

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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GOVT APPOINTS CHAIRMAN OF 16TH FINANCE COMMISSION

In News

- The government appointed former **Niti Aayog vice chairman, Arvind Panagariya** as the **chairman of the Sixteenth Finance Commission**.

About Finance Commission

- It is a **Constitutionally mandated body** that is at the centre of **fiscal federalism**.
- It is constituted by the President under article **280 of the Constitution**, mainly to give its recommendations on **distribution of tax revenues** between the **Union and the States** and amongst the States themselves.
- Its working is characterised by extensive and intensive consultations with all levels of governments, thus strengthening the principle of cooperative federalism.

Composition

- As per the provisions contained in the Finance Commission [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act, 1951 and The Finance Commission (Salaries & Allowances) Rules, 1951, the Chairman of the Commission is selected from among persons who have had **experience in public affairs**, and the **four other members** are selected from among persons who—
 - ♦ are, or have been, or are qualified to be appointed as Judges of a High Court; or
 - ♦ have special knowledge of the finances and accounts of Government; or
 - ♦ have had wide experience in financial matters and in administration; or
 - ♦ have special knowledge of economics

Functions

- It is the duty of the Commission to make recommendations to the President as to—
 - ♦ the **distribution between the Union and the States** of the net proceeds of taxes which are to be, or may be, divided between them and the allocation between the States of the respective shares of such proceeds;
 - ♦ the principles which should govern the **grants-in-aid of the revenues** of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India;

- ♦ the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to **supplement the resources of the Panchayats** in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;
- ♦ the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to **supplement the resources of the Municipalities in the State** on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;
- ♦ **any other matter** referred to the **Commission by the President** in the interests of sound finance.

Developments

- The **First Finance Commission** was constituted under the chairmanship of **Shri K.C. Neogy** in 1952.
 - ♦ **Fifteenth Finance Commissions** have been Constituted so far at intervals of every five years.
 - ♦ The **Fifteenth Finance Commission** was constituted in **2017** against the backdrop of the **abolition of the Planning Commission** (as also of the distinction between Plan and non-Plan expenditure) and the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST), which has fundamentally redefined federal fiscal relations.

Challenges

- There have been fifteen so far. Each of them has faced its own unique set of challenges.
- The reorganisation of the State of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories – one of Jammu and Kashmir and one of Ladakh – presents a new dynamic.
- On the whole the Finance Commission faces new challenges in the process of the evolution of federal polity.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- As an important Constitutional entity, the Commission is committed to balancing competing claims and priorities among all three tiers of government in a credible manner.
 - ♦ The 16th Finance Commission will recommend the tax revenue sharing formula between the Centre and the States for the five-year period beginning April 2026.

Source: **TH**

REGULATING OTT PLATFORMS AND DIGITAL CONTENT

Context:

- The **Draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023** introduced by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting **broadens regulation to cover OTT platforms and digital content.**

Draft Bill of 2023 and OTT Platforms:

- The Bill expands regulatory oversight to include OTT Platforms and Digital Content, by proposing **mandatory registration, content evaluation committees for self-regulation, and a three-tier regulatory system.**
- Mandatory Registration:** No person or broadcasting company can provide services or run a network without formal registration or intimation to the government, with the exception of a few authorised bodies.
 - Similar provisions apply to terrestrial and radio broadcasting networks.
- Broadcasting:** The Bill expands the purview of broadcasting rules to networks that use the internet to broadcast services and programmes, such as **Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) and OTT broadcasting services** (classified as broadcasting network operators in the draft) if they have the required number of subscribers or viewers.
 - These Codes will apply to **individuals and organisations** that operate as a 'systematic business' or 'professional' entity.
 - Digital copies of newspapers and publishers of commercial newspapers, however, will be **exempted.**
- The Draft Bill proposed to set up '**Content Evaluation Committees (CEC)**' for self-regulation and '**Broadcast Advisory Council**' to advise the central government on programme code and advertisement code violations.

- Broadcast Advisory Council:** It will be established by the Union government, **Consisting of independent experts and government representatives,** to oversee the implementation of the regulations.
 - It hears content violation complaints and accordingly makes recommendations to the government.

- Content Quality and Accessibility:** Any programme or advertisement broadcasted through TV, radio, or other broadcasting services must adhere to the **Programme Code and Advertisement Code** (however, these codes are **not defined yet**).
- Self Regulation:** Every broadcaster or broadcasting network operator must establish a CEC with members from various social groups, including women, child welfare, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and minorities.
 - Broadcasters will be allowed to air only those programmes certified by the CEC, except for specific shows exempted by the government.
- Provision for inspection, seizure of equipment:** The Bill allows inspections by the government without prior notice.
 - Operators must facilitate monitoring at their own cost and can face equipment seizure if violations are suspected. Companies are liable unless they prove a lack of knowledge or due diligence.

Regulation of Over-The-Top (OTT) Platforms in India:

- The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, are the **primary regulations governing OTT platforms in India.**
 - These rules categorise **digital media into three segments – publishers of news, intermediaries, and OTT platforms.**
- The **Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT)** clarified that OTT platforms in India fall under the purview of the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** and are **regulated by the Information Technology Rules**, rather than being regulated as telecom services by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

Challenges & Criticisms:

- Application of same rules for different media:** 'OTT' broadcasting services subscribers, viewers retain the autonomy to not consume a programme if they wish to do so.
 - It is a direct contradiction to the nature of cable TV or radio services, wherein consumers cannot choose to stop the airing of a programme (even if they may be able to switch channels).

- **Promoting linear representation:** The draft bill could amplify the erasure or the selective representation of Indian minority communities from the popular imagination and normalise a universal unifocal identity of India.
- **Concern over 'Authorised Officer':** An 'Authorised Officer' working under the government's directions could be influenced by political as well as personal influence.
- **Selective Targeting:** It has also been alleged that the rules will be more misused than for real regulation.
 - ◆ There are instances when the government tried to curb certain anti-government agendas while ignoring populist fake news.

About the Draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023:

- **Single Legislative Framework:** The Bill provides regulatory provisions for various broadcasting services under a single legislative framework.
 - ◆ It aims to replace the **Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995** and other policy guidelines currently governing the broadcasting sector in India.
 - ◆ It extends its regulatory purview to encompass **broadcasting OTT content, digital news and current affairs** currently regulated through the **IT Act, 2000**.
 - ◆ It includes provisions for emerging broadcasting technologies.
- **'Disability Grievance Officer'** for people with disabilities making provisions for using subtitles, audio descriptors, and sign language.
- **Regulations:** The Union government may, by order, regulate or prohibit the transmission or re-transmission of any Television Channel or programme. It is in the interest of the:
 - ◆ Sovereignty or integrity of India; or
 - ◆ Security of India; or
 - ◆ Friendly relations of India with any foreign State; or
 - ◆ Public order, decency or morality,
- **Statutory Penalties:** The Bill provides statutory penalties like advisory, warning, censure, or monetary penalties, for operators and broadcasters.

- Provision for **imprisonment and fines** is there, but only for very serious offences, such as obtaining registration with a **false affidavit**.
- If a broadcaster is found guilty of any wrongdoing, the **self-regulatory organisation** to which it belongs has the authority to expel, suspend, or impose penalties in the form of advisories, censures, warnings, or monetary fines, **not exceeding ₹5 lakh for each violation**.

Source: **TH**

NATIONAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY (NIA)

Context:

- NIA achieved a **94.70% conviction rate in 2023**.

About National Investigation Agency (NIA)

- **Institutional Establishment:**
 - ◆ **The Union government** enacted the **National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act** after the wake of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack in November 2008 and it is presently functioning as the **Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency in India**.
- **Objectives:**
 - ◆ To be a thoroughly **professional investigative agency** matching the best international standards.
 - ◆ To set the standards of excellence in counter terrorism and other national security related investigations at the national level by developing into a highly trained, partnership oriented workforce.
 - ◆ Ensuring **effective and speedy trial**.
 - ◆ Creating deterrence for existing and potential terrorist groups/individuals.
 - ◆ To develop as a storehouse of **all terrorist related information**.
- **Jurisdiction:**
 - ◆ The law under which the agency operates extends to the **whole of India** and also applies to Indian citizens outside the country.
 - ◆ Persons in the service of the government wherever they are posted.
 - ◆ Persons on ships and aircraft registered in India wherever they may be.
 - ◆ Persons who commit a scheduled offence beyond India against the Indian citizen or affecting the interest of India.

- **NIA (Amendment) Act 2019:**
 - ♦ It empowers the NIA to probe terror attacks targeting Indians and Indian interests abroad.
 - ♦ Investigation can also be conducted in other offenses such as human trafficking; circulation of fake currency; manufacture and sale of prohibited arms; and cyber-terrorism.
 - ♦ The law included **Section 66-F of the Information Technology Act** in the schedule of the NIA Act, which pertains to cyber terrorism and prescribes punishment extending to life imprisonment.
- **NIA Special Courts:**
 - ♦ Various Special Courts have been notified by the Govt. of India for trial of the cases arising out of offences committed in various states of the Union.
 - ♦ **Appeal:** An appeal shall lie from **any judgement, sentence or order, not being an interlocutory order, of a Special Court to the High Court** both on facts and on law.
 - Every appeal shall be **heard by a bench of two Judges of the High Court** and shall, as far as possible, be disposed of within a period of three months from the date of admission of the appeal.
 - ♦ **Power of State Government to constitute Special Courts:** The State Government may constitute **one or more Special Courts for the trial of offences** under any or all the enactments specified in the Schedule.

Source: **TH**

AROMATIC CROPS AND FLORICULTURE

In Context

- **High value aromatic crops and floriculture** have recently emerged as a means to supplement **livelihood of Odisha's tribal communities.**

About

- Successful introduction of aromatic plants has been seen in **Nabarangpur** and **Koraput** districts of Odisha, where tribal farmers showed an interest in **diversifying from the traditional maize crop.**
- With the help of the **Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP) in Lucknow**, the district has recently introduced **different aromatic plants** such as,

- ♦ menthol mint (the CIM Unnati variety),
- ♦ rosemary (Hariyali variety),
- ♦ patchouli (CIM Samarth),
- ♦ damask roses (Ranisahiba),
- ♦ chamomile, and
- ♦ geraniums (CIM-Bharat).

Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP)

- **Established in:** 1957
- It is a multidisciplinary research institute of **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)**, India with its major focus on **exploiting the potential of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs).**
- **Headquarters:** Lucknow and research centers at Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pantnagar, and Purara,
- **CSIR-CIMAP houses a National Gene Bank on MAPs.**
- **Mandate:** Engage in multi-disciplinary high-quality research in agricultural, biological and chemical sciences and extending technologies and services to the growers and entrepreneurs of MAPs.
- The **favourable climate and availability of vast stretches of land** offer exciting opportunities for farmers to foray into aromatic plantation, though it is an unfamiliar domain.

About aromatic plants:

- Aromatic plants are those that contain **aromatic compounds**, which are basically **essential oils**.
 - ♦ These essential oils are **odorous, volatile at room temperature, hydrophobic and highly concentrated** compounds.
 - ♦ They can be obtained from **flowers, buds, seeds, leaves, twigs, bark, wood, fruits and roots.**
- Aromatic plants **do not face regulatory challenges medicinal plantations face.**
- There is **huge demand** for aromatic plants in the market because of their diversified uses.
- **Examples:** Lemongrass, Mentha, Vetiver, Citronella, etc.

Uses:

- **Culinary herbs:** Basil, rosemary, thyme, and mint are culinary staples, adding flavor and aroma to dishes.

- **Spices:** Cumin, cloves, and star anise enrich our palates with their potent scents and taste.
- **Medicinal plants:** Lavender, chamomile, and valerian root are known for their calming and therapeutic properties.
- **Cosmetics and perfumes:** Rose, jasmine, and sandalwood essential oils are prized for their captivating fragrances in perfumes and beauty products.
- **Aromatherapy:** Essential oils from plants like eucalyptus and lemongrass can be used for inhalation or massage to promote relaxation and well-being.
- **Insect repellents:** Citronella and lemongrass oils offer natural alternatives to synthetic insect repellents.
 - ♦ The distinct odour of lemongrass, citronella and vetiver, also repels elephants.
- **Landscaping and gardening:** Ornamental plants like fragrant roses, lilies, and lavender add beauty and fragrance to gardens and outdoor spaces.

About the Aroma Mission:

- **CSIR's Aroma Mission** aims to increase the income of the farmers through cultivation of high value and high demand aromatic crops by about Rs. 30,000 to 60,000/ha/year.
 - ♦ On 4th June, 2023 CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine, Jammu launched the **third phase of CSIR-Aroma Mission** during the Lavender Festival conducted at Bhaderwah of Jammu & Kashmir, UT.
- It also aims to **bring an additional area of 30,000 hectares under cultivation of these crops** to further catalyze the cultivation of aromatic crops in about 60,000 hectares.
- This will help in **production of an additional 700 tonnes of essential oil for perfumery, cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries**, and use of these oils in value addition and herbal products would generate a **business of at least 200 crores**.
- About **45,000 skilled human resources** capable of multiplying quality planting material, distillation, fractionation and value addition will also be developed under **"Skill India" initiatives**.
- **More than 25,000 farming families would be directly benefited** and an **employment of more than 10-15 lakhs mandays** will be generated in rural areas.

- Scientific interventions would provide **assured benefits to the growers of Vidarbha, Bundelkhand, Gujarat, Marathwada, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha** and other states where farmers are exposed to frequent episodes of weather extremes and account for maximum suicides.

Source: TH

NEWS IN SHORT

E-SCR PORTAL

In Context

- **The E-SCR portal** has achieved an unprecedented speed in translating judgements, starting with just **2,238 judgments in January 2023** and ending the year with over **31,000 judgments**.

About the E-SCR portal

- **The Electronic Supreme Court Reports (e-SCR) project** is an initiative to provide the **digital version of the apex court's judgments** in the manner as they are reported in the official law report – **'Supreme Court Reports'**.
 - Adapting to the new digital times, now about **34,000 Supreme Court 'landmark' judgements** will be available for free via e-SCR project to lawyers, law students and the common public.
 - This is a project which, in essence, **endeavors to take a step forward towards fulfilling the objective of digitization of Indian Judiciary** and underlines the vision to bring in a positive change for the benefit of all the stakeholders of justice.

Source: TH

XPOSAT (X-RAY POLARIMETER SATELLITE) MISSION

News

- Recently, the Indian Space Research Organisation successfully launched the PSLV-C58 XPoSat (X-ray Polarimeter Satellite) mission.

About

- The XPoSAT mission launch also marked the 60th flight of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
- XPoSat (X-ray Polarimeter Satellite) is **India's first dedicated polarimetry mission** to study various dynamics of bright astronomical X-ray sources.

- After this launch, India became the second nation after the US to send an observatory to study astronomical sources, such as black holes, and neutron stars, among others.

XPoSat's payloads

- The spacecraft will carry two scientific payloads in a low earth orbit. The primary payload POLIX (Polarimeter Instrument in X-rays) will measure the polarimetry parameters.
- The XSPECT (X-ray Spectroscopy and Timing) payload will give spectroscopic information in the energy range of 0.8-15 keV.

How are X-Rays witnessed in space?

- X-rays have much higher energy and much shorter wavelengths, between 0.03 and 3 nanometers, so small that some x-rays are no bigger than a single atom of many elements. The physical temperature of an object determines the wavelength of the radiation it emits. The hotter the object, the shorter the wavelength of peak emission.
- X-rays come from objects that are millions of degrees Celsius — such as pulsars, galactic supernova remnants, and black holes.

Significance

- The mission helps in comprehending the emission processes from various astronomical sources like black holes, neutron stars, active galactic nuclei, and pulsar wind nebulae.
- Space based observatories are also unable to give information about the exact nature of the emission from such sources. Therefore, newer devices can measure specific properties.

Source: *TH*

SOVEREIGN GOLD BONDS

Context

- Investors under government-backed **Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs) Scheme** got an **exceptional return** with a rise in market prices of gold.

About Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs)

- These are **government securities** denominated in grams of gold, and are **substitutes for holding physical gold**.
- It was launched in November **2015**.

- **Objective:** To reduce the demand for physical gold and shift a part of the domestic savings (to purchase of gold) into financial savings.
- **Issuance:** The Gold Bonds are issued **as Government of India Stock** under the Government Securities (GS) Act, 2006.
 - ♦ These are **issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** on behalf of the Government of India.
 - ♦ The Bonds will be **sold through Scheduled Commercial Banks** (except Small Finance Banks and Payment Banks), Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited (SHCIL), Clearing Corporation of India Limited (CCIL), designated post offices, and recognised stock exchanges viz National Stock Exchange of India Limited and Bombay Stock Exchange Limited.
- **Eligibility:** It is restricted for sale to resident individuals, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), trusts, universities and charitable institutions.
- **Term: Maturity period is 8 years**, with an option to exit the investment after the first five years.
- The interest on Gold Bonds shall be **taxable as per the provision of the Income Tax Act, 1961**.

Source: *TH*

EURASIAN OTTER

In News

- A team of researchers have discovered Eurasian otter in the **Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary** in Kerala.

Eurasian Otter

- **Scientific name:** Lutra lutra
- Otters are mammals of the **family Mustelidae** consisting of 13 species. They are found in every continent except Australia and Antarctica.
- The Eurasian otter covers the largest range of any **Palaearctic mammal**.
 - ♦ Palaearctic is a zoogeographical region comprising Eurasia north of the Himalayas, together with North Africa and the temperate part of the Arabian peninsula.
- **Eurasian otter** is classified as '**near threatened**' on the **IUCN Red List**. It is regarded as a flagship species and indicator of high-quality aquatic habitats.

Source: *TH*

TEHREEK-E-HURRIYAT UNDER UAPA

In News

The Government has declared 'Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, Jammu and Kashmir (TeH)' as an '**Unlawful Association**' under **Section 3(1) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967 for five years.**

About

- Tehreek-e-Hurriyat is a separatist political party in Jammu and Kashmir, India founded by Syed Ali Shah Geelani.
- According to the government, "the organisation and its members are involved in anti-national and secessionist activities in Jammu and Kashmir supporting terrorist activities and inciting people to establish Islamic rule in J&K."

About UAPA Act

- The UAPA was **enacted in 1967** and it gives powers to the government to probe and prosecute people for acts of terrorism, and to designate an organisation as an "**unlawful association**" or a "**terrorist organisation**", or an individual as a "**terrorist**".
- **Scope** : The Act provided for declaring an association or a body of individuals "unlawful" if they indulged in any activity that included acts and words, spoken or written, or any sign or representation, that supported any claim to bring about "the cession of a part of the territory of India", or its "secession", or which questions or disclaims the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Under Section 3 of the [UAPA Act](#), the government has powers to declare an association "unlawful".

Amendments Done

The Central Government amended the [Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Act \(UAPA\)](#) in August 2019 to include the provision of designating an individual as terrorist.

- Prior to this amendment, only organizations could be designated as terrorist organisations.

Source: [TH](#)

EXERCISE 'DESERT CYCLONE 2024

In News

- The **Joint Military Exercise 'Desert Cyclone 2024'** will be held from January 2 to January 15 in Rajasthan.

About Exercise 'Desert Cyclone 2024

- It is the Joint Military Exercise between India and UAE
- It aims to enhance interoperability by learning and sharing best practices in urban operations
 - ♦ The first-ever India-UAE Joint Air Forces exercise took place in September 2008 at the Al-Dhafra base in Abu Dhabi.
 - ♦ India has also been a regular participant at the biennial International Defence Exhibition (IDEX) in Abu Dhabi.

Do you know ?

- In recent years, bilateral defence cooperation has been strengthened, notably in the field of defence training and supply of defence inventory, besides regular exchange programmes.

Exercises

- Australia : Ex AUSTRA HIND, Ex AUSINDEX, EX PITCH BLACK
- Bangladesh: SAMPRITI
- China : Ex HAND IN HAND
- Egypt: Ex CYCLONE
- France: Ex SHAKTI, Ex VARUNA, GARUDA
- Indonesia: Ex GARUDA SHAKTI
- Israel: Ex BLUE FLAG
- Japan: Ex DHARMA GUARDIAN
- Kyrgyzstan: Ex KHANJAR
- Malaysia: Ex HARIMAU SHAKTI,
- Mongolia: Ex NOMADIC ELEPHANT
- Nepal: Ex SURYA KIRAN
- Russia: EX INDRA, EX AVIANDRA
- Singapore: SIMBEX
- Sri Lanka: Ex MITRA SHAKTI
- Thailand: Ex MAITREE
- UAE: DESERT EAGLE
- UK: Ex AJEY WARRIOR
- USA: Ex YUDHABHAYAS, Ex VAJRA PRAHAR

Source: [DD News](#)