

NEWS TODAY

RTI appeals pendency coming down every year: Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions (MoPPG&P)

About RTI Act 2005

- ⊕ It provides citizens **right to secure access to information** under control of **Public Authorities (PAs)**.
- ⊕ It **promotes transparency and accountability** in Government working, **contains corruption**, and enhances people's participation in democratic process.
- ⊕ **Nodal agency: Department of Personnel and Training** under MoPPG&P.
- ⊕ It replaced Freedom of Information Act, 2002.

Key Features

- ⊕ Deals with constitution, composition, and functions of **Central and State Information Commissions**.
- ⊕ Puts obligations on PAs for designation of **Central/State Public Information Officers (CPIO/SPIOs)** to provide requested information to citizen.
- ⊕ Provides for a **system of appeals** to aggrieved person:
 - ◆ Appeal can be made to 1st appellate authority (an officer **senior in rank to CPIO/SPIOs**) **within 30 days** of filing RTI application.
 - ◆ Provision for **second appeal** to Central/State Information Commissioner (CIC/SIC) **within 90 days** of order by 1st appellate authority.
 - ◆ The **onus to prove** that denial of request was justified lies on CPIO/SPIOs.
 - ◆ Disposal of appeals **within 30 days (extended to 45 days)** from date of filing.
 - ◆ **Decision of CIC/SIC is binding.**

Achievements

- ⊕ **Increased coverage** (including offices CJI, CAG etc.).
- ⊕ **Online portal** for easy filing of RTI (RTI Online).
- ⊕ **Reduced Pendency** of appeals (from approximately 35,000 (2019-20) to 23,000 (2023-24)).

IAMA demands further consultation on Karnataka's proposed law for gig workers

As per Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMA), provisions like **mandatory registration, updation of database, monetary contribution by firms** would likely impact the Ease of doing business.

- ⊕ These are required under **Draft Karnataka Gig Workers (Conditions of Service and Welfare) Bill, 2024**
- ⊕ Currently, **Rajasthan** is the only state to have legislation for welfare of gig workers.

Gig workers: Means a person who performs work or participates in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of traditional employer-employee relationship. (Code on Social Security, 2020)

- ⊕ **Broadly classified into two categories:**
 - ◆ **Platform based:** Whose work is based on online software apps or digital platforms.
 - ◆ **Non-platform based:** Casual wage workers in conventional sectors, working part-time or full-time.

Concerns associated with Gig workers: Absence of safeguards like minimum wage, poor upward mobility within organization, Absence of traditional employment perks like medical insurance, pension plans, etc.

Balancing gig workers social security and business

- ⊕ **Specialized savings and insurance products** for gig workers.
- ⊕ Collaboration between policymakers, corporations, and workers for an **equitable gig economy**.
- ⊕ Efforts should be made to create a more **stable income environment** for gig workers by discouraging the **race-to-the-bottom mentality**.

Initiatives for Gig Workers

- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** Provides for extension of social security benefits to gig workers as well.
 - ⊕ Provides for setting up a **Social Security Fund with contributions between 1-2% (subject to a limit of 5%)** of annual turnover from aggregators.
- **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020:** To promote safe and healthy work environment and it also regulates contract labour.

UN General Assembly adopted resolution on Nuclear facilities of Ukraine

The resolution is entitled “**Safety and Security of Nuclear Facilities of Ukraine, including the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant**”.

Major Points of Resolution

- ⊕ It condemns the attacks by the Russian Federation against **critical energy infrastructure of Ukraine, which increases the risk of a nuclear accident.**
- ⊕ Calls upon all parties to the armed conflict to respect **international humanitarian law in all circumstances.**

Measures to Safeguard Civilian Nuclear Sites in War

- ⊕ **Seven pillars for nuclear safety and security** during conflict, as defined by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
 - ◆ It includes **safety and security systems and equipment, Radiation monitoring and emergency preparedness and response, Logistical supply chain, etc.**
- ⊕ **2009 IAEA General Conference Decision:** Prohibition of armed attack or threat of attack against nuclear installations, during operation or under construction.
- ⊕ **Additional Protocol I of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions:** Prohibits attacks on works or installations containing dangerous forces (dams, dykes, nuclear power plants), even if they are of military objectives.



NITI Aayog released 4th edition of SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) India Index 2023-24

It measures and tracks **national progress of all States and Union Territories (UTs) on 113 indicators** aligned to Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's National Indicator Framework.

- ⊕ **Composite score** for each State/UT was **computed by aggregating their performance** across 16 SDGs.
- ⊕ **Scores range between 0–100.** Score of 100 means State/UT **achieved targets set for 2030.**
 - ◆ States are divided into four categories: **Achiever (100), Front runners (65-99), Performers (50-64), and Aspirants (0-49).**

Key findings

- ⊕ **National Level**
 - ◆ Composite score for India improved 66 in 2020-21 to **71 in 2023-24.**
 - ◆ Between 2020-21 and 2023-24, **significant progress observed in Goals 1** (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and **13** (Climate Action) and these **goals are now in front runner category.**
 - » **Goal 13 records highest increase in score followed by Goal 1.**
 - ◆ Targeted interventions by Government like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Goal 11), Swachh Bharat Mission (Goal 6), Ayushman Bharat (Goal 3), etc. had led to rapid improvement.
- ⊕ **State/UT level**
 - ◆ **All States** have shown an **improvement in overall score.**
 - ◆ **Front-runner category:** 32 States and UTs.
 - ◆ **4 states in Performer category:** Meghalaya, Nagaland, Jharkhand, Bihar.
 - ◆ **Top States:** Uttarakhand and Kerala with scores of 79 each.
 - ◆ **Top UT:** Chandigarh.

The Supreme Court observation about arresting power under Section 19 of the PMLA

The observations were made while hearing the **Arvind Kejriwal vs. Directorate of Enforcement (ED)** case.

Section 19 of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)

- ⊕ **Authority:** Director, Deputy Director, Assistant Director or any other officer authorised in this behalf by the Central Government by general or special order.
- ⊕ **Basis for arrest: Material in possession or a reason to believe** (the reason for such belief to be **recorded in writing**) that any person has been **guilty** of an **offence** punishable under the Act.

Key takeaways from the judgment

- ⊕ Powers under section 19 of PMLA should be **exercised judiciously and in line with constitutional safeguards.**
- ⊕ The conditions imposed by the legislature under PMLA must be subjected to **judicial scrutiny if the arrestee challenges their arrest.**
- ⊕ **Reasons to believe** should be furnished to the arrestee.

Other judgments related to arresting power under PMLA

- ⊕ **Pankaj Bansal Vs Union of India and others (2023):** importance of **communication of the grounds of arrest**, as mandated by **Article 22(1)** of the Constitution.
- ⊕ **V Senthil Balaji Vs State and others (2023):** **mandatory to record 'reasons to believe' in writing** to ensure fairness and accountability.



About Prevention of Money Laundering Act (2002)

- It was enacted to fight against the **criminal offence of legalizing the income/profits from an illegal source.**
- It enables the Government or the public authority to **confiscate the property earned from the illegally gained proceeds.**

2nd BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Retreat held in New Delhi

First edition of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Foreign Ministers' Retreat was held in **Thailand** in 2023.

About BIMSTEC

- ⊕ It is a **regional organization** established in **1997** by signing **Bangkok Declaration**.
- ⊕ **7 member states**: Bangladesh, **India**, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan.
- ⊕ **Permanent Secretariat**: Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- ⊕ **BIMSTEC's Principle**: Sovereign equality, Territorial integrity, Political independence, Non-interference in internal affairs, Peaceful co-existence, etc.
- ⊕ **7 Focus areas**: Trade; Environment and Climate Change; Security; Agriculture and Food Security; People-to-People Contact; Science, Technology, and Innovation; Connectivity.
- ⊕ **Combined GDP** of BIMSTEC member States amounts to **USD 4.5 trillion in 2022** (approx. 4.5% of global GDP).



Significance of BIMSTEC for India

- ⊕ **Regional cooperation**: It is a critical **intersection of Neighbourhood First Policy and Act East Policy** of India.
- ⊕ **Geostrategic importance**: Sectoral cooperation in **Bay of Bengal** region helps to secure **critical lines of communication** in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and boost trade.
- ⊕ **Security**: In line with **India's Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)** vision and strengthen maritime cooperation in IOR.
- ⊕ Potential to **overcome the deficiencies of SAARC** to evolve as a meaningful platform for regional cooperation in **South Asia**.

Associated Challenges

- **Slow pace of developments** and **inertia** in implementation of initiatives. E.g. lack of progress on adoption of **BIMSTEC FTA**.
- **Irregular meeting**: BIMSTEC planned to hold summit meetings every 2 years but only **5 meetings** have been held till 2024.
- **Stalling of projects** like **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement** undermines goals of connectivity and economic cooperation.

Also in News



Molecular Chaperones

Researchers at **S.N. Bose National Centre for Basic Sciences** have found a **new method of a single molecule technique** to study **protein folding & associated chaperones**.

- ⊕ This could help track progression of diseases like cancer, Parkinsons and Alzheimer's.

Protein Folding and Molecular Chaperones

- ⊕ Most proteins fold into defined **3-D structures** to gain functional activity.
- ⊕ In the cellular environment, **newly synthesized proteins are at risk of aberrant folding** potentially forming toxic species.
- ⊕ To avoid this, cells invest in a complex network of **molecular chaperones**.
- ⊕ **Endogenous proteins** that serve as an essential control mechanism to **prevent aggregation promoting efficient folding of proteins**.



Margin Trading Facility (MTF)

Margin Trading Facility (MTF) demand is increasing **to invest in the stock market**.

- ⊕ The buyer pays only a part of the total value while the broker pays the remaining amount, charging an interest on this loan.

Advantages:

- ⊕ **Increased profit potential** due to access to more **capital**.
- ⊕ Includes a broader range of stocks.

Challenges: higher losses risk, interest cost, etc.



Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserves (STR)

Study highlights lack of awareness on vulture conservation across species' key habitats in STR.

About STR

- ⊕ **Declared as tiger reserve in 2013**.
- ⊕ **Located in Erode district, Tamil Nadu**. It is contiguous with Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (TN); Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve and Bandipur Tiger reserves (Karnataka).
- ⊕ **Links Eastern and Western Ghats**.
- ⊕ **Notable Fauna**: Elephant, Tiger, Panther, Sloth bear, Gaur, Black Buck, Spotted deer, Nilgiri langur, etc.
- ⊕ **Forest types**: Tropical dry thorn, tropical dry mixed deciduous; Tropical semi evergreen; Sub tropical hill forest.
- ⊕ **Concerns**: Smuggling of Sandalwood; Poaching etc.



International Renewable Energy Certificates (I-REC)

I-REC represents **transferable** proof that one **MWh of electricity** was produced from **renewable** energy sources and added to an electrical grid.

- ⊕ I-REC enables **MNCs** to meet their renewable energy **consumption quotas** across nations with **reduced barriers**.
- ⊕ I-REC is an **everlasting certificate** until redeemed by an end consumer or withdrawn.
- ⊕ **India** has emerged as one of a **leading seller** of I-RECs.
- ⊕ **The International Tracking Standard Foundation** is the founder of I-REC.



Reserve Bank of India- Integrated Ombudsman Scheme (RBI-IOS), 2021

Madras HC upheld Constitutional validity of RBI-IOS 2021, prohibiting complainants from engaging advocates to represent their cases in proceedings before ombudsman.

- ⊕ Lawyers only have **statutory right and not a fundamental right to appear before judicial** and quasi- judicial meetings.

About RBI-IOS, 2021

- ⊕ **Launched in 2021 by integrating three previous ombudsman schemes of RBI** i.e. Banking ombudsman schemes (2006), Ombudsman schemes for NBFC (2018), and Ombudsman schemes for Digital Transactions (2019).
- ⊕ Also includes **additional Regulated Entities like banks** (all commercial banks), NBFCs registered with RBI, Credit Information Companies etc.
- ⊕ Provides for **cost-free redress of customer complaints** involving deficiency in services rendered by entities regulated by RBI.



U.S.-South Korea sign joint nuclear deterrence guidelines

Nuclear deterrence guidelines will deter and respond to North Korea aggression.

- ⊕ The US and South Korea created a **joint Nuclear Consultative Group in 2023**.

About the Guidelines:

- ⊕ The agreement calls for **integrating U.S. nuclear assets and South Korean conventional weapons** to better respond to North Korean nuclear threats.
 - ◆ **North Korea's developing nuclear arsenal is a major security threat to South Korea**, which has no nuclear weapons and largely relies on the U.S.
- ⊕ Commit to conduct **joint military exercises** to help implement the deterrence guidelines.



Squalus hima

Scientists from **Zoological Survey of India** discovered a new species of '**Squalus hima**' from Sakthikulangara fishing harbor in Kerala along Arabian Sea.

About Squalus hima

- ⊕ Squalus is a **genus of dogfish sharks** in family Squalidae.
 - ◆ Unlike most sharks, **dogfish are venomous**.
- ⊕ Commonly known as **spurdogs**, and are **characterized by smooth dorsal fin spines**.
- ⊕ They have **angular short snout**, a small mouth almost as wide as snout, first dorsal fin origin behind pectoral fins, and body **without any spots**.
- ⊕ They are **exploited for their liver oil** which is in **high demand for pharmaceutical industries** particularly for making high end cosmetic products and anti-cancerous products.



Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

IPBES won Blue Planet Prize for 2024.

- ⊕ **Awarded annually** by Japan based Asahi Glass Foundation to **individuals and organizations** to recognize achievements in scientific research and its application, providing solutions to global environmental problems.
- ⊕ Prize includes an **award of US\$500,000**.

About IPBES

- ⊕ Established in Panama City in 2012, it is an independent intergovernmental body to **strengthen science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services**.
- ⊕ It is **not a UN body**. However, United Nations Environment Programme provides secretariat services to IPBES.
- ⊕ **Secretariat:** Bonn, Germany
- ⊕ Currently, it has **more than 145 member States (including India)**. All States Members of UN are eligible for IPBES membership.



Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA)

Mutual Recognition Agreement between India and Taiwan for **Organic Products** has been implemented.

- ⊕ It will ease the export of organic products by avoiding dual certifications; thus, reducing compliance cost.
- ⊕ It will **enhance trade opportunities** in the organic sector such as export of major Indian organic products **such as Rice, Processed Food, Green/Black and Herbal Tea, Medicinal plant products etc to Taiwan**.
- ⊕ **Implementing agency:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India and Agriculture and Food Agency, Ministry of Agriculture (AFA), Taiwan.



Exercise in news

Indian Air Force Contingent reached Australia to participate in **Exercise Pitch Black**.

Exercise Pitch Black

- ⊕ **Held every two years**, it is a **multinational exercise**.
- ⊕ Focuses on **large force employment missions** involving large numbers of international aircraft.

Exercise Sagar Kavach - 01/24

- ⊕ It is a coastal security exercise **held along Andhra Pradesh coast**.
- ⊕ It is aimed to **validate the effectiveness of coastal security mechanisms** in dealing with asymmetric threats from the sea.
- ⊕ Assets of Indian Navy, Coast Guard, Marine Police, fisheries, customs and other security agencies were engaged in it.



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