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GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

1. No voter must be turned down, SC tells EC over increased voter limit

Context: A petition was filed challenging the poll body's decision to enhance the maximum number of voters per polling station from 1,200 to 1,500. According to the petition, the move leads to disenfranchisement, especially the underprivileged, for whom the Constitution works. The petitioner emphasized that rather than increasing the number of electronic voting machines (EVMs) or polling stations in every constituency, the EC has chosen to increase the number of electors per polling station, probably in a bid to lower the cost of election.

Key points

- **Overview:** The filed petition suggested that the increase would lead to crowding of polling stations, resulting in longer waiting hours and queues. These are factors which would prove unfriendly for daily wagers.
- **Representation of the People Act, 1950:** The Representation of the People Act of 1950 (RPA 1950) is an act of the Indian Parliament, which was enacted to deal with the electoral system of the nation at the national and state level.
- **Allocation of seats under RPA 1950:** The four schedules under the RPA 1950 contain provisions pertaining to the allocation of seats and the method of election for various posts.
 - *First Schedule* - The allocation of seats to the States in the Lok Sabha and reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
 - *Second Schedule* - The total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of each State.
 - *Third Schedule* - The allocation of seats in the Legislative Councils of the States.
 - *Fourth Schedule* - Local authorities for purposes of elections to Legislative Councils.
 - *Method of election* - All the seats in the Lok Sabha shall be filled by persons chosen by direct election from parliamentary constituencies in the States.
- **Voter qualification in India:** A person shall be disqualified for registration in an electoral roll if he/she - is not a citizen of India, is of unsound mind and stands so declared by a competent court, is disqualified from voting under the provisions of any law relating to corrupt practices and other offenses in connection with elections.
- **Electoral roll:** An electoral roll is a comprehensive list of all eligible voters in a specific geographic area or constituency. It is used to determine who is eligible to vote in an election, or another event of voting.
 - *The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021* - Linking electoral roll data with Aadhaar: The electoral registration officer may require a person to furnish their Aadhaar number to establish their identity. Qualifying date for enrolment in electoral roll: The Bill provides four qualifying dates in a calendar year, which will be January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1. Requisitioning of premises for election purposes: The Bill expands the purposes for which premises can be requisitioned.
- **Role of the judiciary:** *No civil court shall have jurisdiction* - To entertain or adjudicate upon any question whether any person is or is not entitled to be registered in an electoral roll for a constituency. To question the legality of any action taken by or under the authority of an electoral registration officer.
No court shall take cognizance of any offense committed by any officer in connection with the preparation, revision, or correction of an electoral roll or the inclusion or exclusion, etc unless there is a complaint made by the Election Commission or the Chief Electoral Officer of the State concerned.

GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

2. Places of Worship Act must be implemented in letter and spirit

Context: The Congress party in its CWC meeting on Friday (November 29) reiterated its firmest commitment to the Places of Worship Act, 1991. Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh termed as “unfortunate” the various rows that have cropped up recently, including claims on a mosque in Sambhal and Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti’s dargah in Ajmer and the dispute in Sambhal, has reignited debates over the Act’s applicability. The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act prohibits conversion of

places of worship and provides for maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship, as existed on August 15, 1947.

Key points

- **Overview:** Petitioners claim the 16th Century Jama Masjid in Sambhal was built on the site of an ancient Hari Har Mandir (Hindu temple). Constructed around 1528 by Mir Hindu Beg, a general under Mughal Emperor Babur, the mosque features distinct stone masonry with a dome and arches, differing from other Mughal mosques made of red sandstone.
- **Judiciary Involvement:** A Sambhal district court ordered a peaceful survey to verify the claims. However, a second survey resulted in violent clashes.
- **Legal Status of the Mosque:** The Shahi Jama Masjid is a protected monument under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904. It is listed by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) as a Monument of National Importance.
- **Shahi Jama Masjid and Places of Worship Act, 1991:** The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, is at the center of this dispute. The Act stipulates that the religious character of places of worship as they existed on 15th August 1947, must be preserved, and prohibits any changes to the religious identity of such places.
- **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991:** The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, aims to preserve the religious status of places of worship, preventing conversions between different religious denominations or within the same denomination. Some of the key provisions are:
 - *Section 3* - Prohibits the conversion of any place of worship, either in full or in part, from one religious denomination to another.
 - *Section 4(1)* - Mandates that the religious identity of a place of worship must remain unchanged from its status on 15th August 1947. Any attempt to alter the religious character is prohibited.
 - *Section 4(2)* - Terminates all ongoing legal proceedings concerning the conversion of a place of worship's religious character prior to 15th August 1947 and prevents the initiation of new cases challenging the religious status of such places.
 - *Section 5 (Exceptions)* - The specific dispute at Ayodhya (Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi), which was exempted from the Act.
 - *Section 6 (Penalties)* - The Act establishes strict penalties for violations, including imprisonment of up to three years and fines for attempting to change the religious character of a place of worship.

Supreme Court's Interpretation - In May 2022, the Supreme Court noted that inquiries can be allowed into the religious character of places of worship, if such inquiries don't lead to a change in the religious character.

- **Concerns of the act:** *Limits Judicial Review* - The Act has been challenged for limiting judicial review, potentially undermining the role of the judiciary in resolving disputes.

Legal Challenges - Multiple petitions have been filed against the Act, with petitioners arguing that it prevents Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs from reclaiming places of worship they believe were "invaded" or "encroached upon" by historical rulers.

Impact on Secularism - The Act was intended to protect India's secular nature by preserving religious harmony, but its critics believe that it may inadvertently allow for the suppression of

certain religious communities' claims to historical sites, thus undermining the secular fabric of the nation.

- **Way Forward:** *Need for Legal Clarity* - With varying interpretations of the Act's provisions, there is a pressing need for the Supreme Court to provide clear and definitive guidelines on the applicability of the Places of Worship Act.

Focusing on Unity - Both political parties and civil society must prioritize unity over division. It is essential to emphasize the shared cultural and historical heritage that binds India together, irrespective of religion.

Q. Assess the role of the judiciary in resolving disputes related to religious sites, particularly considering the recent challenges to the Places of Worship Act. (ধর্মীয় স্থান সম্পর্কীয় বিবাদ সমাধানত ন্যায়পালিকার ভূমিকার মূল্যায়ন কৰক, বিশেষকৈ উপাসনাস্থলী আইনৰ শেহতীয়া প্রত্যাহ্বানৰ প্রতি লক্ষ্য ৰাখি।)

GS 3: ECONOMY, ECOLOGY, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, DEFENCE, SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

3. Scientists in NZ gather to decode puzzle of rarest whale

Context: It is the world's rarest whale, with only seven of its kind ever spotted. Almost nothing is known about the enigmatic species. But on Monday a small group of scientists and cultural experts in New Zealand clustered around a near-perfectly preserved spade-toothed whale hoping to decode decades of mystery. The careful study of the creature, which washed up dead on a New Zealand beach in July, is the first ever to take place. The first spade-toothed whale bones were found in 1872 on New Zealand's Pitt Island. Another discovery was made at an offshore island in the 1950s, and the bones of a third were found on Chile's Robinson Crusoe Island in 1986.

Spade-toothed whale

- The spade-toothed whale (*Mesoplodon traversii*) is the rarest and least known species of whale.
- The species was first identified from a partial jaw found on Pitt Island, New Zealand, in 1872.
- In 2010, two specimens were found stranded on Opape Beach, New Zealand. Initially thought to be Gray's beaked whale, genetic analysis revealed them to be the first complete specimens of the spade-toothed whale.
- The only known complete specimens include a 5.3-meter adult female and her 3.5-meter male calf. The adult female was spindle-shaped with a dark grey or black dorsal side and a white ventral side, a light thoracic patch, and a dark eye patch, rostrum, and flippers.
- It is assumed that the remaining population of spade-toothed whales' lives solely in the South Pacific.
- The population status of the spade-toothed whale is entirely unknown.
- The spade-toothed whale is covered by the Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Cetaceans and Their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region (Pacific Cetaceans MOU). Its IUCN Red List conservation status is "Data Deficient (DD)" due to a lack of information and uncertain data.

QUICK FACTS: DEALS FOR 26 RAFALE-M JETS, 3 SCORPENE SUBMARINES TO BE SIGNED

India's second nuclear ballistic missile submarine, INS Arighaat, successfully fired a Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) a few days back. The first of the two nuclear attack submarines (SSN) to be indigenously designed and manufactured is expected to be ready by 2036-37. Two multi-billion dollar deals under negotiation with France to procure 26 Rafale-M fighter jets and three additional Scorpene-class conventional submarines are in advanced stages and could be signed next month.

4. Designed in India 5g chip facing fund crunch, low commercial uptake

Context: A first of its kind 'designed in India' 5G and 'Internet of Things' (IoT) chip, which has been allocated funding of close to Rs. 45 crores by the Indian government, is facing mass production issues owing to lack of funds, and an inability to draw commercial orders. The Narrow Band IoT (NB-IoT) chip, which has been designed by WiSig networks at IIT Hyderabad. WiSig networks has also been approved by the IT ministry under its Design Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme for the developed chip. This is the first time a 3GPP compliant modem system-on-chip (SoC) has been indigenously designed and made working.

5th generation technology

- **About:** 5G is the fifth generation of cellular mobile communications with revolutionary services, which succeeds the 4G, 3G, and 2G (GMS) systems. 5G technology is the next generation of mobile networking standards and promises to deliver an improved end-user experience by offering new applications and services through seamless coverage, a high data rate, low latency, significantly improved performance, and reliable communications.
- **Different Bands of 5G:** A band refers to a specific range of frequencies in the electromagnetic frequency spectrum assigned to certain applications. There are essentially three types of 5G bands supported in India.
 - Low band 5G transmits around the 600 to 700 MHz range, providing blanket coverage but offering slow speeds around 50 Mbps.
 - Mid-band 5G transmits around 1.7 GHz to 2.5 GHz, offering a solid balance between coverage and speed (100-900 Mbps).
 - High band 5G operates at 24 GHz or higher, providing the fastest speeds (1 Gbps speeds) over short distances.
- **Applications of 5G Technology:** 5G Technology will enable wireless service providers to develop innovative business models, benefiting various sectors like industrial, commercial, educational, healthcare, agriculture, etc.
 - Health Sector* - 5G technology can facilitate high-quality telemedicine services, allowing for remote consultations, real-time monitoring of patients, and tele-treatment where doctors can treat patients while maintaining social distancing norms like those required during COVID-19.
 - Agriculture* - Using data from sensors installed directly in fields, farmers can pinpoint which areas require water, have a disease, or require pest management.
- **Limitations of 5G Technology:** 5G technology has the potential to improve enterprise operations and the competitiveness of the digital economy. However, there are also some negative aspects to consider, including the following:
 - Security Risks* - 5G networks, like any new technology, may be vulnerable to security threats such as hacking and cyberattacks.
 - Privacy Concerns* - Concerns about personal privacy may arise because of the increased use of data and connected devices enabled by 5G technology.
- **India and 5G Technology:** 5G services were launched in India in October 2022. The 5G network has been rolled out in all 28 states and 8 UTs now. This is one of the fastest 5G rollouts in the world. As of October 2023, the number of 5G users now stands at over 100 million.
- **Initiatives for 5G in India:** *5G High-Level Forum* - It was set up in 2017 to articulate the vision for 5G in India and to recommend policy initiatives & action plans to realize this vision, etc.

5. Windfall gains tax on domestic crude production, export petrol, diesel, ATF

Context: Almost two and half years after it was introduced, the government has finally withdrawn windfall gains tax on domestic production of crude oil and export of diesel, petrol, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF). The finance ministry has notified for the removal of the windfall tax; special additional excise duty (SAED) on production of crude and export of ATF, and road and infrastructure cess (RIC) on export of petrol and diesel with immediate effect from Monday. As the price of crude oil produced in India is benchmarked to international prices, domestic oil prices also went through the roof. At the same time, margins on fuels were a lot more lucrative in other markets, incentivising refiners, particularly private sector players, to export fuels. This had resulted in fuel supply disruptions in some parts of the country.

Key points

- Overview: With the international crude oil and fuel market nowhere as volatile as it was in the initial months of the Ukraine war, and the domestic fuel supplies stable and robust, the windfall gains tax collection has seen a steady decline over the past two-and-a-half years. The windfall gains tax mop-up was around Rs 25,000 crore in 2022-23 (FY23), around Rs 13,000 crore in FY24, and around Rs 6,000 crore so far in FY25.
- India's Crude Oil Trade: India is the 3rd largest oil consumer globally, following the US and China. The country relies on imports for 85% of its oil needs, with dependence expected to increase due to declining domestic production. Russia has become India's top oil supplier, with imports surging to 1.53 million barrels per day (bpd) in January 2024.
- Reason of scrapping the tax: The move comes amid the significant decline in crude oil prices, which have fallen over 23% in the past one year. The global benchmark price of Brent crude has fallen below the \$75-per-barrel mark, a substantial decrease from its April peak of more than \$92 per barrel.
- India on crude oil: Crude oil is one of the eight core industries of India. Crude Oil production (weight: 8.98 percent of total eight core industries). Its cumulative index increased by 0.6 per cent during 2023-24 over the corresponding period of the previous year.
- Crude oil: It is a naturally occurring liquid petroleum product composed of hydrocarbon deposits and other organic materials formed from the remains of animals and plants that lived millions of years ago.

Q. The term 'West Texas Intermediate', sometimes found in news, refers to a grade of:

- (a) Crude oil
- (b) Bullion
- (c) Rare earth elements
- (d) Uranium

Q. Petroleum refineries are not necessarily located nearer to crude oil producing areas, particularly in many of the developing countries. Explain its implications. (পেট্র "লিয়াম শোধনাগাৰবোৰ খাৰুৱা তেল উৎপাদনকাৰী অঞ্চলৰ ওচৰত অৱস্থিত হোৱাটো প্ৰয়োজনীয় নহয়, বিশেষকৈ বহু উন্নয়নশীল দেশত। ইয়াৰ প্ৰভাৱসমূহ ব্যাখ্যা কৰক।)