

WHO'S AFRAID OF CONVERSIONS?

Context

- A two-judge bench of the Supreme Court recently observed that forced conversions is a "very serious issue" which can ultimately affect national safety, freedom of religion and freedom of conscience.
- The Bench also observed that there may be a freedom of religion, but no freedom for forced conversion.
- The top court asked the central government to file an affidavit outlining its plans to combat fraudulent or compulsory religious conversions.

Background

- **About the case:** The SC was hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking directions from the Centre and states to take stringent action against forced religious conversion carried out through intimidation or by luring people using gifts and monetary benefits.
- **Argument of the petitioner:**
 - The issue is a pan-India problem which needs urgent intervention either through a separate law to control such conversions or adding the offence to the existing Indian Penal Code (IPC).
 - **For example**, spreading the popularity of a single faith, as people are getting attracted towards Christianity in huge numbers not just in the northeast or tribal areas, but even in the plains of Punjab.
 - The victims of such forceful conversions are often socially and economically under privileged people, particularly belonging to the Scheduled castes and tribes.
 - This not only offends Articles 14 (equality before the law), 21 (right to life), 25 (freedom of conscience and freedom to profess, practice and propagate the religion) of the Constitution, but is also against the principles of secularism, which is integral part of **basic structure** of Constitution.

Conversion in India

- **Not limited to a particular religion:** Apart from converting to other faiths like Islam and Christianity, there have also been incidents of conversion to Hinduism.
- **For example,** in 2021, 300 Muslims in Haryana converted to Hinduism.
- **Tribals and Harijans are the special targets** for the reason that there is no adequate provision of hospitals, schools, orphanages and other social welfare services in the scheduled or specified areas.

Issues with the contemporary anti-conversion laws

- **Poor conviction rate:** For example, in 2021, Madhya Pradesh came up with a stringent ordinance and within the first 23 days, as many as 23 cases were filed alleging forced conversions.
 - However, none of them have resulted in conviction.
- The anti-conversion laws do not consider re-conversion as conversion (they are rather called “ghar wapsi”, that is, homecoming).
- **State intervention in private affairs:** Also called **Freedom of Religion laws**, these laws provide for the prior permission of public authorities for conversion which is a private act with which the state should have no concern.
- **Based on presumptions:** These laws had been enacted on the premise that women, SCs and STs are vulnerable, need protection.
 - Thus, these laws perpetuate social hierarchies of a casteist and patriarchal
- **Against international treaties:** International human rights instruments like Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which India is a party, specifically include the right to conversion within the freedom of religion provided.
- **Against people’s right to protest:** Mass conversions in independent India, though rare, have been acts of protest against social discrimination. g. The 1982 Meenakshipuram conversions, when 180 Dalit families in a Tamil Nadu village embraced Islam
- **No considerable increase in population:** Nationally speaking, there is no significant increase in the number of Christians, though in some villages/tribal areas, their numbers have gone up.

- Christians are just 2.3% of India's population but they are in a majority in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya.
 - As per PEW findings, only 0.4 per cent Hindu adults are Christian converts.
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RHINO HORNS

According to a global threat assessment report presented at a convention of the conservation agencies in Panama City, the seizure of rhino horns by weight has increased after 2017 despite a reduction in poaching.



About:

- A comprehensive analysis titled '**Executive Summary of the Rhino Horn Trafficking as a Form of Transnational Organised Crime (2012-2021): 2022 Global Threat Assessment**', was presented at the meeting of the Conference of Parties organised by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
- Supported by the **World Wide Fund for Nature, the Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC)** prepared the document on the rhino horn trafficking during the decade from January 1, 2012, to December 31, 2021.
- The threat assessment was compiled from the analysis of 674 rhino horn seizure incidents that had occurred globally during this decade, in addition to seven years of criminal intelligence and findings from the WJC investigations into the rhino horn trafficking, conducted since 2015.
- The report said six countries and territories have dominated the rhino horn trafficking routes from the source to the destination locations although more than 50 countries and territories were implicated in the transnational crime.
- These countries were **South Africa, Mozambique, Malaysia, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Vietnam, and China.**
- Prolific Vietnamese and Chinese criminal networks are driving the racket throughout the supply chain.

- Vietnam is a highly significant transit and distribution area for products ultimately bound for China.

The Greater One-horned Rhinoceros:

- The greater one-horned rhino (or “Indian rhino”) is the largest of the rhino species
- It is identified by a single black horn and a grey-brown hide with skin folds.
- This species of rhino is commonly found in Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and in Assam, India.
- **Protection Status:**
 - IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
 - CITES: Appendix I
 - Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I

It is one of the five species of Rhinos. The other four species are:

- **White rhino** It is native to northern and southern Africa
- **Black rhino** It is native to eastern and southern Africa
- **Javan rhino** It is also known as Sunda rhino or lesser one-horned rhino
- **Sumatran rhino** Critically Endangered species of rhino

NATIONAL INVESTMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE FUND (NIIF)

The Union Finance Minister has recently urged the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) to expand its operations and explore ways to crowd in private capital for projects under the National Infrastructure Pipeline, PM Gati Shakti and National Infrastructure Corridor.



About:

Bodies involved:

- NIIF is an investor-owned fund manager, anchored by the Government of India (GoI) in collaboration with leading global and domestic institutional investors.
- The Indian government has 49 % stake in NIIF with the rest held by marquee foreign and domestic investors.

History:

- NIIF was set up as an alternative investment fund (AIF) in 2015 with a planned corpus of ₹40,000 crore.

Headquarters: Mumbai.

Objective: To provide long-term capital to the country's infrastructure sector.

Funds managed:

- NIIF currently manages three funds each with its distinctive investment mandate namely
 - (1) **Master fund,**
 - (2) **Fund Of Funds and**
 - (3) **Strategic Fund.**
- The funds are registered as Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

INDIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE AT DISPLAY DURING BALI SUMMIT

In News:

- At the G20 summit in Bali, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifted world leaders a range of artworks, representing India's diversity.
- During his address, PM Modi also mentioned Baliyatra, one of the country's largest open-air fairs that commemorates the 2,000-year-old maritime and cultural links between ancient Kalinga and Southeast Asia.

News Summary: Key highlights

- **Miniature paintings from Kangra (Himachal Pradesh)**
 - The art originated in a small hill state 'Guler' in the first half of the 18th century when a family of Kashmiri painters trained in Mughal Style of painting sought shelter at the court of Raja Dalip Singh of Guler.

- This style reached its zenith during the reign of Maharaja Sansar Chand Katoch who was a great patron of Kangra art.
- The central idea behind Kangra paintings is often the immersive love story of Radha and Krishna.
- Today, the Kangra art form is a serene celebration of life and its simplicity, using naturalistic colours.
- **Gujarat's Mata ni Pachedi**
 - It is a handmade textile of Gujarat meant to be an offering in the temple shrines which house the Mother Goddess.
 - Mata Ni Pachedi was crafted by the nomadic community of **Waghri**s as homage to various incarnations of the Goddess.
 - It is said that in this form of art, the goddess forms the central figure in the design, flanked by other elements of her story.
- **Patan Patola scarf from Gujarat**
 - This ancient art of double ikat or Patola woven in pure silk dates back to the 11th century.
 - The Patola fabrics bear an equal intensity of colours and design on both sides.
 - This peculiar quality has its origins in an intricate and difficult technique of dyeing or knot dyeing, known as 'bandhani', on the warp and weft separately before weaving.
- **Agate bowl from Gujarat**
 - Agate, a semi-precious stone, is found in underground mines of Rajpipla and Ratanpur in riverbeds, and extracted to produce a variety of ornamental objects.
 - The art of turning the stone into a range of products has been passed down through generation of artisans since the Indus Valley civilization days and is currently practiced by Artisans of Khambat.
 - The healing powers attributed to agate stones have sustained the use of agate over centuries.
- **Pithora from Chhota Udaipur in Gujarat**
 - These paintings are made by the Rathwa artisans from Chhota Udaipur in Gujarat.
 - These painting are depiction of the cave art that tribals used to make reflecting the social, cultural and mythological life and beliefs of those tribals.

- These paintings bear a striking resemblance the Aboriginal dot painting from the indigenous communities of Australia.
- **Kinnauri shawl from Himachal Pradesh**
 - These shawls are made using the extra-weft technique of weaving.
 - Every element of the design woven uses the knotting method — where the weft is inserted by hand and to lock the design, producing the lift in the pattern formed.
- **Kanal brass set from Himachal Pradesh**
 - It is used on ceremonial occasions, such as the processions of village deities.
 - It is also used to welcome the leaders of the Himachal Pradesh.
 - This traditional musical instrument is now increasingly used as a decor object and is manufactured in Mandi and Kullu districts of Himachal Pradesh.

Baliyatra

- In his address to the Indian diaspora in Bali on the sidelines of the G20 summit, PM Modi mentioned the annual Baliyatra on the banks of the Mahanadi in Cuttack.
- This yatra celebrates the ancient trade relations between India and Indonesia.
- This year's Baliyatra, which concluded recently, also found a place in the Guinness World Records for achieving an impressive feat of origami, the creation of beautiful paper sculptures.

Key highlights

- Baliyatra, literally 'voyage to Bali', is one of the country's largest open-air fairs.
- It is organised every year to commemorate the 2,000-year-old maritime and cultural links between ancient Kalinga (today's Odisha) and Bali and other South and Southeast Asian regions like Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Burma (Myanmar) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).
- The festival begins on Kartik Purnima (full moon night in the month of Kartik).
- The festival is organised by the Cuttack district administration and Cuttack Municipal Corporation in association with several other government agencies.

COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL OF INDIA (CAG)

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla recently said that CAG is among the most effective and prestigious audit institutions in the world.



About:

- Comptroller and Auditor General of India is the apex authority responsible for external and internal audits of the expenses of the National and state governments in the country.
- The Constitution of India provides for an independent office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in **Chapter V**.
- The CAG is mentioned in the Constitution of India under **Article 148 – 151**.

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 148** broadly deals with the CAG appointment, oath and conditions of service.
- **Article 149** deals with duties and powers of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India.
- **Article 150** says that the accounts of the Union and of the States shall be kept in such form as the President may, on the advice of the CAG, prescribe.
- **Article 151** says that the reports of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India relating to the accounts of the Union shall be submitted to the President, who shall cause them to be laid before each House of Parliament.
- As per **Article 279** Calculation of "net proceeds" is ascertained and certified by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India, whose certificate is final.
- **Third Schedule of the Constitution of India** prescribes the form of oath or affirmation to be made by the Judges of the Supreme Court and the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India at the time of assumption of office.

Appointment and Terms of Service:

- As per **Article 148 of the Constitution**, there shall be a Comptroller and Auditor-General of India who shall be appointed by the President and can be removed from office only in the manner and on the grounds that a Judge of the Supreme Court is removed.
- He holds office for a period of **six years or upto the age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.

Functions of CAG:

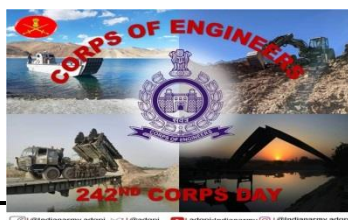
- CAG audits the accounts related to all **expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India, Consolidated Fund of each state and UT's** having a legislative assembly.
- He audits all expenditure from the **Contingency Fund of India and the Public Account of India as well as the Contingency Fund and Public Account of each state.**
- He audits all trading, manufacturing, profit and loss accounts, balance sheets and other subsidiary accounts kept by any department of the Central Government and the state governments.
- CAG audits the receipts and expenditure of all bodies and authorities substantially financed from the Central or State revenues; government companies; other corporations and bodies, when so required by related laws.
- He audits the accounts of any other authority when requested by the President or Governor e.g. Local bodies.
- He advises the President with regard to prescription of the form in which the accounts of the Centre and States shall be kept.

Reports by CAG:

- The CAG submits his audit reports relating to the accounts of the Centre to the President, who shall, in turn, place them before both the houses of Parliament.
- **He submits 3 audit reports to the President-**
 - Audit report on appropriation accounts
 - Audit report on finance accounts
 - Audit report on public undertakings
- He also submits his audit reports relating to the accounts of a State to the Governor, who shall, in turn, place them before the state legislature.

242ND CORPS OF ENGINEERS DAY

Indian Army celebrated the 242nd Corps of Engineers Day on November 18, 2022.



About:



CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK



- The Corps of Engineers provides combat engineering support, develops infrastructure for armed forces and other defence organisations and maintains connectivity along our vast borders besides providing succour to populace during natural disasters.
 - **Four pillars of the Corps:**
 - These tasks are executed through four pillars of the Corps - **Combat Engineers, Military Engineer Service, Border Road Organisation and Military Survey.**
 - **Three groups:**
 - The Corps of Engineers has three groups, i.e. **Madras Sappers, Bengal Sappers and Bombay Sappers which were amalgamated into the Corps on 18 Nov 1932.**
 - Since its inception, history is replete with colossal exemplary contributions of the Corps of Engineers both in war and peace.
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