Despite Pressures, The Indian Rupee's Remarkable Resilience

❖ Context

- The Indian rupee has **depreciated by around 7% against the U.S. dollar**, since the start of the year, in response to **various domestic and global factors**.

❖ Reasons for Rupee Depreciation?

- A widening current account deficit, persistent risk-off sentiment as a result of geopolitical tensions, 'a strengthening dollar index, and continuous sell-off by foreign portfolio investors have all put pressure on the rupee'.
- With inflation rising unabated, the US Fed is widely expected to **continue raising interest rates.**
- The rate hiking cycle by the US Federal Reserve **has precipitated the dollar's appreciation** which has led the **dollar index to strengthen by over 11% in 2022 so far, taking it to a 20-year high.**
- As a result of **higher risk-free returns being available in the U.S.,** there have been **persistent outflows of foreign portfolio capital** since October 2021, which, on a cumulative basis, stands at $30 billion this year.
- This has **intensified the downward pressure on the rupee**.
- The **safe-haven demand for the dolla**r amid geopolitical risks **has bolstered the dollar index**.

❖ RBI Intervention

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has stepped in to arrest a large depreciation** in the currency, with interventions in the **spot and forward foreign exchange markets**.
- Consequently, **India's foreign exchange reserves** have moderated by **almost $55 billion** from a **high of $635 billion seen this year**.
- **Elevated global crude oil prices** have **impinged on India's oil import bill,** in turn widening the **trade deficit**, thus **increasing the demand for U.S. dollars**, and **affecting forex reserves further.**

❖ Effects of a Weak Rupee

- Among the benefits is the premise that the rupee's **weakening should aid exporters in becoming more competitive.**
- However, the concomitant depreciation of currencies of some of **India's competitors** such as South Korea, Malaysia, and Bangladesh against the dollar, along with a **high import intensity** of some of its **key export segments** (petroleum, gems and jewellery, and electronics), is likely to have blunted the ameliorative impact on India's exports.
- On the flip side, a weaker rupee is **driving up prices of key import commodities such as coal, oil, edible oil, and gold, thus impacting the imported component of inflation**.
- The **unhedged component of corporate debt** denominated in **dollars** is also **likely to bear the brunt of a weaker rupee.**
- A continuously sliding exchange rate **discourages foreign investors** from making fresh investments, which **keep losing value in dollar terms**.

❖ What Measures have Contributed to Arresting the Rupee's Slide?

- **Intervening in the forex market**
- **Liberalize foreign inflows into the country and make them more attractive.**
- **promoting trade settlements** between India and other countries in rupee terms,
- Offering **higher interest rates** on **fresh Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) and Non-Resident External deposits,**
- **Widening the investible universe of government and corporate debt,**
- A **relaxation of the interest rate and amount ceiling for External Commercial Borrowing loans**

❖ What other Measures Should be Considered?

- **The Government** could **encourage some of the large market cap companies** (private and public sectors) to be **included in the major global indices such as MSCI and FTSE.**
  - This will help increase the weight of Indian equities in these indices, compensating for foreign portfolio outflows to some extent as investors are unlikely to be underweight on India.
- **The Government** could also **expedite India's entry into bond indices** such as J.P. Morgan's Emerging-Market Bond Index and Barclays Global Bond Index.
  - This will not only lead to forex inflows but also have a benign impact on interest rates.

Blue Flag Standards for Beaches

❖ Context

- Under the **Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project**, the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC) has piloted Beach Environment & Aesthetic Management Service (BEAMS) Programme.

❖ Key Highlights

- Studies indicated that the plastic litter from tourism varies from40% to 96%.

- As per the studies conducted by MoEF&CC and MoES, most of the harbors and beaches have high beach litter.
- Under this programme, various activities related to pollution abatement, beach awareness, aesthetics, safety, surveillances services and environment education, etc., have been done at identified beaches aimed to achieve international standards for Blue Flag Beach Certification.
- Beaches that have been conferred with internationally recognized Blue Flag Certification are :

i. Shivrajpur, Devbhumi Dwarka District, Gujarat.
ii. Ghoghla (Diu) Dadara Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu.
iii. Padubidri, Udupi District, Karnataka.
iv. Kasarkod, Karwar District, Karnataka.
v. Kappad, Kozhikode District, Kerala.
vi. Kovalam, Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu.
vii. Eden, Puducherry District, Puducherry.
viii. Rushikonda, Vishakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh
ix. Golden, Puri District, Odisha.
x. Radhanagar (Havelock), Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

No Proposal to Increase SC, HC Judges' Retirement Age

❖ Context

➢ Union Minister for Law and Justice told the Parliament that there is no proposal to increase the retirement age of Supreme Court and High Court judges.

❖ Key Highlights

- The Constitution (114th Amendment) Bill was introduced in 2010 to increase the retirement age of high court judges to 65. However, it was not taken up for consideration in Parliament and lapsed with the dissolution of the 15 Lok Sabha.
- According to Article 124(2) of the Constitution, the age of retirement for Supreme Court judges is 65.
- As per Article 217(1) of the Constitution, High Court judges retire at 62.
- Initially, the retirement age of High Court judges was 60, which was later in 1963 increased to 62 through the 114th constitutional amendment.

❖ Why the Idea is Mooted?

- The idea of increasing the age of retirement for judges has been mooted for decades as a solution for dealing with the mounting pendency of cases and judicial vacancies.
- It has also been discussed in the context of ensuring serving judges do not look for post-retirement jobs from the executive.

- Article 124(7) of the Constitution bars judges of the Supreme Court from practicing before any forum, while for High Court judges, an amendment was brought in 1956 to allow practice before the Supreme Court and High Courts other than the one they served in.

❖ Recommendations

- In 1974, the 58th report of the Law Commission recommended bringing parity between the age of retirement of judges of the High Court and Supreme Court.
- In 2002, Justice Venkatachaliah Report – the report of the National Commission to review the working of the Constitution – also recommended that the age of retirement should be increased for judges of High Courts and Supreme Court to 65 and 68, respectively.
- In 2021, the Supreme Court refused to entertain a PIL seeking uniform retirement age for judges of High Courts and the top court.

Low-Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD) Technology

❖ Context

➢ **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** through its autonomous Institute **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)** has developed Low-Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD) technology for **conversion of seawater to potable water** which has been successfully demonstrated in Lakshadweep islands.

❖ What is Low-Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD)?

- Low-Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD) is one process that uses the availability of a **temperature gradient** between **two water bodies** or flows to **evaporate the warmer water at low pressure** and **condense the resultant vapor with the colder water to obtain fresh water.**
- The system uses vacuum pumps to create a **low-pressure, low-temperature environment** in which water evaporates even at a temperature gradient of 8 °C (14 °F) between two volumes of water.
- Cooling water is supplied from deep sea depths of as much as 600 meters (2,000 ft).
- This cold water is pumped through coils to condense the evaporated water vapor. The resulting condensate is purified water**.**

❖ Advantage

- The LTTD technology does not require any chemical pre- and post-treatment of seawater and thus the pollution problems are minimal and suitable for island territories.
- Since no effluent treatment is required, it gives less operational maintenance problems compared to other desalination processes.

News in Between the Lines

Kali Bein River

❖ **Context**

- Punjab chief minister was admitted to Delhi's Apollo hospital, 2 days after he **drank water from Kali Bein, a holy rivulet in Sultanpur Lodhi.**

❖ **What is the Kali Bein?**

- The rivulet which stretches across **165 kilometers** runs through **four districts in Punjab** & meets the confluence of the **rivers Beas & Sutlej at Kapurthala**.
- There are around **80 villages and six towns** along its banks and wastewater from here flows into the rivulet.
- **Kali Bein means black stream** and it got its name because of the **black minerals** in its water. **Bein is the Punjab word for a stream**, which is derived from the **Sanskrit word veni.**

❖ **Why is the Rivulet Considered Holy?**

- The Kali Bein is of **great significance to the Sikh religion** and history, because the **first Guru, Nanak Dev, is said to have gotten enlightenment here.** When Guru Nanak Dev was staying at Sultanpur Lodhi with his **sister Bebe Nanki**, he would bathe in the Kali Bein.
- He is said to have disappeared into the waters one day, before emerging on the third day. The 1st thing he recited was **the "Mool Mantra" of the Sikh religion.**

Career Counselling by NCS

❖ **Context**

- The Ministry is implementing the **National Career Service Project** (NCSP) to provide a variety of career related services in the country like job matching, career counselling, etc.

❖ **Key Highlights**

- There is a network of career counsellors on the National Career Service (NCS) Portal for providing the quality counselling services to the job seekers/candidates registered on the portal.
- Further, career counselling and vocational guidance is also provided through Model Career Centres that have been established in various District Employment Exchanges and institutions under the **NCS Project.**
- Till 30th June 2022, 1,57,989 counselling sessions have been booked/provided through NCS to help the jobseekers in making appropriate job choices

Weapon of Mass Destruction Amendment Bill 2022

❖ **Context**

- Recently Rajya Sabha took up discussion on the Weapon of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Amendment Bill 2022.

❖ **Key Highlights**

- The Bill seeks to amend the Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Act, 2005.
- The 2005 Act prohibits unlawful activities such as manufacturing, transport, or transfer related to weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.
- The Bill bars persons from **financing any prohibited** activity related to weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.
- Passing of this Bill will strengthen the security of the country.
- **Weapon of Mass Destruction:** Weapons of mass destruction are biological, chemical, or nuclear weapon that can kill and bring significant harm to numerous individuals or cause great damage to artificial structures.

Henley Passport Index

❖ **Context**

- Henley Passport Index 2022 was recently published by immigration consultancy **Henley & Partners.**

❖ **Key Findings**

- **India has been ranked at 87th position**, among 199 world's most powerful passports in 2022.

- Among the 199 countries, **Japan was ranked first.** It is followed by Singapore and South Korea.
- China is placed 69th with access to 80 countries.
- Pakistan has the 4th worst passport in the world after Afghanistan, Iraq & Syria.

❖ What Does the Index Indicate?

- The index defines the **strength of diplomatic relations** of any one country with others; essentially, the more **one country has 'ease of access' to others, the higher its ranking.**

Raja Serfoji and Sivaji

❖ Context

➢ An exquisite mid-19 century painting of **Maharaja Serfoji II of Thanjavur and his son Sivaji II**, stolen from Saraswathi Mahal and found its way to a museum in the US in 2006, has been traced by the idol wing police, Director-General of Police.

❖ Key Highlights

- Serfoji was the last of the Bhonsle Rajas of Thanjavur. He died in 1832. His only son Shivaji ruled until 1855.
- Thanjavur became a casualty of **Lord Dalhousie's infamous 'Doctrine of Lapse'**, and it got absorbed into British Ruled Indian provinces.
- The painting, which has Raja Serfoji and his youthful son, according to some historians, was **probably painted between 1822 and 1827** and kept in the Saraswathi mahal. In 1918, the Saraswathi Mahal Library was opened to the public.
- The investigation revealed that in 1786, when Raja Tulaja of Thanjavur died, his adopted son Serfoji was young, and his other son, whom he had begotten through his concubine, Amar Singh, was appointed the Raja. However, by about **1798, the British decided to make Serfoji the king**. Serfoji soon learned several languages, & he enlarged the **Saraswati Mahal Library at Thanjavur**, which even today boasts of over 40,000 rare manuscripts & paintings.

Crimes Against SCs, STs

STATUS REPORT: CASES, PROBE

	Cases registered	Charge-sheeted	Pending probe
SCs			
2018	42,793	34,838	16,323
2019	45,961	34,754	17,903
2020	50,291	39,138	19,825
STs			
2018	6,528	5,619	2,603
2019	7,570	5,918	2,920
2020	8,272	6,484	3,351

*Investigation pending at end of given year
Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, LS reply

TOP 2 IN CASES REGISTERED

Crime against SC

Year	UP	Bihar
2018	11,924	7,061
2019	11,829	6,544
2020	12,714	7,368

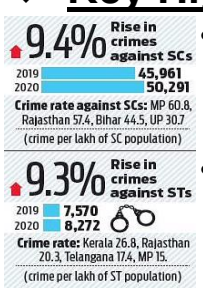
Crime against ST

Year	MP	Rajasthan
2018	1,868	1,095
2019	1,845	1,797
2020	2,401	1,878

❖ Context

➢ Cases of crime against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have **risen progressively in the years between 2018 and 2020,** according to figures tabled by the Ministry of Home Affairs in Lok Sabha.

❖ Key Highlights



- Cases registered for crime against SCs rose from **42,793 in 2018 to over 50,000 in 2020,** and of crime against STs from 6,528 to 8,272 in the same period.
- The figures also detailed how many cases had resulted in charge sheets being filed, and how many were pending investigation at the end of each of these years

Ayush Mark Certification Scheme

❖ Context

➢ Ayush Mark Certification Scheme is operated by Quality Council of India (QCI) since 2009.

❖ Salient Features of the Scheme

- It is a voluntary certification scheme for ASU&H products having two levels: **Ayush Standard Mark and Ayush Premium Mark.**
- The **Ayush Standard Mark** is based on Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) for Ayurvedic, Siddha and Unani medicines (ScheduleT) as per Drugs and Cosmetic Rules, 1945.
- **AYUSH Premium Mark** is based on WHO's GMP guidelines covering herbal medicines. For any manufacturer to qualify for AYUSH Mark Certification, compliance to the domestic regulations is a pre-requisite.
- The products are certified post regulatory approval given by State Licensing Authority of the state government concerned.

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