

MERCY PETITIONS

Recently, The Supreme Court said that prisoners on death row were taking advantage of inordinate delays in deciding mercy petitions to seek commutation of their punishment to life sentence, thereby defeating the purpose of death sentence.



About Mercy Petitions:

- As per the Constitutional framework in India, mercy petition to the President is the last constitutional resort a convict can take when he is sentenced by the court of law. A convict can present a mercy petition to the President of India under **Article 72 of the Constitution of India**.
 - Similarly, the power to grant pardon is conferred upon the Governors of States under **Article 161 of the Constitution of India**
- Constitutional Provision:**
- **Under Article 72**, The **President** shall have the power to grant **pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute** the sentence of any person convicted of any offence—
 - In all cases where the punishment or sentence is by a **Court Martial**.
 - In all cases where the punishment or sentence is for an offence against any law relating to a matter to which **the executive power of the Union extends**.
 - In all cases where the sentence is a **sentence of death**.
 - **Under Article 161**. The **Governor of a State** shall have the power to grant **pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute** the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to **which the executive power of the State extends**.
 - There is **no time limit given** in these two Articles for Mercy Plea.
 - These Articles have **no binding effect** on the President and the Governors of the states **to accept all the Mercy Petitions**.

Difference between pardoning powers of President and Governor: Power differs in the following two ways:

- **The President's power** to grant pardon extends to the cases where the sentence or punishment has been awarded by a **Court Martial**, but the Governor's power prescribed doesn't provide so.
- **The President** can grant pardon in all cases, **including the death sentence**, but the pardoning power of the Governor doesn't extend to death sentence.

Process of making a mercy petition:

- There is **no statutory written procedure** for dealing with mercy petitions, but in practice **either the convict in person or his relative** on his behalf may submit a written petition to the President.
- A convict under the sentence of death is allowed to **make the petition within a period of seven days** after the date on which the Superintendent of jail informs him about the dismissal of the appeal or special leave to appeal by the Supreme Court.
- It is then **forwarded to the Ministry of Home Affairs** for their comments and recommendations.
- The Home Ministry in consultation with the concerned State Government, recommended to the President for his decision.
- Both the executive heads are required to **act on the advice of the appropriate government**.

WHAT IS THE INCA CIVILIZATION?

Archaeologists in the Peruvian Andes recently discovered an Inca bath complex built half a millennium ago.



About Inca Civilization:

- Inca Civilization flourished **in ancient Peru between c. 1400 and 1533 CE**.
- It is the **largest empire ever seen in the Americas** and the largest in the world at that time.
- Inca society was **highly stratified**.
- The **emperor ruled with the aid of an aristocratic bureaucracy**.

- Inca **technology and architecture** were highly developed.
 - Their **economy** was based on agriculture.
 - The Inca **religion** combined features of **animism, fetishism**, and the worship of nature gods.
 - The **Inca language Quechua** is still spoken by around eight million people in the world.
 - The **descendants of the Inca** are the present-day **Quechua-speaking peasants of the Andes**, who constitute around 45 percent of the population of Peru.
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SPITI VALLEY

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister recently said that 4G services would be extended to the Spiti Valley.



About Spiti Valley:

- It is a **cold desert mountain valley** located in the **northeastern part of Himachal Pradesh**.
 - It is located in the **rain shadow region of the Greater Himalayan ranges**.
 - The name **Spiti** or Piti — as it is known among the locals— means ‘**The middle land**’ that is the **land between India and Tibet**.
 - The valley is **bounded by the districts of Kinnaur in the southeast**, Kullu in the south, and the valleys of **Zaskar & Ladakh in the north**.
 - In the east, **Spiti shares its boundary with Tibet**.
 - **Highest Point: Kunzum La (pass) 4551 m.**
 - **Language:** Natives communicate in **Stod Bhoti**, a subgroup of the Tibetan languages. Hindi and English are understood and spoken by the people engaged in the tourism trade.
 - The famous **Tabo Monastery (a favourite of the Dalai Lama)** is located in Spiti Valley.
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WHAT IS NATIONAL AGRICULTURE MARKET (E-NAM)?

Prime Minister recently said that with the help of the National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) portal, the farmers will be able to decide the place, time and price of selling their products, and reduce the burden on the consumers.



About National Agriculture Market (e-NAM):

- It is a **pan-India electronic trading portal** which **networks the existing APMC mandis to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities.**
- It was launched on 14th April 2016, and is **completely funded by the Government of India.**
- **Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is the lead agency** for implementing eNAM under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India.
- **Vision: To promote uniformity in agriculture marketing** by streamlining procedures across the integrated markets, removing information asymmetry between buyers and sellers and promoting real-time price discovery based on actual demand and supply.
- **Mission: Integration of APMCs across the country through a common online market platform** to facilitate pan-India trade in agriculture commodities, providing better price discovery through a transparent auction process based on the quality of produce along with timely online payment.
- **Features:**
 - A **National e-market platform for transparent sale transactions and price discovery** in regulated markets, kisan mandis, warehouses and private markets.
 - **Liberal Licensing of traders/buyers and commission agents** by State authorities without any pre-condition of physical presence or possession of shop/premises in the market yard.
 - **One license for a trader is valid across all markets** in the State.
 - **Harmonization of quality standards** of agricultural produce and **provisions of assaying (quality testing)** infrastructure in every market to enable informed bidding by buyers.
 - **Restriction of agriculture Produce Marketing Committee's (APMC) jurisdiction** to within the APMC market yard/sub yard instead of a geographical area (the market area) at present.
 - **Single point levy of market fees**, i.e. on the first wholesale purchase from the farmer.

GIG ECONOMY

Why in news?

- Thousands of workers of Blinkit are protesting against a new payout policy.
- Blinkit (formerly Grofers) is a Zomato-owned quick commerce marketplace that helps users shop for various products online, and delivers them in a flash.
- At the heart of the strikes is a change in the way Blinkit compensates its delivery workers.
- Protesting workers said that they had joined Blinkit last year when the fee was Rs 50 per order.
- Last year, it was reduced to Rs 25 per order, and has now been reduced further to Rs 15 with a distance-based fee component being introduced.
- These fresh protests mark a new flashpoint in the rising conflict between workers and the firms, especially in the gig economy.

What is Gig Economy?

- A gig economy is a free market system in which organisations hire or contract workers for a short span of time.
- Simply put, the positions are temporary to meet the company's requirements by having short-term engagements.
- Startups like Ola, Uber, Zomato, and Swiggy have established themselves as the main source of the gig economy in India.

Who is a Gig Worker?

- According to the Code on Social Security, 2020 (India), **“A gig worker is a person who performs work or participates in work arrangements and earns from such activities, outside of the traditional employer-employee relationship.”**
- They are independent contractors, online platform workers, contract firm workers, on-call workers and temporary workers.

What is the size of Gig Economy in India?

- A NITI Aayog study on **“India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy”** has estimated that at present, about 47 per cent of the gig work is in medium-skilled jobs, about 22 per cent in high skilled, and about 31 per cent in low-skilled jobs.

- These figures clearly indicate the importance of the gig working community in the Indian economy.
- Research studies by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) have indicated that participation in the gig economy is higher in developing countries (5-12 percent) versus developed economies (1-4 percent).
 - Most of these jobs are in lower-income job-types such as deliveries, ridesharing, microtasks, care and wellness.
- These studies further estimate that in 2020-21, **77 lakh workers were engaged in the gig economy.**
- The gig workforce is expected to **expand to 2.35 crore workers by 2029-30.**

Challenges faced by Gig Workers:

- **Lack of Social Security Benefits:**

- Gig workers are not entitled to social security benefits like regular employees, such as health insurance, pension, and employee provident fund.

- **Inconsistent Income:**

- Gig workers have an unpredictable income as they are paid per task or project, which can lead to financial instability.

- **Lack of Job Security:**

- Gig workers do not have a regular job and are often not guaranteed work, which can lead to job insecurity.

- **Lack of Legal Protection:**

- Gig workers do not have legal protection, which can make it difficult for them to seek justice if they are exploited or mistreated by their employers.

- **Limited Access to Financial Services:**

- Gig workers often do not have access to financial services, such as loans and credit cards, as they do not have a fixed income or regular employment.

- **Long Working Hours:**

- Gig workers often work long hours to meet deadlines or complete projects, which can impact their health and well-being.

What needs to be done in order to improve the Living Standards of these Gig Workers?

- **Fiscal Incentives –**
 - Fiscal incentives such as tax-breaks or startup grants may be provided for businesses that provide livelihood opportunities where women constitute a substantial portion of their workers.
- **Retirement Benefits –**
 - Firms should adopt policies that offer old age or retirement plans and benefits, and other insurance cover for contingencies such as the Covid-19 Pandemic.
 - Such plans and policies may be envisaged under the **Code on Social Security, 2020**.
 - Businesses should consider **providing income support to workers**.
 - It would be a critical step in providing assured minimum earnings and social security from income loss in the wake of uncertainty or irregularity in work.
 - Offering **paid sick leave** to workers apart from insurance cover.

LITHIUM BEYOND ORIGINAL SITE IN J&K, EXPLORATION SCOPE MAY BE EXPANDED

Why in News?

- In February 2023, the Geological Survey of India (GSI), for the first time, had established availability of lithium-inferred resources of 5.9 million tonnes in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir.
- In a recent finding, this is now likely to extend well beyond the original location where the mineral was detected, and the scope of geological exploration is now being widened.

About Lithium:

- Lithium is a chemical element with the symbol Li and atomic number 3. It is a **soft, silvery-white** alkali metal.
- Lithium is a special metal in many ways. It's light and soft — it can be cut with a kitchen knife and so low in density that it floats on water.

Applications of Lithium:

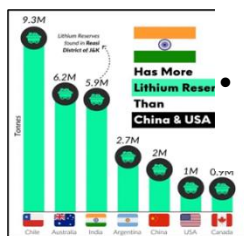
- The most important use of lithium is in **rechargeable batteries for mobile phones, laptops, digital cameras and electric vehicles (EVs)**.
- Lithium is often dubbed as “**white gold**” for electric vehicles.
- Lithium metal is made into alloys with aluminium and magnesium, improving their strength and making them lighter.
- Aluminium-lithium alloys are **used in aircraft, bicycle frames and high-speed trains**.
- Lithium has no known biological role. **It is toxic**, except in very small doses.

Where is Lithium Found Naturally?

- Lithium makes up a mere **0007 per cent of the Earth's crust** and it's only found locked up in minerals and salts.
- With 9.3 million tonnes, **Chile has the world’s largest known lithium reserves**.
- Chile is followed by **Australia (6.2 million tonnes), Argentina (2.7 million tonnes) and China (2 million tonnes)**.
- **NOTE** – This was before the discovery of 5.9 million tonnes of reserves in J&K.
- Global lithium production surpassed **100,000 tonnes** for the first time in 2021, quadrupling from 2010. Currently, **Australia alone produces 52% of the world’s lithium**.

Future of Lithium Production:

- As the world produces more batteries and EVs, the **demand for lithium is projected to reach 1.5 million tonnes of lithium carbonate equivalent (LCE) by 2025 and over 3 million tonnes by 2030**.



- Based on the above demand projections, production needs to triple by 2025 and increase nearly six-fold by 2030.

Discovery of Lithium-reserves in India:

- The Geological Survey of India, during preliminary exploration (G3) stage, found that 5.9 million tonnes have been found in Salal-Haimana area of #Reasi district of J&K.
- As part of efforts to augment local reserves of the critical mineral, the **GSI has carried out 14 projects on lithium during last five years**.

- India now has the third largest resource of lithium globally, but it will take time to convert it to reserves.
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SOLAR ENERGY CORPORATION OF INDIA LIMITED (SECI)

Recently, the Solar Energy Corporation of India Limited (SECI) has been accorded the status of Miniratna Category-I Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE)



SOLAR ENERGY CORPORATION OF INDIA

Renewable Energy schemes/projects.

About Solar Energy Corporation of India:

- It is the primary implementing agency of the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy**, Govt. of India for Renewable Energy schemes/projects.
 - It was established in the year **2011**.
 - It has awarded Renewable Energy (RE) project capacities of over **56 GW**.
 - It enjoys the **highest credit rating** of AAA by ICRA.
 - **Criteria for grant of Miniratna status to CPSEs**
 - **Miniratna Category-I status:** The CPSEs which have made a profit in the last **three years** continuously, with a pre-tax profit is **30 crores or more in at least one of the three years** and have a **positive net worth** are eligible to be considered for grant of Miniratna-I status.
 - **Miniratna Category-II status:** The CPSEs which have made a profit for the last three years continuously and have a positive net worth are eligible to be considered for grant of Miniratna-II status.
 - Miniratna CPSEs **should have not defaulted** in the repayment of loans/interest payments on any loans due to the Government.
 - Miniratna CPSEs **shall not depend upon budgetary support** or Government guarantees.
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PRALAY MISSILE

India is going to buy 250 more Pralay ballistic missiles for the services to strengthen them on the northern borders, further boosting the firepower of the defence forces.



About Pralay missile:

- It is a quasi-ballistic **surface-to-surface missile**.
- **Range:** It can hit targets 150-500 km away.
- **Capacity:** The missile can carry 350-700 kg of high-grade explosives.
- It is developed by the **Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO)**
- It is powered by a **solid propellant rocket motor** and other new technologies.
- The missile guidance system includes **state-of-the-art navigation** and integrated avionics.
- It can **change its path** after covering a certain range in mid-air.

What are Ballistic Missiles?

- These are launched **directly into the upper layers** of the earth's atmosphere.
 - They travel outside the atmosphere, where the warhead detaches from the missile and falls towards a predetermined target.
 - They are rocket-propelled self-guided weapons systems which can carry conventional or nuclear munitions. They can be **launched from aircraft, ships and submarines, and land**.
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