

Current Affairs: 30.11.2021

Suspension of MPs

Context: In the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs has sought the approval of the House for suspending 12 Rajya Sabha MPs for the remainder of the session.

Why has the minister asked for suspension of MPs?

- The reason for their suspension was “their unprecedented acts of misconduct, contemptuous, unruly and violent behaviour and intentional attacks on security personnel” on the last day of the Monsoon Session.
- MPs are required to adhere to certain rules of parliamentary etiquette.

What is the procedure for suspension of MPs?

- The **presiding officer of each House can direct an MP** to withdraw from the legislative chamber for grossly disorderly conduct. The MP then has to remain absent from the proceedings of the House for the remainder of the day.
- The presiding officers can also “name” an MP for “persistently and wilfully obstructing the business” of the House. In such a case, usually, the **Parliamentary Affairs Minister moves a motion for suspending the offending MP** from the service of the House. The suspension can last until the end of the session.
- In 2001, the Lok Sabha rule was amended to give the Speaker one additional power. A new rule, 374A, **empowers the Speaker to automatically suspend an MP** for a maximum of five days for disrupting the business of the House.
 - In 2015, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan used this rule for suspending 25 Congress MPs.

Out-Of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE)

In News: As a share of total health expenditure, the OOPE has come down to 48.8% in 2017-18 from 64.2% in 2013-14. Even in the case of per capita OOPE, there has been a decline from ₹2,336 to ₹2,097 between 2013-14 and 2017-18.

- One of the factors attributing to this decline is the increase in utilisation and reduction in cost of services in Government health facilities.
- If we compare National Health Accounts (NHA) 2014-15 and 2017-18, there has been a decline in OOPE for Government hospitals to the tune of 50%.

Did government measures help in reduction of OOPE?

- The NHA estimates for 2017-18 clearly showed that there had been an increase in the share of Government health expenditure in the total GDP of the country.

- It has increased from 1.15% in 2013-14 to 1.35% in 2017-18. Additionally, the share of Government Health Expenditure in total health expenditure has also increased over time.
- In 2017-18, the share of Government expenditure was 40.8%, which is much higher than 28.6% in 2013-14.
- The report further indicates that in per capita terms, the Government health expenditure has increased from ₹1,042 to ₹1,753 between 2013-14 to 2017-18.

Indian Bio-Jet Fuel Technology

Context: CSIR-IIP Dehradun's home-grown technology to produce bio-jet fuel has been formally approved for use on military aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Key Takeaways

- Biojet fuel is prepared from “non-edible tree borne oil” and is procured from various tribal areas of India.
- This fuel is made from Jatropha oil sourced from Chattisgarh Biodiesel Development Authority (CBDA) and then **processed at CSIR-IIP, Dehradun**.
- Generally, it is made from vegetable oils, sugars, animal fats and even waste biomass, and can be used in existing aviation jet engines without modification.
- **Jatropha oil** is suitable for conversion to jet fuel. This biojet fuel has received wide acceptance from the airline industry.
- Currently, **Aviation Sector contributes to 2% of global greenhouse gas emissions**. Commercial biofuel flights will help Indian Airlines in achieving the International Air Transport Association (IATA) target for fuel efficiency and carbon emission.
- The technology, developed by the Indian Institute of Petroleum (CSIR-IIP), a constituent laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, has undergone evaluation tests and trials over the last three years.
- Earlier on 26 January 2019, an AN-32 aircraft, filled with blended bio-jet fuel, had flown over Raj Path at New Delhi during the Republic Day celebration

What are Biofuels?

- Biofuels are fuels manufactured from biomass.
- Biomass resources are the biodegradable fraction of products, wastes and residues from agriculture, forestry and related industries as well as the biodegradable fraction of industrial and municipal wastes.
- Categorisation of Biofuels
 - **First Generation:** Produced from food crops like maize, corn, sugar cane, rapeseed, palm, and soybean into ethanol and biodiesel, using a similar process to that used in beer and wine-making.
 - **Second Generation:** Produced from non-food crops and organic agricultural waste, which contain cellulose.
 - **Third Generation:** Derived from algae. Also known as green hydrocarbons

Cross & Climb, Rohtak



- **Fourth Generation:** Produce sustainable energy as well as capture and store CO₂ by converting biomass materials, which have absorbed CO₂ while growing, into fuel.

National Mission on Cultural Mapping

In News: National Mission on Cultural Mapping has mapped data of 14.53 lakh artists/artisans

- A scheme administered by the Ministry of Culture
- Conceptualized for the purpose of developing a comprehensive data base of artists, art forms and other resources gathered from cultural organizations in the Ministry of Culture, other Ministries and also States on a robust IT-enabled platform.

Development Projects for Civil aviation

- Taken up developmental projects worth around Rs. 25,000 crores over the next five years for expansion and modification of existing terminals, new terminals, expansion or strengthening of existing runways, aprons, air navigation services, control towers, technical blocks etc.
- Three Public Private Partnership (PPP) airports at Delhi, Hyderabad and Bengaluru
- Around Rs. 36,000 Crores have been planned for investment in the development of new greenfield airports across the country under PPP mode.
- GoI has accorded 'in-principle' approval for setting up of 21 greenfield airports across the country. So far, eight greenfield airports namely, Shirdi in Maharashtra, Durgapur in West Bengal, Pakyong in Sikkim, Kannur in Kerala, Orvakal in Andhra Pradesh, Kalaburagi in Karnataka, Sindhudurg in Maharashtra and Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh have been operationalized.
- Under Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS), also known as the Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) Scheme, 393 routes have commenced connecting 62 unserved and underserved airports, including 2 water aerodromes and 6 heliports.

News Source: [PIB](#)

NIPUN Bharat Scheme

Part of: Prelims

In News: Detailed guidelines for the NIPUN Bharat Scheme have been developed which includes the codification of development goals and learning outcomes for age 3 to 9 years and Lakshya or Targets for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy starting from Balvatikato Grade III.

- The Department of School Education and Literacy launched the National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy called National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat) under the aegis of Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Samagra Shiksha.

- The mission aims to achieve **universal foundational literacy and numeracy** in **primary** classes.

- The Mission Guidelines lays down priorities and actionable agendas for States and UTs to achieve the goal of proficiency in foundational literacy and numeracy for every child by **grade 3**.

As per the NIPUN Bharat implementation guidelines, assessment during the foundational learning can be broadly categorized into two major areas, namely:

- **School Based Assessment (SBA)** through qualitative observation based on performance of the child in a multitude of experiences and activities. Various tools and techniques like anecdotal records, checklist, portfolio, and interactions (through a holistic 360-degree assessment with teacher, peers, family and friends) have been recommended to be used for assessment. Thus, the teachers at the foundational stage need to observe children as they play, work on their task, perform or interact among themselves, to assess children's interests and learning.
- **Large-scale standardised assessment** for assessment of the processes and functioning of the educational systems (such as NAS, SAS, and Third-Party Assessments). The assessment tools commonly used in conducting large scale assessment studies are multiple choice questions (MCQ) and constructed responses are usually avoided to bring in objectivity in the process. These assessments are a mechanism to gauge how well learning is happening in their state, districts, and blocks. In this regard, the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2021 has been carried out for assessing learning outcome of children in Grade III.
- A specialized **National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA 3.0)** for the foundational literacy and numeracy covering about 25 lakh teachers at the primary level across all states and UTs has been launched in September, 2021.

Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)

In News: NITI Aayog released the report 'Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India', to scale dispute avoidance, containment and resolution online. The roll out of the stated recommendations in the report can help make India a world leader in using technology and innovation through Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) for effective access to justice for every individual.

- Chaired by Supreme Court Justice (Retd) AK Sikri

Recommends measures at three levels to tackle challenges in adopting ODR framework in India

- At the structural level, it suggests actions to increase digital literacy, improve access to digital infrastructure and train professionals as neutrals to deliver ODR services.
- At the behavioural level, the report recommends adoption of ODR to address disputes involving Government departments and ministries.

Cross & Climb, Rohtak



- At the regulatory level, the report recommends a soft-touch approach to regulate ODR platforms and services. This involves laying down design and ethical principles to guide ODR service providers to self-regulate while fostering growth and innovations in the ecosystem.
- The report also stresses on strengthening the existing legislative framework for ODR by introducing necessary amendments to statutes. The report offers a phased implementation framework for ODR in India.

What is ODR?

ODR is the resolution of disputes, particularly small- and medium-value cases, using digital technology and techniques of ADR, such as arbitration, conciliation and mediation.

- It refers to the process of using technology for dispute avoidance, containment and resolution outside the traditional court system.
- As a dispute resolution avenue it can be provided both as an extension of the public court system and outside of it.
- Increasingly, ODR has received impetus across Government, businesses and even the judicial processes to tide over the constraints due to Covid-19.

Why Do We Need ODR?

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a large section of society unable to receive timely access to justice. The pandemic also led to a deluge of disputes further burdening the already lengthy court processes.

- ODR has the potential to help reduce the burden on the court and efficiently resolve several categories of cases.
- It may also be integrated to support the judiciary through technology integration in court-annexed Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) centres, via e-lok adalats and also be introduced within Government departments for internal disputes.

Revising EWS Reservation Limit

Context: The Union Government has decided to revisit the criteria set out for eligibility for its 10% reservation under the economically weaker sections (EWS) category within a month. The main criterion is a family income ceiling of ₹8 lakh.

- The decision came after the Supreme Court closely questioned it on how it arrived at the income figure, while considering a challenge to the implementation of 27% reservation for the OBCs and 10% for the EWS under the **all-India quota for medical admissions**.

How was EWS reservation introduced?

- The 10% reservation was introduced through the 103rd Constitution Amendment and enforced in January 2019.

- It added **Clause (6) to Article 15** to empower the Government to introduce special provisions for the EWS among citizens except those in the classes that already enjoy reservation.
- It allows reservation in **educational institutions, both public and private**, whether aided or unaided, excluding those run by minority institutions, up to a maximum of 10%.
- It also added **Clause (6) to Article 16 to facilitate reservation in employment**. The new clauses make it clear that the EWS reservation will be in addition to the existing reservation.
- The Constitution initially allowed special provisions only for the socially and educationally backward classes.
- When the previous Congress Government tried to introduce a 10% quota for the poorer among the general category during 19902, the Supreme Court struck it down in Indira Sahwnet Judgement, saying there is no provision in the Constitution for **reservation on the basis of an economic criterion**.
- Through this amendment, the Government **introduced the concept of ‘economic backwardness’ for a new class of affirmative action** programmes for those not covered by or eligible for the community-based quotas.

What are the criteria to identify the section?

- The main criterion is that those above an annual income limit of ₹8 lakh are excluded (income from all sources such as salary, business, agriculture and profession for the financial year prior to the application) of the family (applicants, their parents, siblings and minor children).
- Possession of any of these assets, too, can take a person outside the EWS pool:
 - five or more acres of agricultural land
 - A residential flat of 1,000 sq.ft. and above
 - A residential plot of 100 square yards and above in notified municipalities
 - A residential plot of 200 square yards and above in other areas.

What are the court’s questions about the criteria?

- The court has been intrigued by the income limit being fixed at ₹8 lakh per year, as it is the same figure for excluding the **‘creamy layer’ from OBC reservation benefits**.
- A crucial difference is that those in the general category, to whom the EWS quota is applicable, **do not suffer from social or educational backwardness**, unlike those classified as the OBC.
- Therefore, the question the court has raised is that when the OBC category is socially and educationally backward and, therefore, has additional impediments to overcome, “would it be arbitrary to provide the same income limit both for the OBC and EWS categories.”
- In line with the Supreme Court’s known position that any reservation or norms for exclusion **should be based on relevant data**, the Bench wants to know whether the criteria for the EWS were arrived at based on any study.
 - For instance, whether the **per capita income or GDP in all States**, or the difference in purchasing power in the **rural and urban areas**, were taken into account while a single income limit was formulated for the whole country.

- There are other questions as to whether any exercise was undertaken to derive the exceptions such as why the flat criterion does not differentiate between **metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas**.

What is the current status of the EWS quota?

- The reservation for the EWS is being implemented by the Union Government for the second year now.
- Recruitment test results show that the category has a **lower cut-off mark** than the OBC, a point that has upset the traditional beneficiaries of reservation based on caste.
- The explanation is that **only a small number of people are currently applying** under the EWS category — one has to get an income certificate from the revenue authorities — and therefore the cut-off is low.
- However, when the number picks up over time, the cut-off marks are expected to rise.
- The EWS quota remains a controversy as its critics say it **reduces the size of the open**

Regulation, not ban: on cryptocurrencies

In News: Government is set to introduce legislation that would, if passed, officially forbid Crypto-currencies.

- This is being done two years after drafting a Bill to ban cryptocurrencies.
- Eight years ago the RBI had issued its first advisory cautioning holders of virtual currencies about the potential financial and security risks

What were the key factors which has made government to legislate on prohibiting such currencies?

- Its concerns appear to be the risks associated with cryptocurrencies, including their potential use for money-laundering and financing of illegal activities.
- The risks investors and consumers face in dealing with these so-called currencies, given that they are neither ‘a store of value nor are they a medium of exchange’, and the threat they pose to financial stability are some of the key factors influencing government decision of banning cryptocurrency.
- PM had in a video address to the Sydney Dialogue earlier this month said: “It is important that all democratic nations work together on cryptocurrency and ensure it does not end up in wrong hands.
- No country across the world treats virtual currencies as legal tender

Why the present stance of prohibition a challenging one?

- There has been an **exponential jump in investment** in virtual currencies, especially after the Supreme Court last year struck down an RBI notification that banned financial entities from facilitating customer transactions related to virtual currencies.

Cross & Climb, Rohtak



- Industry estimates now peg cryptocurrency holdings in India at about **₹40,000 crore**, held by about **15 million investors**, and advertising trends show an upsurge in ads promoting brands associated with investment in virtual currencies.
- Earlier this year **El Salvador** — admittedly a small and heavily indebted nation — officially declared '**bitcoin**' as **legal tender**, much has changed in the adoption of private virtual currencies worldwide.
- The **pandemic has fastened the global embrace** of all things digital and investment in the technologies enabling cryptocurrencies including blockchain, appear to be no different.

How is Crypto currency regulation in other parts of world?

- Canada, Japan and Thailand permit the use of virtual currencies as a payment method, with some jurisdictions regulating them as a digital asset, and others as a commodity.
- Canada and the U.S. closely monitor virtual currency activity to ensure they do not run afoul of laws on financial crimes, with the former also earning tax revenue on transactions.

Way Forward

- All things given, India should avoid the temptation to join China in prohibiting virtual currencies and instead **aim to tightly regulate their trading** through monitored exchanges and earn revenue.
- Simultaneously, it should expedite the RBI's pilot of the **Central Bank Digital Currency** so as to offer an alternative to cryptocurrencies.