

### PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS (PREVENTION OF UNFAIR MEANS) BILL, 2024

#### Why in news?

- Union minister Jitendra Singh introduced the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024 in the Lok Sabha.
- The bill mandates a maximum jail term of 10 years and a fine of up to Rs 1 crore for malpractices and irregularities in competitive examinations.

#### Background against which the bill has been brought

- The bill comes in the backdrop of a cancellation of a series of competitive tests such as:
  - the teacher recruitment exam in Rajasthan,
  - Common Eligibility Test (CET) for Group-D posts in Haryana,
  - recruitment exam for junior clerks in Gujarat and
  - constable recruitment examination in Bihar following question paper leaks.

#### Key highlights of the bill

- **Objective**
  - The objective of the Bill is:
    - to bring greater transparency, fairness and credibility to the public examination systems and
    - to reassure the youth that their sincere and genuine efforts will be fairly rewarded and their future is safe.
- **Applicability**
  - The bill is applicable to central recruitment and entrance exams conducted by:
    - the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC),
    - Staff Selection Commission (SSC),
    - Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs),
    - Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS), and
    - National Testing Agency (NTA).

- The NTA conducts exams for admission to higher educational institutions, like the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) for engineering, National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) for medical, and Common University Entrance Test (CUET) for undergraduate and post-graduate studies.
- Apart from these designated public examination authorities, all central ministries and departments, as well as their offices for recruitment, will also come under the purview of the new law.
- **Does not target students**
  - The Bill provides punishment for persons, organised groups or institutions indulging in unfair means for monetary or wrongful gains.
  - However, candidates appearing for the exams have been left out of its purview.
    - Candidate shall continue to be covered under the extant administrative provisions of the public examination authority concerned.
- **Punishments**
  - The bill mandates a three-to-five-year prison term for involvement in paper leak cases.
  - However, in cases where a link to organised crime is proven it calls for a prison sentence of up to 10 years.
  - It imposes a fine of Rs 1 crore and recovering the cost of conducting examinations from firms.
  - It says a firm also may be barred from conducting public exams for years in case of a conviction.
- **Defines unfair means**
  - Section 3 of the Bill defines unfair means.
  - It proposes 20 offences and unfair means including impersonation, manipulation of answer sheets and tampering with documents.
- **Nature of offences**
  - Section 9 of the bill states that all offences shall be cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable.

## ZERO TOLERANCE TOWARDS USE OF CHILDREN IN POLL CAMPAIGNS

### Why in news?

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) said it issued directions to political parties to refrain from using children in election campaigns.
- The ECI asked parties to adhere to the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and a Bombay High Court order of August 4, 2014.
  - The Bombay High Court, in August 2014, emphasised the need to ensure that parties do not allow children to participate in election-related activities.

### Child Labour

- According to the ILO, child labour includes any work that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity, physical or mental development.
- **Constitutional provision in India**
  - Article 24 of the Constitution of India prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factory or mine or in any hazardous employment.
- **Reasons behind Child labour in India**
  - **Poverty and lack of social security** are the main causes of child labour.
  - Entry of multi-national corporations into industry without proper mechanisms to hold them accountable has led to the use of child labour.
  - **Lack of quality universal education** has also contributed to children dropping out of school and entering the labour force.
  - Laws that are meant to protect children from hazardous labour are ineffective and not implemented correctly.
  - A growing phenomenon is using **children as domestic workers in urban areas**.
    - According to many surveys, child labour is highest among schedule tribes, Muslims, schedule castes and OBC children.

## Steps taken by India to eliminate child labour

- **The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and its 2016 amendment**
  - **The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986**, prevents children from partaking in certain employments and regulates the conditions of work for children in other fields.
  - In 2016, an amendment completely banned the employment of children below 14 years.
  - It also prohibits employment of adolescents (14-18 years) in hazardous occupations and processes.
- **Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2017**
  - Government has framed the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2017.
  - This rule specifies the duties and responsibilities of State Governments and District Authorities.
- **PENCIL (Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour) platform**
  - To ensure effective enforcement of the provisions of the Child Labour Act and smooth implementation of the **National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme** a separate online portal PENCIL has been developed.
    - Government had initiated the NCLP Scheme in 1988 to rehabilitate working children in 12 child labour endemic districts of the country.
    - Under this Scheme, the children in the age group of 9-14 years are withdrawn from work and put into NCLP Special Training Centres.
- **The Factories Act of 1948**
  - This act prohibits the employment of children under 14 years old in factories.
- **Right to Education**
  - The Right to Education Act was passed in 2009 to ensure that all children get an education in place of working.
  - There are several schools set up that impart free education to such children and also offer facilities such as textbooks, uniforms, and others for free.

## WHAT IS ABHYAS?

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted four flight trials of the high-speed expendable aerial target 'ABHYAS' recently.



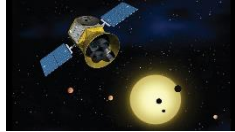
- It is a **high-speed expendable aerial target (HEAT)**.
- It is **designed** by the DRDO's **Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE)**.
- **ABHYAS offers a realistic threat scenario for the practice of weapon systems.**
- It is the ideal platform for the validation of Armed Forces equipment slated for induction (only those that require aerial engagement).
- **Features:**
  - It is **designed for autonomous flying** with the **help of an autopilot** indigenously made by the ADE.
  - It has a **radar cross-section** and a **visual and infrared augmentation system** required for **weapon practice**.
  - The target drone has a **laptop-based Ground Control System** with which the aircraft can be integrated and **pre-flight checks, data recording** during the flight, replays after the flight and **post-flight analysis** can be carried out.

## **Key Facts about DRDO:**

- It is the **R&D wing of the Ministry of Defence**, Govt. of India, with a vision to empower India with cutting-edge defence technologies and a mission to achieve self-reliance in critical defence technologies and systems.
- It is **India's largest research organisation**.
- **Formation:** The organisation was formed in 1958 from the amalgamation of the then-existing Technical Development Establishment (TDEs) of the Indian Army and the Directorate of Technical Development and Production (DTDP) with the Defence Science Organisation (DSO).
- **Headquarters: New Delhi.**

## WHAT IS THE TRANSITING EXOPLANET SURVEY SATELLITE (TESS)?

Using data from NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS), astronomers have recently discovered and characterised a habitable zone planet named TOI-715b.



- It is a NASA mission that's searching for planets orbiting the brightest stars in Earth's sky.
- The satellite is a **follow-up to NASA's highly successful Kepler space telescope**, which found thousands of exoplanets during a decade of work after its launch in 2009.
- **Launch:** It was launched on **April 18, 2018**, aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket out of Cape Canaveral.
- **Orbit:** TESS circles Earth in a **unique high Earth orbit** of 12 to 15 days, **which is inclined** in such a way that the telescope's sky view is largely free from **obstructions** by our bright planet and the Moon.
- Over the course of its **two-year primary mission**, TESS' **four sensitive cameras systematically scanned** over 200,000 of the nearest and brightest stars, **imaging 75% of the sky**. It found 2,100 planetary candidates and 66 confirmed exoplanets.
- TESS is finding planets ranging from small, rocky worlds to giant planets, showcasing the diversity of planets in the galaxy.

### How does TESS find exoplanets?

- It uses the **transit method** to detect planets.
- It **looks for periodic dips in stars' brightness as planets cross** in front of them along our sightline.
- The **larger the planet, the greater the drop in brightness** during the transit.
- **How long it takes a planet to pass** in front of the star and come back **tells us the shape of its orbit**.
- This method **reveals the diameter of the planet and the size of its orbit**.
- **Orbits within a certain range lie in the "habitable zone"**, where liquid water can exist on the surface of an Earth-like world.

## MERA GAON MERI DHAROHAR PROGRAMME

Recently, the Union Minister for Culture, Tourism And Development of North Eastern Region informed the Lok Sabha about the Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar programme.



### About Mera Gaon Meri Dharohar programme:

- It is a pan-India initiative of the **Ministry of Culture** under the **National Mission on Cultural Mapping** and was launched on 27th July 2023.
- It seeks to compile comprehensive information detailing the life, history, and ethos of Indian villages and to make the same available to virtual and real-time visitors.
- Under the MGMD, information is collected under **seven broad categories** as given below-
  - Arts and Crafts Village
  - Ecologically Oriented Village
  - Scholastic Village Linked with Textual and Scriptural Traditions of India
  - Epic Village linked with Ramayana, Mahabharata and/or Puranic legends and oral epics
  - Historical Village linked with Local and National History
  - Architectural Heritage Village
  - Any other characteristic that may need highlighting such as fishing village, horticulture village, shepherding village etc.
- **Objective:** The main objective of the project is to **culturally map** India's 6.5 lakh villages, spanning 29 States and 7 Union Territories, on a comprehensive virtual platform.
- Through MGMD, people will get an opportunity to immerse themselves in the diverse and vibrant cultural heritage of India.
- The core idea behind this project is to encourage appreciation for India's culture and traditions, paving the way for economic growth, social harmony, and artistic development in rural communities.

- The financial outlay of Rs.353.46 Crore is approved under the scheme of **Financial Assistance for Promotion of Art and Culture** consisting of 08 scheme components namely;
  - Financial Assistance to Cultural organisations with National Presence
  - Cultural Function & Production Grant (CFPG)
  - Financial Assistance for the Preservation & Development of Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas
  - Financial Assistance for the Preservation & Development of Buddhist/Tibetan Organization
  - Financial Assistance for Building Grants including Studio Theatres
  - Financial Assistance For Allied Cultural Activities
  - Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage

## INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR INTEGRATED MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT

Experts from the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) declared the Hindu Kush Himalaya region a biosphere on the brink of collapse and called for bold action and urgent finance to prevent nature loss.



### About the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development:

- It is an **intergovernmental knowledge and learning centre** working on behalf of the people of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH).
- It was formally established and inaugurated on **5 December 1983**.
- **Mission:** To build and share knowledge that drives regional policy and action and attracts investment that enables the diverse countries and communities of the HKH to transition to greener, more inclusive, and climate-resilient development.
- **Member countries** – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.
- **Governance**
  - The **Board of Governors** is the highest governing body of the centre.



- It consists of one representative from each of the eight regional member countries and independent members who are nominated by the ICIMOD Support Group based on their recognized professional expertise and experience.
- **Functions**
  - It serves the region through information and knowledge generation and sharing to find innovative solutions to critical mountain problems.
  - It **bridges science with policies** and on-the-ground practices.
  - It provides a regional platform where experts, planners, policymakers, and practitioners can exchange ideas and perspectives towards the achievement of sustainable mountain development.
- **Headquarters:** Kathmandu, Nepal

## Key facts about Hindu Kush Himalaya

- The HKH region extends 3,500 km over all or part of eight countries from Afghanistan in the west to Myanmar in the east.
  - It is the source of ten large Asian river systems – the **Amu Darya, Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra** (Yarlungtsanpo), **Irrawaddy, Salween** (Nu), **Mekong** (Lancang), **Yangtse** (Jinsha), **Yellow River** (Huanghe), and **Tarim** (Dayan).
  - It provides water, ecosystem services, and the basis for livelihoods to people in the region.
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