

GST APPELLATE TRIBUNAL MAY BE HEADED BY A FORMER SUPREME COURT JUDGE

Why in News?

- Amendments to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) laws to enable the GST Appellate Tribunal's constitution are expected to be introduced in the Lok Sabha.
- The GST Appellate Tribunal is likely to be headed by a former Supreme Court (SC) judge or a former Chief Justice of a High Court (HC).

What Exactly is the Goods and Services Tax (GST)?

- It is an **indirect tax** (not directly paid by customers to the government), that came into effect from **1 July 2017** through the implementation of the **101st Amendment to the Constitution of India** by the Indian government.
- It has actually **replaced** various indirect taxes such as - service taxes, VAT, excise and others in the country.
- It is **levied on the manufacturer or seller** of goods and the providers of services.
- It is divided into five different tax slabs for collection of tax - **0%, 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%**.
- **Types of GST:** State Goods and Services Tax (SGST), Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) and the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST, on exports and imports).

What is the GST Council?

- **Article 279A** of the Indian Constitution gives power to **the President of India** to constitute a joint forum of the Centre and States called the GST Council, consisting of the -
 - Union Finance Minister - **Chairperson**
 - The Union Minister of State, in-charge of Revenue of finance - **Member**
 - The Minister in-charge of finance or taxation or any other Minister nominated by each State Government - **Members**
- The GST Council is **an apex committee** to modify, reconcile or to make recommendations to the Union and the States on GST, like the goods and services that may be subjected or exempted from GST, model GST laws, etc.

What is the GST Appellate Tribunal?

- The CGST Act empowers the Central Government to constitute, **on the recommendation of the GST Council**, an Appellate Tribunal known as the GST Appellate Tribunal.
- It is the **forum of second appeal** in GST laws and the **first common forum of dispute resolution between Centre and States**.
- The appeals against the orders passed by the Appellate Authority under the Central and State GST Acts lie before the GST Appellate Tribunal.
- **Being a common forum**, GST Appellate Tribunal **will ensure that there is uniformity in redressal of disputes arising under GST**, and therefore, in implementation of GST across the country.

PARVATMALA PROGRAMME

The Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways recently informed the Lok Sabha about the detailed feasibility studies of eight projects for Ropeway implementation under the Parvatmala programme.



About Parvatmala Programme:

- The National Ropeway Development Programme also known as ‘Parvatmala’ (Parvatmala means garlanding mountains) was announced in the 2022-23 Union Budget.
- **Aim:** To decongest mountainous areas where road and train connectivity cannot be upgraded beyond a limit.
- Under phase-I of the project, 30 priority points or stretches will be constructed
- Parvatmala will construct ropeways in mountainous terrains of India under the **Public Private Partnership (PPP)**.
- **Nodal Ministry:** The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways undertakes the project.
- The ministry will oversee all the affairs related to the ropeway construction, research, and policy-making.

- **Implementing Agency:** The National Highways Logistics Management Limited (NHLML) has been mandated by the ministry to implement the project. It is a 100% owned SPV of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).
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UNION GOVERNMENT FORMS COMMITTEE TO LOOK INTO NEW PENSION SCHEME

Why in News?

- Union Finance Minister Shri Nirmala Sitharaman announced the formation of a committee to look into improving the system of pension for government employees.
- The move comes against the backdrop of at least five Opposition-ruled states adopting the Old Pension Scheme.

What were the concerns with the OPS?

- **Fiscally unsustainable –**
 - The main problem was that the **pension liability remained unfunded — that is, there was no corpus specifically for pension**, which would grow continuously and could be dipped into for payments.
 - The Government of India budget provided for pensions every year; there was no clear plan on how to pay year after year in the future.
 - The ‘pay-as-you-go’ scheme created inter-generational equity issues — meaning the **present generation had to bear the continuously rising burden of pensioners**.
 - According to Union Minister of State, Personnel, the number of people receiving central government pensions exceeds the number of active employees.
 - There are more pensioners, about 77 lakh, than active-duty personnel, which is about 50–60 lakh.
 - He also stated that **there are 6,000–7,000 pensioners who are 'over 100 years old' and receive the same amount as a pension as they did as a salary**.
- **Only benefits few people –**
 - Another criticism of OPS is that it costs the government a lot of money while only benefiting a few people.

- Under the scheme, **only government employees, and only those who have worked for at least 20 years, are eligible.**
- As a result, **only 34 million (or less than 11%) of India's estimated working population** is eligible to participate in formal provisions designed to provide old-age income security.

What is New Pension Scheme (NPS)?

- As a substitute of OPS, the NPS was introduced by the Central government in **April, 2004.**
- This pension programme is open to employees from the **public, private** and even the **unorganised sectors** except those from the armed forces.
- The scheme encourages people to invest in a pension account at regular intervals during the course of their employment.
- After retirement, the subscribers can take out a certain percentage of the corpus.
- The beneficiary receives the remaining amount as a monthly pension, post retirement.
- **Nodal agency:** Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)

Eligibility:

- Any Indian citizen **between 18 and 60 years** can join NPS.
- **NRIs** (Non-Residential Indians) are also eligible to apply for NPS.

Permanent Retirement Account Number (PRAN):

- Every NPS subscriber is issued a card with **12-digit unique number** called Permanent Retirement Account Number or PRAN.

Minimum contribution in NPS:

- The subscriber has to contribute a minimum of **Rs. 6,000 in a financial year.**
- If the subscriber fails to contribute the minimum amount, his/her account is frozen by the PFRDA.

MSP FOR JUTE

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister of India, has given its approval for the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Raw Jute for the 2023-24 season.



About Jute:

- Jute is one of the most important natural fibres after cotton in terms of cultivation and usage

- **Climatic conditions required for its growth**

- **Temperature:** Between 25-35°C
- **Rainfall:** Around 150-250 cm
- **Soil Type:** Well-drained alluvial soil.
- India is the largest producer of jute followed by Bangladesh and China.
- It is mainly grown in eastern India because of the rich alluvial soil of the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta.
- In India, major jute-producing states include **West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya and Tripura.**

What is the Minimum support price?

- A minimum support price (MSP) is a **minimum price** for any crop that the Government considers as remunerative for farmers and hence deserving of “support”.
- It is also the price that Government agencies pay whenever they procure a particular crop from the farmers.
- There is currently **no statutory backing for these prices**, nor any law mandating their enforcement.
- **Crops covered under MSP:** At present, the Central Government sets **MSP for 23**
 - **7 cereals** (Bajra, wheat, maize, paddy barley, ragi and jowar);
 - **5 pulses** (tur, chana, Masur, urad and moong);
 - **7 oilseeds** (sunflower, mustard, niger seed, soya bean, groundnut, sesame and sunflower);
 - **4 commercial crops** (raw jute, cotton, copra and sugarcane).

How does the Government decide on the MSP?

- The Government announces the MSP at the start of each cropping season (Rabi and Kharif).
- The MSP is decided after the Government exhaustively studies the recommendations made by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).

- CACP is an attached office of the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**.

WHAT ARE MICRO UNITS DEVELOPMENT AND REFINANCE AGENCY (MUDRA) LOANS?

The Central Government has recently made MUDRA loans given to joint liability group micro enterprises eligible for the Credit Guarantee Fund for Micro Units.



About MUDRA Loans:

- MUDRA Loan is offered under the **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)**.
- PMMY was **launched in 2015** with the aim to **help small-scale businesses expand and attain success**.
- **Support under the scheme:** It provides **loans of up to 10 lacks** to **non-corporate, non-farm small/micro enterprises**.
- **Purpose of loan:** To **start a new business, enhance existing or meet working capital requirements**, and for business expansion purposes
- These loans are **classified as MUDRA loans** under PMMY.
- **Eligibility:** **Any Indian Citizen who has a business plan for a non-farm sector** income-generating activities such as manufacturing, processing, trading, or service sector.
- These loans are **given by Commercial Banks, RRBs, Small Finance Banks, MFIs, and NBFCs**.
- **Types of loans:**
 - **Shishu** - Covering loans **up to Rs 50,000;**
 - **Kishor** - Covering loans **above Rs 50,000 and up to Rs 5 lakh;**
 - **Tarun** - Covering loans **above Rs 5 lakh and up to Rs 10 lakh.**

WHAT IS THE UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES PREVENTION ACT (UAPA)?

The Supreme Court of India recently ruled that mere membership in an unlawful association is sufficient to constitute an offense under the stringent provisions of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967.



About Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA):

- The UAPA was **enacted in 1967**.
- It **lays down** the definitions and rules for designating an organization as an "unlawful association" if it is engaged in certain types of activities.
- **'Unlawful activity'** is defined as any action taken by an individual or association – through an act, words, spoken or written, or by signs or visible representation – which is intended to, or supports a claim to, **bring about the cession of a part of the territory of India**, or the secession of a part of the territory of India from the Union, or **which incites any individual or group of individuals to bring about such cession** or secession.
- It **covers** activities which disclaim, question, disrupt or are intended to **disrupt the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India**, and which cause or intend to cause disaffection against India.
- In 2004, the UAPA was amended, and 'terrorist activities' were brought within its **fold**, under which 34 outfits, including the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad, were banned.
- Under the Act, the central government may designate an organization as a **terrorist organization** if it:
 - commits or **participates in acts of terrorism**;
 - **prepares for terrorism**;
 - **promotes terrorism**;
 - is otherwise **involved in terrorism**;
- The **2019 Amendment** gave the Home Ministry the power to designate individuals as **terrorists**.
- The Act extends to the whole of India.
- It also **applies to citizens of India who are abroad**, persons in service of the Indian government, and persons on ships and aircraft registered in India.

WHAT IS FINANCE BILL?

The Lok Sabha recently passed the Finance Bill 2023 giving effect to tax proposals.



About Finance Bill:

- Financial Bills are also called "Act for Appropriation of Funds for Appropriations".
- Financial bills are responsible for fiscal matters such as government spending or revenue.
- It specifies the amount of money to be spent by the government and the way it is to be spent.
- According to Rule 219 of the Lok Sabha's Rules of Procedure, a "Finance Bill" is defined as the Bill that is typically introduced each year to give effect to the Government of India's financial proposals for the upcoming fiscal year, as well as a Bill to give effect to supplementary financial proposals for any period.
- Financial bills are a component of the union budget. The Indian Constitution's Article 110(a) requires that a finance bill be presented together with the budget.
- It proposes all the necessary legal changes required for the proposed tax adjustments.
- It is accompanied by a Memorandum containing explanations of the provisions included in it.
- When a question arises about whether a Finance bill is a money bill or not, the speaker of the house decides on the matter, and his decision shall be final in this regard.

What is a Money Bill?

- Under Article 110(1), a Bill is said to be a Money Bill if it only contains provisions related to taxation, borrowing of money by the government, and expenditure from or receipt to the Consolidated Fund of India.
- Bills that only contain provisions that are incidental to these matters would also be regarded as Money Bills.
- Who decides if a Bill is a Money Bill? The Speaker certifies a Bill as a Money Bill, and the Speaker's decision is final.
- Passage of Money Bills:

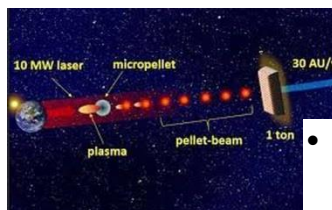
- A Money Bill may only be introduced in Lok Sabha on the recommendation of the President.
- It must be passed in Lok Sabha by a simple majority of all members present and voting.
- Following this, it may be sent to the Rajya Sabha for its recommendations, which Lok Sabha may reject if it chooses to. If such recommendations are not given within 14 days, it will be deemed to be passed by Parliament.

How is a Money Bill different from a Financial bill?

- While all Money Bills are Financial Bills, all Financial Bills are not Money Bills.
- For example, the Finance Bill, which only contains provisions related to tax proposals, would be a Money Bill.
- However, a Bill that contains some provisions related to taxation or expenditure but also covers other matters would be considered a Financial Bill.
- The Rajya Sabha cannot amend or reject the money bill, but it has the power to amend or reject the finance bill.
- Money bills and finance bill (1) can be introduced only in the Lok Sabha, whereas a Finance Bill (2) can be introduced both in Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha.
- To resolve a deadlock, the President can summon a joint sitting of Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha in case it is a finance bill. However, no such provision is made in case of a money bill.

PELLET-BEAM PROPULSION SYSTEM

A newly proposed propulsion system of NASA could theoretically beam a heavy spacecraft outside the confines of our Solar System in less than 5 years.



About Pellet-Beam Propulsion System:

- The pellet-beam concept was partly inspired by the Breakthrough Starshot initiative, which is working on a 'light-sail' propulsion system.
- This system requires two spacecraft – one that sets off for interstellar space, and one that goes into orbit around Earth.



CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK



- The spacecraft orbiting Earth would **shoot a beam of tiny microscopic particles** at the interstellar spacecraft.
 - Those particles would be heated up by lasers, causing part of them to melt into plasma that accelerates the pellets further, a process known as laser ablation.
 - Those pellets could reach 120 km/second (75 miles/second) and either hit the sail of the interstellar spacecraft or repel a magnet within it, helping to propel the spacecraft to huge speeds that would let it whizz out of our heliosphere – the bubble of the solar wind around our Solar System.
 - This proposal examines a new propulsion architecture for **fast transit of heavy (1 ton and more) payloads** across the Solar System and to the interstellar medium.
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