

### DISCRIMINATION IN THE IITS IS SOMETHING TO WRITE ABOUT

#### Context

- An 18-year-old Dalit chemical engineering student of IIT Bombay allegedly committed suicide, with his family alleging that he had faced caste discrimination on campus.
- The article highlights that this tragic case should serve as a reminder to pause and reflect on the blind spots of biases to prevent further occurrences like these.
- It also emphasised the necessity to discuss merit alongside any discussion of discrimination at the IITs, as it is the **imbedded notion of merit that permits discrimination**.

#### Discrimination in the Facade of Merit

- The political philosopher, Michael Sandel, in the book, The Tyranny of Merit, presents a scathing critique of **meritocracy as a societal ideal** and argues **how pride among the elites and a politics of humiliation are natural outcomes of meritocracy**.
- This “**credentialist prejudice**” as noted by Sandel is embodied by some upper-caste students at the IITs, knowingly or unknowingly, as symptom of meritocratic arrogance.
  - This happens, when elites tend to “look down on those who do not rise”.
  - Such a strategy undermines societal acceptance and respect for people who lack the qualifications the system rewards.
  - As a result, various forms of graded inequality and discriminatory assessments of one's alleged talents, are strongly ingrained.

#### On Campus Prejudiced Scenario of IITs

- **The ladder of merit:** The IIT campuses have well-demarcated zones of hierarchy, the first level of hierarchy being whether you are an undergraduate or a postgraduate student.
  - **Intermingling** of these two cohorts was an **exception** than the norm as undergraduates tended to feel superior to postgraduates.
  - For instance, for undergraduates, one's abilities are immediately imprinted in the minds of everyone based on one's rank in the entrance exams and one's branch of studies is also an accident of one's rank.

- This then becomes the unique identifier of phantom called merit which then slowly, blurs the lines between being objective and objectifying.
- **The role of caste:** The branch of studies results in disinterest and disillusionment among some students, but it plays out differently among students across caste.
- On average, for some **upper-caste disinterested students**, it becomes an opportunity to **explore other facets**, which then acts as a **justification for bad academic performance** in college.
- These students also possess an implicit confidence that they could be bailed out when needed, owing to their family connections, affluence, cultural capital or social networks which act as **cushions** for them to **take risks in college**.
- However, the students on ‘reservation’, trapped in a branch not of their choice, do not have the luxury to explore or take the same kind of risks as their upper-caste counterparts.
- An apprehension of being **stigmatised for bad academic performance** tends to amplify the anxiety and pressure of ‘reserved’ category students.
- It implies that even the **freedom to take chances is implicitly conditioned** on one’s rank and caste location and merit fails to account for these starting points, trajectories, prejudices, hardships, etc., that shape us.
- The argument of using **rank or grades as a proxy for merit** hence could be drawn **corollary** to using a person’s body temperature as a sole metric to assess health, ignoring one’s age, gender or other pre-existing health conditions.

## Steps taken to Reduce Caste-based Discrimination in the IIT Campus

- In June 2022, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) had launched a probe into the lack of mental health support for SC/ST students in IIT-Bombay.
- Following this, the institute had agreed to hire one SC and one ST counsellor and train existing ones in **affirmative counselling** for the marginalized.
- The **University Grants Commission (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations 2012** prescribes for a level playing field for all students in respect of the entitlement and opportunity for enjoyment of all legitimate rights.

## WHAT IS THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION (RTI) ACT, 2005?

The Supreme Court recently directed all high courts to set up RTI websites within three months.



### About Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005:

- It is a law enacted by the Parliament of India "to provide for **setting out the practical regime of right to information for citizens.**
- The **Right to Information** is **derived** from our **fundamental right of Expression** under **Article 19** of the Constitution of India.
- The Act **applies to all States and Union Territories** of India.
- Under the provisions of the Act, **any citizen may request information from a "public authority"** (a body of Government or "instrumentality of State") by making an **application in writing** or through **electronic means**.
- The information seeker is **not required to give reasons** for seeking information.
- **Time Period for Supply of Information:**
  - **In the normal course**, information to an applicant shall be **supplied within 30 days** from the receipt of the application by the public authority.
  - If the **information sought concerns the life or liberty of a person**, it should be **supplied within 48 hours**.
- **Public Information Officer (PIO):** Every public authority shall **designate** some of its officers as They are **responsible for giving information** to a person who seeks information under the RTI Act.
- The Act also **requires every public authority to computerize their records** for wide dissemination and to **proactively publish** certain categories of **information** so that the citizens need minimum recourse to request information formally.
- **Exemptions:**
  - It also contains **several exemptions** which **enable public authorities to deny** requests for information. It ranges from the **sovereignty and security of India to trade secrets**.

- Section 24 of the act exempts certain security and intelligence organizations from the purview of the act **except** the information pertaining to the **allegations of corruption and human rights violations**.
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## WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION (ITU)?

Prime Minister will inaugurate the new International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Area office and Innovation Centre at a programme in Delhi's Vigyan Bhawan.



### About International Telecommunication Union (ITU):

- It is the **United Nations specialized agency** for information and communication technologies.
- It is an **intergovernmental organization** that **coordinates between governments and private sector bodies** with respect to **global telecommunication and information communication technology (ICT) services**.
- It was **established in 1865** as International Telegraph Union.
- **In 1947** the ITU became a **specialized agency** of the United Nations.
- **Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland.**
- **Membership:** It has a membership of **193 countries** and nearly **800 private sector entities** and academic institutions.
- **Functions:**
  - **allocate global radio spectrum and satellite orbits;**
  - **coordination and setting of technical standards** related to telecommunication/ICT;
  - **strive to improve access to ICTs in underserved communities** worldwide;
- **India and ITU:** India has been an **active member** of the ITU **since 1869** and has been a **regular member of the ITU Council since 1952**.

### ITU Area office and Innovation Centre:

- The Area Office, which is **fully funded by India**, is **located on** the second floor of the **Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT) building** at Mehrauli in **New Delhi**.
- It will serve **India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Afghanistan, and Iran**.

- It will **enhance coordination among nations** and foster mutually beneficial economic cooperation in the region.

## IMF APPROVES \$3-BN BAILOUT FOR SRI LANKA; TACKLING CORRUPTION A KEY CONDITION

### Why in News?

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) cleared a \$3 billion-Extended Fund Facility (EFF) for Sri Lanka.

### Brief Background on Economic Crisis in Sri Lanka:



- Sri Lanka is currently in an economic and political crisis of mass proportions, recently culminating in a default on its debt payments.
- There are several reasons for this crisis and the economic turmoil has sparked mass protests and violence across the country. Following is a brief timeline of events which eventually led to the crisis:
  - **2009 –**
    - In 2009, a decades-long civil war in the country ended and the government’s focus turned inward towards domestic production.
    - However, **a stress on local production and sales, instead of exports, increased the reliance on foreign goods.**
  - **2019 –**
    - Unprompted cuts were introduced on income tax in 2019, leading to **significant losses in government revenue**, draining an already cash-strapped country.
  - **2021 –**
    - The Sri Lankan government introduced a ban on foreign-made chemical fertilizers. The ban was meant to counter the depletion of the country’s foreign currency reserves.

- However, with only local, organic fertilizers available to farmers, a **massive crop failure occurred.**
- As a result, Sri Lankans were subsequently forced to rely even more heavily on imports, further depleting reserves.

### Implications of the Economic Crisis:

- Sri Lanka is home to more than 22 million people who are rapidly losing the ability to purchase everyday goods.
- The **government owes \$51 billion** and is unable to make interest payments on its loans, let alone repay the amount borrowed.
- And its currency had collapsed by 80%, making imports more expensive and worsening inflation that is already out of control, with food costs rising 57% by May, 2022.
- Due to power outages meant to save energy and fuel, schools were shut down.

### IMF Bailout:

- In September 2022, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Sri Lankan authorities reached a staff-level agreement to support Sri Lanka's economic policies with a 48-month arrangement under the **Extended Fund Facility (EFF)** of about **\$3 billion**.
- The objectives of Sri Lanka's new Fund-supported program are –
  - To restore macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability,
  - Stepping up structural reforms to address corruption vulnerabilities and unlock Sri Lanka's growth potential.

### What is Extended Fund Facility?

- The Extended Fund Facility (EFF) is a lending facility of the Fund of the IMF and it was established in **1974**.
- The EFF **provides financial assistance to countries facing serious medium-term balance of payments (BoP) problems** because of structural weaknesses that require time to address.
- To help countries implement medium-term structural reforms, the **EFF offers longer program engagement and a longer repayment period.**
- **Eligibility –**
  - All member countries of IMF facing actual or potential external financing needs are eligible.



- **Conditions –**
    - Countries’ policy commitments are expected to focus on structural reforms to address institutional or economic weaknesses, in addition to policies to maintain macroeconomic stability.
  - **Duration –**
    - Typically approved for periods of 3 years, but may be approved for periods as long as 4 years to implement deep and sustained structural reforms.
  - **Repayment –**
    - Over 4½–10 years in 12 equal semi-annual instalments.
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## [XI - PUTIN MEETING](#)

### **Why in news?**

- China’s President Xi Jinping is on an enormously significant three-day visit to Russia.
- He landed in Moscow days after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued warrants for the arrest of President Vladimir Putin for alleged war crimes.

### **Xi - Putin Meeting**

- Chinese President Xi Jinping has embarked on his first trip to Russia since the country invaded Ukraine last year.
- His trip to Russia offers a symbolic shot in the arm (stimulus) to his increasingly isolated Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin.
- It also highlights Xi’s determination to push back against American power in the world.

### **Why China-Russia relationship matters to Beijing?**

- **From security point of view**
  - From the point of view of security, it is imperative for Beijing to maintain both outreach and cordial relations with Moscow.
  - Despite the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia is still China’s largest neighbour, a major source of military technology.

- Russia continues to exercise influence in the former Soviet states that border China's troubled west.
- **Economic and energy security**
  - Russia is now a major source of hydrocarbon energy as well as a market for China's manufacturing and technology.
- **Strategic**
  - China sees in Russia an ally in the opposition to Western liberal ideas and a US-led global order.
  - The Chinese under Xi declared a partnership with no limits during Putin's visit to Beijing in early February 2022 on the eve of his invasion of Ukraine.
  - To the Chinese, Western sanctions against Russia are an example of what a new Chinese document on their Global Security Initiative calls "abusing unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction".
- **Message to non-western world**
  - Xi sees value in showing the non-Western world that there is an alternative to American power and ideas of how the world should be run.

## How does the war affect China?

- The war brings costs to China — not just economic ones but political ones, too.
  - This is especially from the major Western nations that are also big markets for Chinese manufacturing and sources for high technology.
- But these are costs that the Chinese economy appears large enough to bear, especially when it is able to procure oil at deep discounts from Russia.
  - Also, China has had its own version of technological self-reliance programmes underway for decades.
  - China is also able to use its economic influence to carry out trade in its own currency with Russia and other sanctioned regimes — Iran, for example.

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[SANDALWOOD BUDDHA STATUE](#)



Recently, the Prime Minister of India presented a sandalwood Buddha statue to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during the latter's two-day state visit to India.

### About the Sandalwood Buddha statue:

- The Buddha figure, made of pure sandalwood, has hand carvings along with traditional designs and natural scenes.
- In this posture, Buddha is sitting in '**dhyana mudra**' under the Bodhi tree.
  - The 'dhyana mudra' is the mudra of meditation and the attainment of spiritual perfection.
  - According to tradition, this mudra derives from the one assumed by the Buddha when meditating under the **Bodhi tree before his enlightenment**.
  - The obverse of the image has an intricate carving of the Bodhi tree.
- The **Kadamwood Jali Box** in which the statue was encased is also considered auspicious in Indian culture.
- The art of sandalwood carving is an exquisite and ancient craft that has been practised in Karnataka for centuries.

### Key facts about the sandalwood tree

- Indian Sandalwood is a **dry deciduous forest species** native to China, India, Indonesia, Australia, and the Philippines
- It has been an important part of Indian culture for centuries and is widely regarded as one of the most valuable and prized woods in the world.
- **Major Growing areas in India:** Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.

### NATIONAL CHAMBAL SANCTUARY



Recently, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh these three States have commenced joint action to stop illegal sand mining in National Chambal Sanctuary.

## About National Chambal sanctuary:

- National Chambal Sanctuary lying at the tri-junction of three states **Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.**
- It is home to the critically endangered **Gharial**, the **red-crowned roof turtle** and the endangered **Ganges River dolphin.**
- Chambal supports the largest population of Ghariales in the wild.

## Key facts about the Chambal River

- It is one of the **tributaries of the Yamuna River** and the most pollution-free river in India.
  - It originates at the **Singar Chouri peakon** the northern slopes of the Vindhya mountains
  - On its south, east and west, the basin is bounded by the Vindhyan mountain ranges and on the northwest by the Aravallis.
  - The **Hadauti plateau** in Rajasthan occurs in the upper catchment of the Chambal River to the southeast of the Mewar Plains.
  - **Tributaries:** Banas, Kali Sindh, Sipra, Parbati, etc.
  - **Major Dams on the River:** Gandhi Sagar Dam, Rana Pratap Sagar Dam, Jawahar Sagar Dam.
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