ASW SWC ships will be capable of **detecting and neutralizing various underwater threats**.
 - ASW SWC ships have a displacement of 900 tons with a **maximum speed of 25 knots** and an endurance of 1800 NM.
 - These ships will have **over 80% indigenous content**, ensuring that large-scale defense production is executed by Indian manufacturing units thereby generating employment and capability build up within the country.
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PUDUCHERRY ACES SOCIAL PROGRESS INDEX, L'DWEEP & GOA AMONG TOP THREE

In News:

- The report, titled '**Social Progress Index: States and Districts of India**', was recently released by Economic Advisory Council-Prime Minister (EAC-PM) chairman Bibek Debroy
- **Puducherry**, followed by Lakshadweep and Goa, has bagged the top slots for its remarkable performance across the components like personal freedom and choice, shelter, and water and sanitation.

The Social Progress Index (SPI):

- **About:**
 - Formulated by the Institute for Competitiveness and Social Progress Imperative, **SPI is a comprehensive tool** that can serve as a holistic measure of a country's social progress at the national and sub-national levels.
 - The index assesses states and districts based on 12 components across three critical dimensions of social progress - **Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing and Opportunity**.

- **Basic Human Needs** assess the performance of states and districts in terms of Nutrition and Basic Medical Care, Water and Sanitation, Personal Safety and Shelter.
- **Foundations of Wellbeing** evaluates the progress made by the country across the components of Access to Basic Knowledge, Information and Communication, Health and Wellness, and Environmental Quality.
- **Opportunity** focuses on Personal Rights, Personal Freedom and Choice, Inclusiveness, and Access to Advanced Education.
 - Based on the SPI scores, states and districts have been ranked **under six tiers of social progress**, with the Tier 1 indicating Very High Social Progress, while the Tier 6 indicating Very Low Social Progress.
 - **Significance:**
 - By evaluating change in the performance of some key indicators since 2015-16, the report presents a **broad picture of the social progress** in India.
 - In addition, the report highlights progress made by the **112 aspirational districts in the country**.
 - GDP is an incomplete measure of progress and endeavours such as the SPI, that weave in **sociological factors into economic progress** provides more robust and reliable analysis.
 - The findings in the report **will pave the way for policymakers** to make informed decisions.

News Summary:

- The report also dwells on **India's performance based on the global SPI** that is brought out by Social Progress Imperative since 2013.
 - In the latest (2022) report, India has been ranked 110th (out of 169 nations) on the index and India's aggregate SPI score of 60.2 in 2022 is slightly lower than the world average of 65.2.
- The report also highlights that Aizawl (Mizoram), Solan (Himachal Pradesh) and Shimla (Himachal Pradesh) have emerged as the top three best-performing districts.
- The index also highlights that **27 out of 112 districts under the Aspirational District Programme (ADP)** have scored above the national average on the SPI.

- It highlights that over 40% of J&K districts belong to the "high social progress category". Shopian has the highest SPI score of 63.1, attributable to the district's achievements **across water and sanitation, environmental quality, and inclusiveness.**
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GENOME SEQUENCING

The Central government has recently asked States and Union Territories to increase genome sequencing of positive samples amid a rise in COVID cases in China, Japan, the United States, Korea and Brazil.



About Genome:

- A genome is an **organism's complete set of DNA**, including all of its genes.
- Each genome contains all of the information needed to build and maintain that organism.
- In humans, a copy of the entire genome—more than 3 billion DNA base pairs—is contained in all cells that have a nucleus.

Genome Sequencing:

- Genome sequencing is figuring out the **order of DNA nucleotides, or bases, in a genome**—the order of **As, Cs, Gs, and Ts** that make up an organism's DNA.
- The human genome is made up of over 3 billion of these genetic letters.
- In more simple terms, Sequencing a gene is like reading a book one letter at a time to look for any spelling mistakes.
- Whole genome sequencing (WGS) is the equivalent of running spellcheck on every volume in a library.

Applications:

- Tackling Human Disease
- Uncovering the secrets of our past
- Learning about the science behind ancient medicine

- Conserving our wildlife
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JOINT FINANCE AND HEALTH TASK FORCE (JFHTF)

The first Joint Finance and Health Task Force (JFHTF) meeting under India's G20 Presidency was held in virtual mode on December 20.



What is Joint Finance and Health Task Force (JFHTF)?

- The meeting was co-chaired by **Italy and Indonesia**.
 - **The Bali Leaders' Declaration 2022** extended the mandate of the Task Force to continue the collaborations between Finance and Health Ministries for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response.
 - The 1st JFHTF enabled discussions on the mandates specified by the **Bali Leaders' Declaration**.
 - The Task Force Secretariat worked with the Indian Presidency and Co-Chairs Italy and Indonesia to draft the work plan for next year and beyond, which was designed around Indian Presidency's Global Health Priorities for 2023.
 - The Task Force will also promote the exchange of experiences and best practices, developing coordination arrangements between Finance and Health Ministries, promoting collective action and encouraging effective stewardship of resources to address the existing financing gaps in pandemic preparedness and response.
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