

POLITY

❖ **The Constitution Benches of the Supreme Court**

❖ **CONTEXT:** Under the supervision of the new Chief Justice of India Uday Umesh Lalit, the Supreme Court of India has returned to hearing Constitution Bench matters. Twenty-five of the 29 SC judges are now part of the five Constitution Benches sitting in the SC.

- A few days before he took over, Justice U. U. Lalit announced his intentions to introduce major reforms in the SC during his tenure. Besides assuring transparency in the listing of cases in the apex court and setting up a system for mentioning urgent matters, the then CJI-designate promised the SC would strive to have at least one Constitution Bench functioning throughout the year.
- In September 2022, the SC notified that 25 Constitution Bench matters would be listed for hearing. The matters included a challenge to the Centre's demonetisation policy, reservation for economically weaker sections, WhatsApp privacy, 'real' Shiv Sena row and hijab ban. The first two benches were assembled on August 29 2022. Several Constitution Bench matters were long pending.

❖ **What is a Constitution Bench?**

- The Supreme Court is at the apex of the Indian judicial system. As the guardian of the Constitution, it is the primary duty of the SC to uphold the fundamental rights of citizens and protect their liberties.
- Whenever a matter of law arises that requires a provision or provision of the Constitution to be interpreted, or there is a "significant legal question", it is required to be decided by a Bench involving a minimum of five judges of the Supreme Court. Such a Bench is called Constitution Bench. Constitution Benches have decided some of India's most significant cases over the years:
- **Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India:** In 1977, the Centre impounded Maneka Gandhi's passport in the "interest of general public". When the government declined to give reasons for the order, Ms. Gandhi approached the SC. The seven-judge Bench expanded the scope of Article 21 and ruled that "personal liberty" is "of the widest amplitude" covering "a variety of rights which go to constitute the personal liberty of man".
- **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (retired) v. Union of India:** Justice K.S Puttaswamy, a retired judge of the Karnataka High Court, filed a writ petition in 2012 in the SC challenging the constitutional validity of the Aadhaar scheme. In 2017, a nine-judge bench recognised the right to privacy as one guaranteed under the Constitution. The Bench ruled that while the right to privacy is intrinsic to an individual's ability to exercise bodily autonomy, it is still not an "absolute right". Justice K.S Puttaswamy, a retired judge of the Karnataka High Court filed a writ petition in the SC challenging the constitutional validity of the Aadhaar scheme
- **In re: The Berubari Union and Exchange of Enclaves (1960):** The seven-judge bench of the Supreme Court held that the Parliament doesn't have the power to cede a State's territory to another country unless it chooses to give effect to the same through an amendment to Article 368.
- **Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar:** In 1962, the five-judge bench upheld the constitutional validity of Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code which penalises sedition. The top court, however, held that Section 124A must be construed to only penalise statements that incite public disorder.

❖ **When does the SC set up a Constitution Bench?**

- Article 145(3), which deals with the rules of the court, provides for the setting up of a Constitution Bench.
- Article 145(3) says a minimum of five judges need to sit for deciding a case involving a "substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution", or for hearing any reference under Article 143, which deals with the power of the President to consult the SC.
- Other scenarios in which a Constitution Bench can be constituted are:
 - ✓ If two or three-judge Benches of the Supreme Court have delivered conflicting judgments on the same point of law
 - ✓ If a later three-judge Bench of the SC doubts the correctness of a judgment delivered by a former Bench with as much strength and decides to refer the matter to a larger bench for reconsideration of the previous judgment.
- The judiciary hasn't determined so far what constitute "substantial questions of law" that "involve Constitutional interpretation".
- A larger Bench can, however, overrule the pronouncement of a five-judge Constitution Bench. But before that, a five-judge Bench must be convinced that the previous order was incorrect, following which it may refer the matter to a larger Bench of seven judges.

❖ **The strength of Constitution Benches**

- Constitution Benches are not a routine affair in the SC as most of the cases are listed before a two or three-judge Bench, called a Division Bench.
- As per the legal provisions, a Constitution Bench consists of a minimum of five judges and the number can go up to an odd number of seven, nine and so on.
- The Chief Justice of India, who is also the master of the roster, decides which cases will be heard by a Constitution Bench, the number of judges on the bench and even its composition. While there are no clear guidelines, the sole discretion lies with the CJI. It is not binding on the CJI to be a part of a Constitution Bench.

- Cases which deal with important constitutional matters or are likely to have a significant impact are usually heard by larger benches. However, there have been instances when smaller benches of two or three judges have been assigned crucial issues with wide impact. For instance, in 2013 a two-judge bench reversed the Delhi HC judgement in Suresh Kumar Koushal vs. Naz Foundation decriminalizing homosexuality, stating that this could only be done by the Parliament. A few years later, a five-judge bench unanimously struck down Section 377.
- To date, the largest-ever Constitution Bench was that of 13 judges in the case Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, headed by the then CJI S. M. Sikri. A ground-breaking judgment was delivered as the SC, by a thin majority of 7:6, holding that Parliament could amend any part of the Constitution so long as it did not alter or amend “the basic structure or essential features of the Constitution.”

❖ **Why are more Constitution Benches needed?**

- When it first opened its doors in 1950, the Supreme Court had a total strength of eight judges. About 13% of the court’s decisions were from a five-or-larger Bench in the 1950s, but the court was soon overwhelmed by backlogs.
- The Parliament increased the overall strength of the Court from 11 in 1956 to 33 in 2019, but there was a decline in the number of Constitution Benches as smaller Benches heard more cases.
- Nick Robinson, a legal researcher at the Program on the Legal Profession at Harvard Law School analysed 50 years of Supreme Court data and noted that while Constitution Benches are vital for Supreme Court jurisprudence, the number of such Benches dropped from a yearly average of 134 cases in the 1960s to an average of 6.4 cases per year in the last half of 2000s.
- It has been found that even as Constitution benches have become less frequent, their judgments have become longer, more prone to split decisions, increasingly delayed, and more likely to have been brought under both appellate and writ jurisdictions. In fact, given the more convoluted nature of these decisions in recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to even determine the winning party.
- The study, published in 2011, found that the number of regular matters disposed of by the Supreme Court had risen over the decades. The falling number of Constitution Bench decisions indicates that the court is getting distracted by its backlog of thousands of rather mundane cases. It risks falling behind on its core duty as the primary interpreter of the Indian Constitution.
- The situation remains similar a decade later. While two Constitution Benches were set up in 2021, there was none in former CJI N.V. Ramana’s tenure spanning over one year. When he retired on August 26, around 490 Constitution Bench matters were pending before the SC. Cases that awaited a Constitution Bench during his tenure included challenges to the abrogation of Article 370, electoral bonds, the constitutionality of the UAPA amendment and the Sabarimala review petition. These cases were pending for almost five years, with an average of 3 years of pendency, as per a Live Law report.

• **A Flourish hierarchy chart**

Bench Strength	Total	Main	Connected
Five judges	338	42	296
Seven judges	15	7	8
Nine judges	135	5	130
Total	488	54	434

- As of October 1 around a month after CJI Lalit took over 488 Constitution Bench matters are pending. Of these, 54 cases directly deal with questions of law and constitutional interpretation, while 434 connected matters are pending. While 338 matters are pending before five-judge benches, 15 seven-judge and 135 nine-judge bench cases are pending. A decision in the main matter disposes of those cases which are connected.
- **Research by the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy in February 2022** concluded that while the number of main cases pending before Constitution Benches saw a slight rise, the increase has been drastic in connected matters.
- It drew two conclusions: First, even though the court is disposing such cases, it is not able to keep up with the inflow of new cases. Therefore, the overall pendency has remained stagnant or marginally increased. Second, the increase in the number of connected matters means that more cases have been tagged with the main matters pending before these courts.”
- The numbers will only continue to rise unless their disposal is prioritised, while adding that disposal of Constitution Bench cases can reduce pendency in the SC.

INDIA and IT's NEIGHBOUR

1. **Bhutan's Sustainable Development Fee for tourists**

- ❖ **CONTEXT:** After keeping its borders closed for more than two years to contain the spread of COVID-19, Bhutan reopened its gates to travellers on September 23 2022 as part of its efforts to revive a struggling economy.

❖ **Emergence and development of tourism in Bhutan**

- It was in 1974 that Bhutan first opened its borders to foreign travellers to support its economy.

- The Himalayan kingdom adopted a “high value, low volume” strategy, considering the possible negative consequences of tourism on the socio-cultural and natural environment and promoting itself as one of the most exclusive destinations.
- Bhutan permitted tourists only in groups and allowed a maximum of 30 people who were required to pay \$130 per day. The cost of this Minimum Daily Package Rate, or MDPR, included transport within the country, food, guides and at least a 3-star hotel accommodation. At the time, 287 tourists visited Bhutan.
- In 2012, the all-inclusive daily package was increased to \$250 for the peak season of March to May and September to November, and \$200 for December to February and June to August. The fee was increased to reduce the tourist inflow and minimise its adverse impact on the country’s culture and environment.
- An additional fee of \$65 per person per night as a Sustainable Development Fee was also introduced. The SDF did not apply to regional visitors, or tourists from countries granted an exemption by Bhutan, which included India.

What is the Sustainable Development Fee?

The Tourism Levy Act of Bhutan 2022 describes SDF as the “tourism levy on all leisure tourists per person per night and applicable throughout the year as a contribution towards sustainable development initiatives undertaken by the government and to compensate for the negative environmental impacts associated with tourism.”

The revenue is used to develop roads, bridges, and schools, provide free education and health services, promote and preserve culture and tradition, and support the preservation of the natural environment in the country.

- The decade saw rapid growth in the tourism industry, marked by a rise in regional visitors. The overall figure crossed the 2-lakh mark in 2016.
- Three years later, Bhutan welcomed 3.15 lakh tourists — a 15% jump from the previous year. These included 72,199 international tourists and 2.43 lakh regional visitors — 20% more than in 2018 — of which 2.3 lakh were regional visitors, mainly from India, as per a report on the overall sector performance in 2019.
- Over the years, the tourism industry emerged as a major sector in Bhutan with significant contributions toward socio-economic development through revenue generation and employment.
- According to the latest Tourism Establishment Census of Bhutan, around 52,000 of Bhutan’s 7.8 lakh population were employed in the industry in 2019. Tourism and related activities generated gross revenue of Rs 23,337.15 million in 2019, the majority of which was earned from transport, tour operators, travel agents and reservation services, as per the report.

❖ Why was a tourism policy the need of the hour?

- Tourism, along with hydropower and agriculture, is one of the largest contributors to the economy in Bhutan.
- The industry, however, has brought with it social, cultural and environmental challenges. Along with concerns over the negative impact of tourism on Bhutan’s ecology, the increase in the number of visitors resulted in traffic congestion at tourist sites and highways and an increase in accidents. It also resulted in quality issues in accommodation services, waste management problems, mushrooming of non-certified tourist facilities, and unethical business practices.
- The Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB) expressed similar concerns. “With Bhutan’s limited infrastructure and carrying capacity it has become increasingly challenging to maintain our policy of high value, low volume and ensuring an authentic and quality experience for tourists.
- As the government grappled with fears of destructive effects of the industry on the country’s sensitive ecology and rich cultural heritage in absence of set guidelines, a new tourism policy was framed in 2020 to regulate the flow of tourists and “change and adapt” with the evolving demands of the industry. The government announced that “regional tourists” would have to pay a daily fee of Rs 1,200 to travel in Bhutan. The new set of rules, which were to come into force in July 2020, could not be implemented because of the pandemic.
- Meanwhile, the two years of shutdown dented the economy as the tourism industry remained closed. Arrivals dropped by 91% from 3.15 lakh visitors in 2019 to 29,812 visitors in 2020, while direct revenue declined by 92% to \$19.84 million in 2020 from \$23.4 million in the previous year.

❖ What are the new rules and how much will Indians have to pay?

- Earlier this year, the National Assembly passed the Tourism Levy Bill of Bhutan 2022, which proposed an increase in the SDF for international tourists to \$200 per night from the previous \$65. The daily tourism fee for those from India, Maldives and Bangladesh remained unchanged at Rs 1,200, as laid down by the 2020 policy.
- As per the rules, in addition to the SDF, Indian visitors are required to show their voter card, passport or any other identity proof at the immigration check posts, while the birth certificates of children will have to be produced.
- The new rule for tourists from India will remain in effect for two years, following which it will be reviewed and could be revised. The SDF for those from other nations, meanwhile, has been increased to \$200 per night from the previous \$65 fee.
- The tourist fee will be used on projects like planting trees, up skilling tourism workers, maintaining hiking trails, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and electrifying vehicles to offset tourists’ carbon footprints.
- People visiting Bhutan will no longer have to pay the minimum package fee (MDPR). Day tourists who do not travel beyond the first designated point and children aged five years and below will not be required to pay SDF.

Those between six and 12 years of age, meanwhile, will have to pay Rs 600. In addition to the SDF, Bhutan will levy an entrance fee for visits to monuments or sacred sites. The rule was notified in a circular in July.

❖ **Does any other country levy a tourism tax?**

- Over the years, several countries have introduced tourism taxes, which are different from visa fees, to promote sustainable tourism and combat the problem of mass tourism.
- In Europe, many countries levy a hotel tax. Germany has a culture tax and a bed tax in some cities. Venice introduced an entrance fee ranging from 3 to 10 euros in 2018. Tourist tax in Switzerland depends on the location. Bulgaria also levies a tourist fee on overnight stays. The Netherlands levies two types of tourist tax — land tourist tax for accommodation and water tourist tax for accommodation on cruise ships.
- Some states in the U.S. also charge hotel tax— called occupancy tax.
- Some countries charge a “departure tax”, which is the fee paid by visitors for leaving the country. In 2019, Japan charged the “sayonara tax”, which was used to enhance infrastructure ahead of the 2020 Summer Olympics.

PRELIMS

1. Legal rights to non-humans

❖ **Context: With novel approaches being put forth for tackling the climate crisis in the last few years, the concept of granting legal rights to natural entities has been discussed in a recent report titled ‘Law in the Emerging ‘BioAge’.**

- The report have proposed giving legal rights to plants, animals, and non-living entities is crucial to building meaningful human-environment relationships in the future.
- The report focused on rapid developments in biotechnology and the need to understand its ethical consequences on humanity’s relationship with the environment.

❖ **“bio age”**

- The increased integration of biotechnology in human life will bring in the bio age.
- Integration of life sciences with modern technology through the production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), engineering of genes to enhance disease resistance, gene editing, and more, indicate that biotechnology is most likely to pervade our lives in the future.
- It will mark the end of the digital Information Age and this era will require legal intervention to hold researchers accountable for the impact of their work on the environment.
- This is where the question of nature as a “juristic person” or an entity recognized in law as a person, which otherwise is not, comes in.
- Granting legal rights and protection to non-human systems – flora, fauna, rivers, ecosystems and landscapes – would recalibrate human-environment relationships and bring ethical conduct to the field.
- **Ecuador: The first country in the world to recognise the rights of nature**
 - The South American country of Ecuador, in 2008, approved a Constitution that grants tropical forests, islands, rivers and air, legal rights to exist, flourish and evolve.
 - More recently, Ecuador became the first country to grant legal rights to individual wild animals.
- **Bolivia: Establishing the Law of Mother Earth**
 - Bolivia granted all nature rights equal to that of humans in 2011.
 - It established the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth.
 - It provided legal status to Mother Earth and all its components, which includes human beings, entitling them to inherent rights recognized by law.
 - This includes: the right to life and to exist; the right to continue vital cycles and processes free from human alteration; the right to pure water and clean air; the right to balance; and the right to pollution-free living.
- **New Zealand’s Whanganui river: First in the world to be given legal status**
 - The Maori people had been fighting for the river to be recognized as a living entity for about 160 years.
 - The New Zealand parliament in 2017 passed the Whanganui River Claims Settlement Bill, which granted legal personhood to river Whanganui and its surrounding ecosystem.
- **India**
 - Article 51-A (g) of the Constitution of India lays down that it is the fundamental duty of every citizen to protect wildlife and have compassion for all living creatures.
 - However, such duties are not enforceable by law.
 - The Uttarakhand High Court in 2017, granted the river Ganga and its longest tributary Yamuna the legal right to be protected and not be harmed.

2. Global Hunger Index is out, India in ‘serious’ category at rank 107

❖ **Context: India ranks 107 out of 121 countries on the Global Hunger Index in which it fares worse than all countries in South Asia barring war-torn Afghanistan.**

- India’s score of 29.1 places it in the ‘serious’ category.
- India also ranks below Sri Lanka (64), Nepal (81), Bangladesh (84), and Pakistan (99).
- Afghanistan (109) is the only country in South Asia that performs worse than India on the index.

- China is among the countries collectively ranked between 1 and 17 having a score of less than five.
- India's child wasting rate (low weight for height), at 19.3%, is worse than the levels recorded in 2014 (15.1%) and even 2000 (17.15), and is the highest for any country in the world and drives up the region's average owing to India's large population.
- Prevalence of undernourishment, which is a measure of the proportion of the population facing chronic deficiency of dietary energy intake, has also risen in the country from 14.6% in 2018-2020 to 16.3% in 2019-2021. This translates into 224.3 million people in India considered undernourished.
- India has shown improvement in child stunting, which has declined from 38.7% to 35.5% between 2014 and 2022, as well as child mortality which has also dropped from 4.6% to 3.3% in the same comparative period.
- On the whole, India has shown a slight worsening with its GHI score increasing from 28.2 in 2014 to 29.1 in 2022.
- Though the GHI is an annual report, the rankings are not comparable across different years.
- The GHI score for 2022 can only be compared with scores for 2000, 2007 and 2014.

Food for thought

India's score of 29.1 in the 2022 Global Hunger Index falls under the "serious" category in the hunger meter. It ranked 107 out of the 121 countries analysed below Rwanda and Ethiopia

29.1				
<= 9.9 low	10-19.9 moderate	20-34.9 serious	35-49.9 alarming	>= 50 extremely alarming
Rankings	Country			
		106	Sudan	
102	Rwanda	107	India	
103	Nigeria	108	Zambia	
104	Ethiopia	109	Afghanistan	
105	Republic of Congo	110	Timor-Leste	

❖ GHI

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a tool for comprehensively measuring and tracking hunger at global, regional, and national levels.
- GHI scores are based on the values of four component indicators - undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting and child mortality.
- Countries are divided into five categories of hunger on the basis of their score, which are 'low', 'moderate', 'serious', 'alarming' and 'extremely alarming'.
- Based on the values of the four indicators, a GHI score is calculated on a 100-point scale reflecting the severity of hunger, where zero is the best score (no hunger) and 100 is the worst.
- Each country's GHI score is calculated based on a formula that combines four indicators that together capture the multidimensional nature of hunger:
 - Undernourishment: the share of the population with insufficient caloric intake.
 - Child stunting: the share of children under age five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition.
 - Child wasting: the share of children under age five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition.
 - Child mortality: the share of children who die before their fifth birthday, partly reflecting the fatal mix of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environments.
- Taken together, the component indicators reflect deficiencies in calories as well as in micronutrients.

❖ What is meant by hunger?

- Hunger is usually understood to refer to the distress associated with a lack of sufficient calories.
- Undernutrition is the result of inadequate intake of food in terms of either quantity or quality, poor utilization of nutrients due to infections or other illnesses, or a combination of these immediate causes.
- Malnutrition refers more broadly to both undernutrition (problems caused by deficiencies) and overnutrition (problems caused by unbalanced diets that involve consuming too many calories in relation to requirements, with or without low intake of micronutrient-rich foods).
- Overnutrition, resulting in overweight, obesity, and noncommunicable diseases, is increasingly common throughout the world
- While overnutrition is an important concern, the GHI focuses specifically on issues relating to undernutrition.

3. SLBM launch by INS Arihant

- ❖ **CONTEXT:** The Ministry of Defence (MoD) announced that the indigenous ballistic missile nuclear submarine INS Arihant had successfully launched a nuclear capable Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) in the Bay of Bengal with "very high accuracy".

❖ **The Test**

- The SLBM was launched from the country's first indigenous Strategic Strike Nuclear Submarine INS Arihant. The test is significant for the nuclear ballistic submarine, or SSBN, programme, which is a crucial element of India's nuclear deterrence capability.
- The missile was tested to a predetermined range and impacted the target area in the Bay of Bengal with very high accuracy. All operational and technological parameters of the weapon system have been validated.
- The successful user training launch of the SLBM by INS Arihant is significant to prove crew competency and validate the SSBN programme. A robust, survivable and assured retaliatory capability is in keeping with India's policy to have 'credible minimum deterrence' that underpins its 'no first use' commitment.
- The official did not reveal the specifications and range of the missile that was launched but suggested it could have been the K-15 (also called Sagarika), belonging to the 'K' family of SLBMs.

❖ **The Submarine**

- Launched in 2009 and Commissioned in 2016, INS Arihant is India's first indigenous nuclear powered ballistic missile capable submarine built under the secretive Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) project, which was initiated in the 1990s.
- INS Arihant and its class of submarines are classified as 'SSBN', which is the hull classification symbol for nuclear powered ballistic missile carrying submarines. While the Navy operates the vessel, the operations of the SLBMs from the SSBN are under the purview of India's Strategic Forces Command, which is part of India's Nuclear Command Authority.
- In November 2019, after INS Arihant completed its first deterrence patrol, the government announced the establishment of India's "survivable nuclear triad" — the capability of launching nuclear strikes from land, air and sea platforms.
- The second submarine in the Arihant class, SSBN Arighat, is reported to have been launched in 2017, and said to be undergoing sea trials at present. In addition, India operates 15 conventional diesel electric submarines (classified as SSK), and some more are on the way.

❖ **The Missile**

- The Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs), sometimes called the 'K' family of missiles, have been indigenously developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- Because these missiles are to be launched from submarines, they are lighter, more compact and stealthier than their land-based counterparts, the Agni series of missiles which are medium and intercontinental range nuclear capable ballistic assets. The development of the K family missiles has been done in consonance with the ATV project.
- Part of the K family is the SLBM K-15, which is also called B-05 or Sagarika. It has a range of 750 km. INS Arihant can carry a dozen K-15 missiles on board. India has also developed and successfully tested K-4 missiles from the family, which have a range of 3,500 km.
- In January 2020, two successful tests of the K-4 missile were conducted from submerged platforms, off the coast of Andhra Pradesh within a span of six days. These tests were a key step towards ultimately deploying K-4s on the INS Arihant. It is also reported that more members of K-family — reportedly carrying the code names K-5 and K-6, with a range of 5,000 km and 6,000 km respectively — are under development.

❖ **The Strategic Significance**

- The capability of being able to launch nuclear weapons submarine platforms has great strategic significance in the context of achieving a nuclear triad, especially in the light of the "No First Use" policy of India.
- The sea-based underwater nuclear capable assets significantly increases the second strike capability, and thus validates the nuclear deterrence. These submarines can not only survive a first strike by the adversary, but can also launch a strike in retaliation, thus achieving 'Credible Nuclear Deterrence'.
- The development of these capabilities is important in the light of India's relations with China and Pakistan. With China having deployed many of its submarines, including some that are nuclear powered and nuclear capable, India's capacity building on the nuclear powered submarines and of the nuclear capable missile which can be launched from them, is crucial for nuclear deterrence.
- Pakistan Navy, operates five diesel-electric submarines and three mini submarines of under 150 tonne displacement.

❖ **The Posture**

- MoD after launch from Arihant stressed on the strategic postures of 'credible minimum deterrence' and 'no first use' which are pivotal to India's nuclear doctrine, made public in January 2003, after the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) had reviewed the progress in operationalizing of India's nuclear doctrine.
- The key points in the doctrine made public at the time were: building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrent; a posture of 'no first use' denoting that the nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere; and that nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to "inflict unacceptable damage".
- The doctrine says that the nuclear retaliatory attacks can only be authorised by the civilian political leadership through the Nuclear Command Authority. However at the time, the Cabinet Committee on Security had also

reviewed and approved the arrangements for alternate chains of command for retaliatory nuclear strikes in all eventualities.

4. Iranian kamikaze drones

❖ **CONTEXT: Ukraine's capital region was struck by Iranian-made kamikaze drones recently.**

❖ **What are Kamikaze drones?**

- These are small unmanned aircraft packed with explosives that can be flown directly at a tank or a group of troops that are destroyed when it hits the target and explodes.
- The name comes from the World War 2 era's feared Japanese kamikaze pilots, who conducted suicide attacks by intentionally crashing their explosive filled aircraft into enemy targets.
- The modern drone versions have the capability of surpassing traditional defences to strike their targets and are also cheaper than their larger counterparts. The small lethal drones are difficult to detect on radar, and through the use of facial recognition, can be programmed to hit targets without human intervention.

❖ **Which countries have such drones?**

- Some countries have admitted to using such armed drones, while others have been accused of utilising them to carry out covert attacks. According to the US military, Iranian-backed militias have used small drones in 10 attacks on US bases in Iraq this year.
- Azerbaijan had used small Turkish-made drones against the Armenian military in the last few years, shifting the prolonged stalemate over a disputed enclave decisively in Azerbaijan's favour.
- There have been also multiple occasions where Russia has used such suicide drones to launch attacks in Ukraine following their invasion.
- Iranian-backed Houthi rebels also used them to blow up Saudi oil facilities in 2019.
- Although the US Kamikaze might be the most advanced in this class of drones, Russia, China, Israel, Iran and Turkey all have some versions of it.
- The US kamikaze drones are cheaper than most other drones made in the country, and come in two sizes.
- The Switchblade 300 suicide drone weighs about five pounds (2.26 kilograms), can fly for up to 15 minutes at a time, and is designed to be carried in a backpack.
- The Switchblade 600, by comparison, weighs about 50 pounds, can fly for up to 40 minutes, and is known as a "loitering missile" that can hover around an area for some time and target armoured vehicles.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Discuss the role of the National Commission for Backward Classes in the wake of its transformation from a statutory body to a constitutional body.

The National Commission on Backward Classes (NCBC) was a statutory body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Later, the 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act of 2018, provided constitutional status to the NCBC.

There are various transformations that have happened in the new NCBC:

- As a statutory body, it derives its powers from statutes or laws made by parliament while now as a constitutional body it derives its powers and authorities from the Indian constitution.
- 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) inserted Article 338B which is regarding NCBC to examine complaints and welfare measures. This was lacking in the previous NCBC.
- 102nd CAA also inserted a new Article 342A, which brings greater transparency as the Act specified the concurrence of parliament which is mandatory in the amendment of the list of backward classes.
- In the new NCBC, the focus has shifted from reservation to the development of the backward class and the inclusion of grievance redressal.
- However, there are some underlying issues like, the recommendation of the NCBC is not mandatory and it has no responsibility to define backwardness.

Thus, NCBC is an important commission for social progress. It should be gender sensitive and there should be no vote bank politics for better implementation of its rules.

MCQs

- With reference to the Indian judiciary, consider the following statements :
 - Any retired judge of the Supreme Court of India can be called back to sit and act as a Supreme Court judge by the Chief Justice of India with the prior permission of the President of India.
 - Constitution Benches are set up on an ad hoc basis and it is binding on the CJI to be a part of a Constitution Bench of Supreme Court.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

 - 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- With reference to the Global Hunger Index (GHI), consider the following statements:
 - India has been consistently recording lower values for the four indicators, it started going up in last five years for undernourishment and the prevalence of wasting in children.
 - The key indicators in the index include undernourishment, child mortality, child wasting and child stunting.

Which of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
 - b) 2 only
 - c) **Both 1 and 2**
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2
3. "Whanganui river" first in the world to be given legal status is associated with which country?
 - a) **New Zealand**
 - b) Switzerland
 - c) Germany
 - d) Italy
 4. Recently the term "Sagrika (K-15)" in news is related which of the following?
 - a) **Submarine launched Ballistic Missile**
 - b) Surface to Surface Air Missile Short Range Ballistic Missile
 - c) Surface to Surface Air Missile Medium-Range Ballistic Missile
 - d) Anti Tank Guided Missile
 5. Which of the following submarines of Indian Navy's Kalvari class has commenced its sea trials in most recently?
 - a) **Vagir**
 - b) Vela
 - c) Karanj
 - d) Khanderi
 6. 'Sayonara tax' often mentioned in news is related to which country?
 - a) USA
 - b) North Korea
 - c) South Korea
 - d) **Japan**
 7. Recently India Post releases special cover on "Seabuckthorn", it has been identified as a product of which district under the One District One product?
 - a) **Leh**
 - b) Kargil
 - c) Chamba
 - d) Bilaspur
 8. Which of the following statements about the National Human Rights Commission is correct?
 - a) It consists of 10 members.
 - b) Its powers are only binding in nature.
 - c) **NHRC can took suo motu cognizance of a media report on a matter related to it.**
 - d) Its chairman must be sitting judge in the Supreme Court.
 9. ISRO to launch 36 satellites of UK's global communications network OneWeb, will use GSLV MK3, With reference to India's satellite launch vehicles, consider the following statements:
 1. PSLVs launch the satellites useful for Earth resources monitoring whereas GSLVs are designed mainly to launch communication satellites.
 2. Satellites launched by PSLV appear to remain permanently fixed in the same position in the sky, as viewed from a particular location on Earth.
 3. GSLV Mk III is a four- staged launch vehicle with the first and third stages using solid rocket motors; and the second and fourth stages using liquid rocket engines.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - a) **1 only**
 - b) 2 and 3
 - c) 1 and 2
 - d) 3 only
 10. PM of India to dedicate 75 Digital Banking Units to the nation, with reference to Digital Banking Units (DBU) consider the followings.
 1. A DBU is a specialised fixed point business unit or hub housing certain minimum digital infrastructure for delivering digital banking products and services as well as servicing existing financial products and services digitally.
 2. DBUs will be subject to prudential and liquidity norms on a par with existing commercial banks.
 Which of the above statement/s is/are not correct?
 - a) 1 only
 - b) **2 only**
 - c) Both 1 and 2
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2