

GOVT. SETS UP PANEL TO PLAN EXAM REFORMS

About National Testing Agency (NTA):

- The NTA is an autonomous organization in India responsible for conducting entrance examinations for higher educational institutions.
- The NTA was established in November 2017 by the Ministry of Education to standardize and streamline the conduct of entrance exams across the country.
- **Objective:** To improve the quality and transparency of entrance examinations, ensuring fairness and efficiency in the assessment process.
- **Functions:**
 - **Conducting Exams:** The NTA conducts various national-level entrance examinations for admission to undergraduate and postgraduate programs.
 - **Developing Question Papers:** The NTA is responsible for developing high-quality question papers.
 - **Result Processing:** The NTA processes examination results efficiently, ensuring timely release of scores and ranks.
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi

About the NEET-UG Results Controversy:

- On June 4, the National Testing Agency (NTA) released the results for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test, Undergraduate (NEET UG) 2024 examination.
- **Approximately 2.4 million candidates participated** in the NEET UG test held on May 5 across 571 cities, including 14 centers outside India.
- The exam sought to fill the **1,08,940 available MBBS seats** distributed among more than 700 medical institutions nationwide.

Allegations:

- Post evaluation, there have been complaints about the unusually high number of students (67) who hit the **perfect score of 720/720**.

- Also, there are complaints about students who scored “**statistically impossible**” marks, while some cases of **cheating by proxy** were also reported.
- Other cases pertaining to the **question paper leak** are still to be heard by the Supreme Court.
- These charges led to nationwide protests from students and political parties.
- The **Supreme Court, subsequently, declared the NEET-UG examination as void and asked the Government to form a committee.**

Govt. Sets Up panel to Plan Exam Reforms:

- The **Union government removed Subodh Kumar Singh from his role as NTA chief** and placed him on "compulsory wait" in the Department of Personnel and Training.
- This decision coincided with the **postponement of the NEET PG exam**, affecting around 2 lakh candidates.
- The Education Ministry later announced that the CBI, **already investigating the UGC-NET paper leak**, will also look into alleged irregularities in NEET-UG.
 - The Health Ministry postponed the NEET-PG exam, which is crucial for admissions to postgraduate medical programs, to assess the integrity of the examination process.
 - The Education Ministry also postponed the CSIR-UGC NET for similar reasons.
- An expert committee, chaired by former ISRO chairman **K. Radhakrishnan**, has been formed to recommend exam reforms and data security protocols, and to review NTA's structure and functioning.

BANGLADESH PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO INDIA

Key Highlights of the Bilateral Meet:

- The two leaders outlined a Shared Vision for peace, prosperity, and development, focusing on connectivity, commerce, and collaboration. Key points include:

- **Future-Oriented Partnership:** Recognizing the interconnected progress and prosperity of both nations, they emphasized guiding India-Bangladesh ties towards a future-oriented partnership, aligning with "**Viksit Bharat 2047**" and "**Smart Bangladesh Vision 2041**".
- **Transformative Connectivity:** They aim to turn geographical proximity into economic opportunities through multi-modal transport, cross-border trade, energy, and digital connectivity. India will extend transit facilities for Bangladeshi goods to Nepal and Bhutan and operationalize the BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement.
- **Power and Energy Collaboration:** The countries will develop intra-regional electricity trade, including clean energy from India, Nepal, and Bhutan, and expedite the construction of high-capacity grid interconnections.
- **Digital and Green Partnership:** They will collaborate on digital and green technologies, leveraging these to foster economic growth, sustainable development, and regional prosperity, including the joint development of a small satellite for Bangladesh.
- **Trade and Investment:** The leaders agreed to strengthen trade and investment links, including early negotiations for a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** and operationalizing Special Economic Zones in Bangladesh.
- **Water Resource Management:** They will prioritize data exchange and formulating interim water-sharing frameworks, including renewing the **Ganges Water Sharing Treaty** and managing the **Teesta River**.
- **Defence Cooperation:** The nations will strengthen defence ties, including industrial cooperation and multifaceted military engagements, to modernize the Bangladesh Armed Forces.
- **Development Cooperation:** They will expand development cooperation, focusing on capacity building for civil services, judicial officers, police, and other specialized services.
- **Cultural and Historical Ties:** Promoting exchanges among scholars, artists, tourists, and students, they will support the Muktijoddhas and their families with new programs for medical and educational support.

- **Cross-Border Travel:** India will extend **e-Medical Visa facilities** to Bangladeshi citizens and open a new **Assistant High Commission in Rangpur** to facilitate consular services.
- **Essential Commodities:** India will support Bangladesh with the supply of essential commodities based on availability.
- **Youth Development:** They emphasized accelerating partnerships in education, skilling, technology, sports, and creative industries to meet youth aspirations.
- **Indo-Pacific Cooperation:** They committed to a free, open, inclusive, and secure Indo-Pacific region, co-leading the ‘Disaster Risk Reduction and Management’ pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
- **Regional and Global Cooperation:** The leaders envisioned India-Bangladesh relations as a major anchor for regional integration under **BIMSTEC, SAARC, and IORA**, and will work together on global platforms to promote common interests, especially for the Global South.

WHAT IS A SPACE VARIABLE OBJECTS MONITOR (SVOM)?



- It is a **French-Chinese satellite** which aims to **detect and study gamma-ray bursts**.
- It was launched by a Long March-2C rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in southwest China's Sichuan Province.
- It is a 930-kilogram satellite carrying **four instruments - two French and two Chinese**.
- The satellite has been sent into an orbit over 600 kilometers above Earth and has a designed life of five years, though scientists expect it could be operational for as long as 20 years.

Gamma-ray bursts (GRBs):

- GRBs generally occur after the explosion of huge stars - those more than 20 times as big as the sun - or **the fusion of compact stars**.

- The **extremely bright cosmic beams** can give off a blast of energy equivalent to over a billion billion suns.
 - Observing them is like "looking back in time, as the light from these objects takes a long time to reach earth.
 - The rays **carry traces of the gas clouds and galaxies** they pass through on their journey through space - valuable data for better understanding the history and evolution of the universe.
 - GRBs are notoriously hard to catch as they can appear anywhere in the sky and **last for just a few seconds**. They are readily **absorbed by the Earth's atmosphere**, so the only way to record them is to place probes in space.
 - SVOM has the potential to unravel several mysteries in the field of GRBs, including **detecting the most distant GRBs** in the universe, which correspond to the earliest GRBs.
 - The data gathered will help test the laws of physics under conditions that cannot be replicated on Earth and provide insights into the dynamics of the universe.
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NAMAQUALAND



Scientists recently discovered the world's oldest inhabited termite mounds along the Buffels River in Namaqualand, dating back 34,000 years.

- It is a **desert region of southwestern Africa**.
- From north to south, it stretches from the Karas region of Namibia to the Northern Cape province of South Africa.
- From west to east, it stretches **from the Namib Desert to the Kalahari**.
- It covers an area of 400,000 square kilometres.
- The Namibian section, north of the Orange River, is sometimes called Great Namaqualand.
- The South African section, south of the Orange River, is sometimes called Little Namaqualand.

- It is **very dry**. For a large part of the year succulents are almost the only plants that can be seen on the vast plains.
 - Succulents can hold water for long periods and can survive in droughts.
- **Rain falls mostly in the winter**. If there is enough rain, wildflowers cover Namaqualand for a few weeks during springtime.
- There are large **deposits of copper** in Namaqualand. The Nama mined them for hundreds of years.
- In the early **1900s diamonds were discovered** in several places in Namaqualand, including Sperrgebiet in Namibia and the Richtersveld in South Africa.

What are Termites?

- Termites are **insects that eat wood**.
- They can damage buildings, furniture, and other wooden items.
- Termites are found all around the world, and there are more than 2,000 species. However, they are **most common in tropical rainforests**.
- Termites build damp **nests in wood or underground**.
 - Some underground nests rise partly above the ground as mounds or towers.
 - The nests are made of dirt, clay, and chewed wood.
- Termites live in organized groups called colonies. Mature termite colonies can contain 60,000 to 1 million termites, depending on the type of termite colony.
 - Each colony has **three kinds of termites: royalty, soldiers, and workers**.
 - Each kind of termite has a certain job within the colony.
- Termites also help nature by **breaking down dead wood into nutrients**. The nutrients can then be recycled and used by bacteria and plants.

WHAT IS THE GOODS AND SERVICES TAX (GST) COUNCIL?



The GST Council recently announced various recommendations relating to taxation, ITC claims and demand notices.

- It is a **constitutional body** responsible for making recommendations on issues related to the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India.
- 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:
 - **Union Finance Minister as Chairperson**
 - **The Union Minister of State, in-charge of Revenue of finance**
 - **The Minister in-charge of finance or taxation, or any other Minister nominated by each State Government**
- It is an apex committee to modify, reconcile, or make **recommendations to the Union and the States on important issues related to GST**, like the goods and services that may be subjected to or exempted from GST, model GST Laws, principles that govern Place of Supply, threshold limits, GST rates including the floor rates with bands, special rates for raising additional resources during natural calamities/disasters, special provisions for certain States, etc.
- **Secretariat:**
 - The Secretariat **manages the GST Council.**
 - It is manned by officers taken on deputation from both the Central and State Governments.
 - The entire cost of managing the Secretariat is borne by the Central Government.
 - The **Ex-officio Secretary to the GST Council** is the **Revenue Secretary of India.**
 - The office of the council is located in **New Delhi.**

What is the Goods and Services Tax (GST)?

- It is an **indirect tax** which has replaced many indirect taxes in India, such as excise duty, VAT, services tax, etc.
- The GST Act was passed in Parliament on 29th March 2017 and **came into effect on 1st July, 2017.**

- It is a **single domestic indirect tax law** for the entire country.
 - The GST is **paid by consumers**, but it is **remitted to the government by the businesses** selling the goods and services.
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INTERNATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC ORGANISATION



On 21 June every year, the International Hydrographic Organisation (IHO) celebrates the World Hydrography Day to raise awareness about hydrography.

- It is an **intergovernmental organization** that works to ensure all the world's seas, oceans and navigable waters are surveyed and charted.
- It was **established in 1921**, it coordinates the activities of national hydrographic offices and promotes uniformity in nautical charts and documents.
- It issues survey best practices, provides guidelines to maximize the **use of hydrographic survey data** and develops hydrographic capabilities in Member States.
- **Member countries:** It has currently **100 Member States**.
- The IHO Secretariat has been hosted by the Principality of **Monaco**.
- **India** has been an active member of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) since 1955.
 - The **Indian Naval Hydrographic Department (INHD)**, or the Marine Survey of India earlier, was established in 1874 in Kolkata.
 - It is the nodal agency for hydrographic surveys and has a fleet of indigenously built modern survey ships.

World Hydrography Day

- It is celebrated annually on **June 21**.
 - The theme for 2024 is "Hydrographic Information - Enhancing Safety, Efficiency and Sustainability in Marine Activities"
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SENSORINEURAL DEAFNESS



Recently, bollywood playback singer Alka Yagnik has been diagnosed with Sensorineural deafness.

- It is a type of **hearing loss** caused by damage to the **inner ear** or the nerve pathways that transmit sound from the ear to the brain.
- Although sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL) is a natural process of ageing, listening to very loud music can also cause permanent damage to the inner ear or the auditory nerve.
- Within the human inner ear, a spiral-shaped organ called the **cochlea** contains tiny hairs known as These hairs are responsible for converting vibrations from sound waves into neural signals, which your auditory nerve then transmits to your brain.
- **Causes of Sensorineural deafness**
 - **Congenital Factors:** Genetic factors or complications during pregnancy or childbirth.
 - **Noise Exposure:** Prolonged exposure to **loud noise can** damage inner ear hair cells, leading to noise-induced hearing loss.
 - **Ageing:** Natural ageing processes can damage or destroy hair cells in the inner ear.
 - **Infections and Diseases:** Conditions like meningitis, mumps, measles, and autoimmune diseases like Meniere's disease.
 - **Trauma:** Head injuries or inner ear trauma.
 - **Ototoxic Medications:** Certain antibiotics and chemotherapy drugs.
- **Symptoms**
 - Difficulty understanding speech
 - Muffled or distorted sounds.
 - Ringing, buzzing, or hissing in the ears.
 - Difficulty hearing high-pitched sounds.
 - Balance issues.