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Current affairs summary for prelims

17 September, 2022

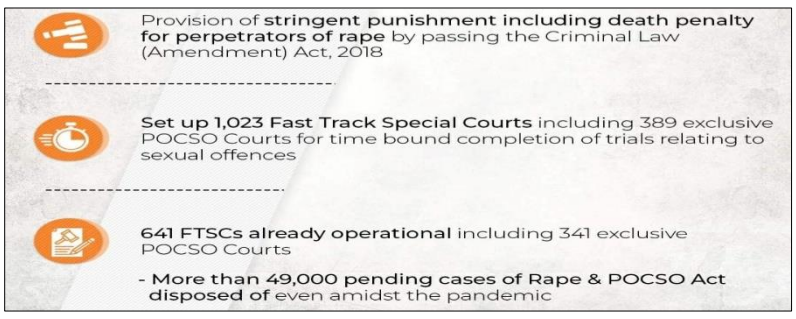
Fast Track Special Courts & Fast Track Courts

❖ Context

- The **Union Minister for Law and Justice** has written to **Chief Justices of all High Courts** seeking their personal intervention in setting up fast-track courts to hear cases of heinous crimes against women, children, and senior citizens on “priority basis”.

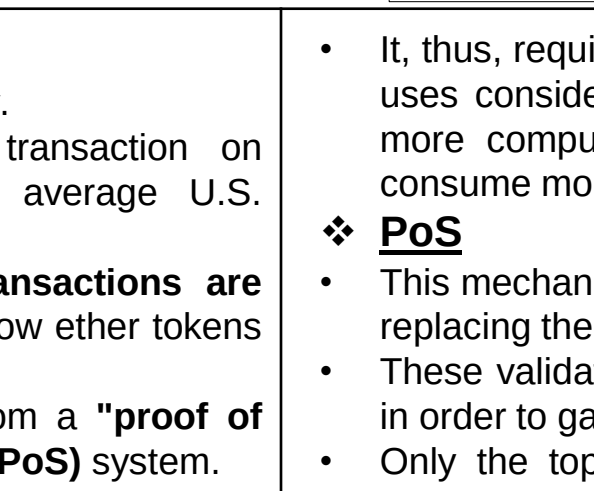
❖ About Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)

- To bring more stringent provisions and expeditious trial, the Central Government enacted **"The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018"** and made provision of stringent punishment including death penalty for perpetrators of rape.
- This led to the establishment of the FTSCs.
- As of July 31 2022, **only 731 were operational.** Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal and A&N Island are yet to join this scheme.
- The **Central Share is funded from Nirbhaya Fund.**



❖ About FTCs

- FTCs were created during the **11th Finance Commission** for disposal of long pending cases.
- The **14th Finance Commission** had recommended the setting up of **1,800 FTCs** during **2015-2020**.

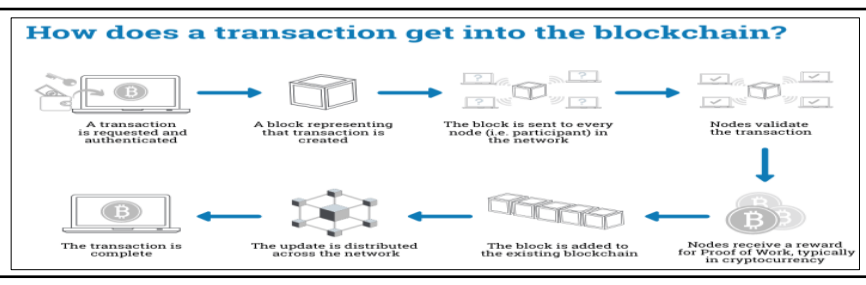


- Only **896** were functional as of July 31, 2022 and more than **13.18 lakh cases were pending in these courts.**
- The 14th Finance Commission had recommended that the **number of FTCs to be established should be 10 % of the sanctioned strength of judicial officers of the state.**
- Setting up of FTCs and allocation of funds lies within the **domain of state governments** which set up such courts as per their need and resources, **in consultation with respective high courts**.
- It is established for cases of heinous crimes; civil cases involving senior citizens, women, children, disabled & litigants affected with HIV-AIDS & other terminal ailments & civil disputes involving land acquisition & property/rent disputes pending for more than five years.

Merge

❖ Context

- The **Ethereum blockchain** has undergone a **major software upgrade**, known as **Merge,** drastically reducing its energy usage.



❖ Key Highlights

- The new system will use **99.95% less energy**.
- Before the software upgrade, a single transaction on Ethereum used as much power as an average U.S. household uses in a week.
- The Merge is an upgrade to the **way transactions are validated** on the Ethereum blockchain and how ether tokens are created.
- With the upgrade, Ethereum has moved from a **"proof of work" system (PoW) to a "proof of stake" (PoS)** system.
- Both are **consensus mechanisms** through which transactions on blockchains are validated.

❖ PoW

- PoW requires the people who own the computers in the network to solve a **complex mathematical problem** to be able to add a block to the chain.
- **Solving the problem is known as mining**, and ‘miners’ are usually rewarded for their work in cryptocurrency. But, mining isn’t easy.
- The mathematical problem can only be solved by trial & error and the odds of solving the problem are about 1 in 5.9 trillion.
- It, thus, requires substantial computing power which uses considerable amounts of energy. As a result more computers attack a transaction and hence consume more energy.

❖ PoS

- This mechanism removes miners from the equation, replacing them with entities called ‘**validators’**.
- These validators **put up a stake (at least 32 ETH)** in order to gain the right to validate transactions.
- Only the top stakeholders are rewarded for their work.
- Their stakes are held in a central wallet, and they are penalised for mistakes or frauds.
- Ethereum is not the only network to use the PoS concept. However, it was the 1st to introduce **smart contract technology** which allowed developers to build decentralised applications, **Dapps.**

❖ Next upgrades

- After the Ethereum merge, there will be many more upgrades to the network: **the surge, the verge, the purge, and a splurge**.

KRITAGYA

❖ Context

- **Indian Council of Agricultural Research** with its National Agricultural Higher Education Project and Crop Science Division is organizing Hackathon 3.0 ‘’KRITAGYA” on promoting ‘speed breeding for crop improvement’.

❖ Key Highlights

- The definition of KRITAGYA is: **KRI** for Krishi meaning Agriculture, **TA** for **Taknik** meaning Technology and **GYA** for Gyan meaning Knowledge.
- In this competition, students, faculty and innovators/entrepreneurs from any university/technical institute across the country can apply and participate in the program as a group.

❖ Significance

- This program will provide an opportunity to students/faculties/entrepreneurs/innovators and others to showcase innovative approaches and technology solutions to promote innovation for crop improvement.
- Such initiatives will give impetus to the desired rapid results in the crop sector with the ability to learn, innovation and solutions, employability and entrepreneurship. It will also encourage greater adoption of technology enabled solutions in the country.

Eastern Economic Forum (EEF)

❖ Context

- Russia hosted the seventh Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) Vladivostok recently.
- The four-day forum is a platform for entrepreneurs to expand their businesses into Russia’s Far East (RFE).

❖ About Eastern Economic Forum

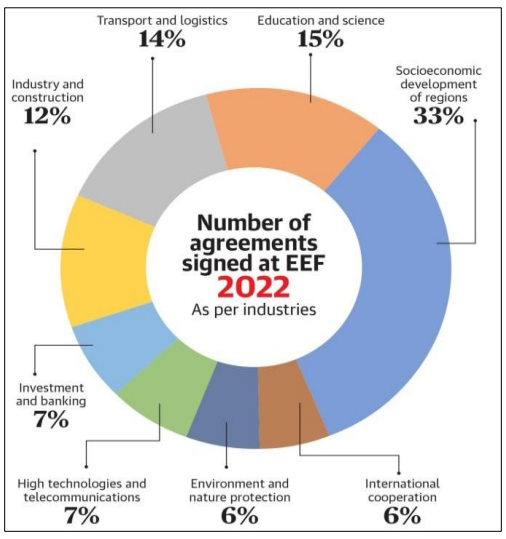
- The EEF was established in 2015 to encourage foreign investments in the RFE.
- The EEF displays the economic potential, suitable business conditions and investment opportunities in the region.
- As of 2022, almost 2,729 investment projects are being planned in the region.

- The agreements focus on infrastructure, transportation projects, mineral excavations, construction, industry and agriculture.
- **China i**s the biggest investor in the region as it sees potential in promoting the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and the Polar Sea Route in the RFE.
- China’s investments in the region account for **90%** of the total investments.
- **The primary objective** of the EEF is to increase the Foreign Direct Investments in the RFE.
- The region encompasses **one-third** of Russia’s territory and is rich with natural resources such as fish, oil, natural gas, wood, diamonds and other minerals.
- The RFE is geographically placed at a strategic location; acting as a gateway into Asia.

❖ India’s Stand

- During the forum, Prime Minister expressed the country’s readiness in expanding trade, connectivity and investments in Russia.
- India is keen to deepen its cooperation in energy, pharmaceuticals, maritime connectivity, healthcare, tourism, the diamond industry and the Arctic.
- In 2019, India also offered a $1 billion line of credit to develop infrastructure in the region.

❖ The EEF and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)

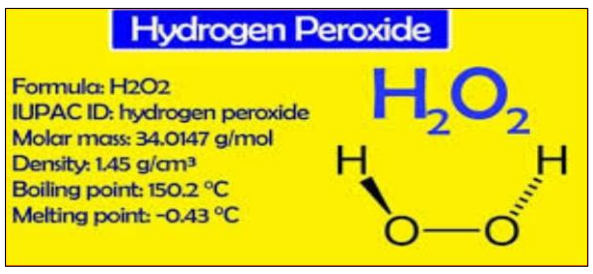


- The U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and the EEF are incomparable based on its geographic coverage and the partnership with the host-countries.
- India has vested interests in both the forums and has worked towards balancing its involvement.

Hydrogen Peroxide

❖ Context

- The fire brigade of **Pune Metropolitan Region Development Authority (PMRDA)** recently responded to a hydrogen peroxide leak from a truck which was carrying containers of the chemical from Pune to Tamil Nadu.



❖ About Hydrogen Peroxide (H_2O_2):

- **It is** a colourless liquid usually produced as aqueous solutions of various strengths, used principally for :
  - bleaching cotton and other textiles and wood pulp,
  - in the manufacture of other chemicals,
  - as a rocket propellant, and
  - for cosmetic and medicinal purposes.

- Although Hydrogen peroxide is non-toxic, it has its hazards if there is exposure in concentrated form i.e Solutions containing more than about **8% hydrogen peroxide** are corrosive to the skin.

Public Safety Act

❖ Context

- Recently seven clerics, including two prominent religious scholars were arrested under this act in the Kashmir valley.

❖ About PSA

- The **Public Safety Act (PSA), 1978,** of Jammu & Kashmir is an administrative detention law that allows detention of any individual for up to two years without a trial or charge.
- The Public Safety Act allows for the arrest and detention of people without a warrant, specific charges, and often for an unspecified period of time.
- A detention order under the PSA is issued either by the **Divisional Commissioner or District Magistrate.**
- The detention of a person below the age of **18 was strictly** prohibited under this Act.

- The **Advisory Board** is a non-judicial body established under Section 14 of the PSA to review detention orders and determine whether there is sufficient cause for detention.

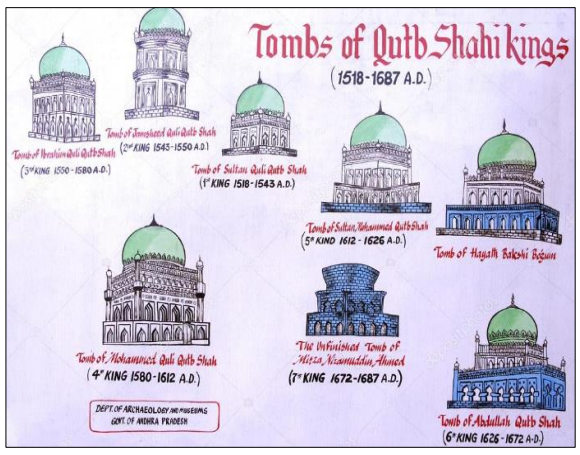
News in Between the Lines

Qutb Shahi Tombs

❖ Context

- Six wells inside the Qutb Shahi Tombs Complex in Hyderabad were restored recently which will help make a strong case for UNESCO World Heritage City.

❖ Key Highlights



- The restored medieval wells include the 16.5 metre deep (about five storeys) 3.5 million litre capacity Badi Baoli and an equally massive stepwell near Jamshed Quli's tomb as well as the 4.7 million litre capacity Hammam Baoli.
- The State Government is planning to restore including the Jilau Khana near Laad Bazaar.
- The Qutb Shahi tombs complex dating back to 15th century has numerous tombs, funerary mosques, wells and manicured gardens.

Virgin Lake

❖ Context

- A group of trekking enthusiasts has recently discovered what they claim is "an unexplored lake about 160m in length and 155m wide with turquoise, crystal-clear water at an altitude of 16,500 feet" in the Uttarakhand Himalaya.

❖ Key Highlights

- The discovery of the new lake in Rudraprayag is a jewel in the crown of trekkers.
- The other lakes in the district are Vasuki Tal, Basuri Tal, Deoria Tal, Badhani Tal, Sajal Sarowar, Nandi Kund, among others.

SOVA

❖ **Context**

- According to the latest advisory issued by CERT-In, a **new mobile banking 'Trojan' virus** is spreading targeting Indian customers.

❖ **Key Highlights**

- The virus can stealthily encrypt an **Android phone** for **ransom** and it is hard to uninstall.
- The first version of the malware first appeared for sale in underground markets in September 2021 with the ability to harvest usernames and passwords via key logging, stealing cookies and adding false overlays to a range of apps.

Global Crypto Adoption Index 2022

❖ **Context**

- **India** fell by two slots to the **fourth place** in a **list of 20 countries with the highest crypto-currency adoption rate**, according to crypto analysis platform Chainalysis.

❖ **Key Highlights**

- The list is **dominated by the emerging markets** with as many as 18 of the 20 countries.
- **Vietnam retained the top spot** followed by the Philippines and Ukraine.
- India's poor score in terms of peer-to-peer (P2P) exchange trade volume lowered its overall ranking.

NAAC

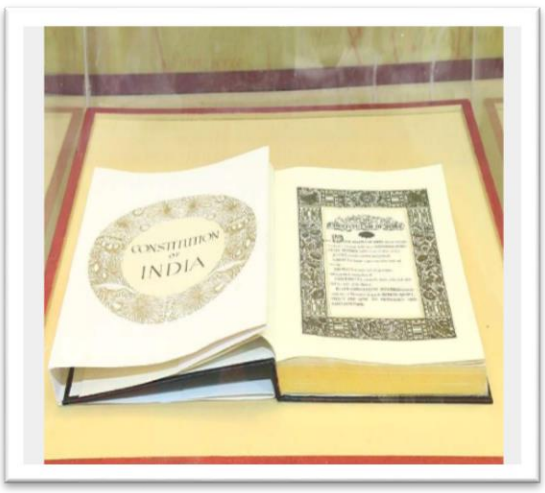
❖ **Context**

- The **National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)** has withheld the results of the rating process for a public university in Gujarat.

❖ **Key Highlights**

- Based in Bengaluru, NAAC is a **government organisation** that conducts **qualitative assessment and grades higher education institutes (HEI)** based on several parameters.
- The **National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) and the Programme of Action (PoA, 1992)** advocated the establishment of an independent National accreditation agency.
- Consequently, the NAAC was **established in 1994 as an autonomous institution of the University Grants Commission (UGC).**
- An A++ grade or a CGPA score above 3.51 is considered the highest rating.
- The NAAC functions through its **General Council (GC)** and Executive Committee (EC). **The Chairperson of the UGC is the President of the GC of the NAAC.**

Ninth Schedule



❖ **Context**

- The Cabinet note on the draft Bill approved by the **Jharkhand government,** keeping **1932 as the cut-off year to determine domicile status**, states that the Bill will be operational only after the Centre clears an **amendment to include it in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution.**

❖ **Key Highlights**

- The Ninth Schedule contains a list of **284 Central and state laws** which, according to **Article 31B,** can't be termed void on grounds of violation of fundamental rights and are immune from judicial review**.**
- The **first amendment of the Constitution (1951)** inserted new Article 31 A and Article 31B, which, together were enacted to protect legislation pertaining to agrarian reform and the abolition of the Zamindari system.
- In ***Kameshwar Singh v. The State of Bihar*** case, the government's decision to classify zamindars into different categories for the purpose of procuring their land was criticised by the judiciary as a violation of Article 14.
- However, courts have held some times that the laws in the 9th schedule can be reviewed as per **IR Coelho 2007.** if they violate fundamental rights or the basic structure of the Constitution as propounded by the Supreme Court in ***Kesavananda Bharati*** case in 1973.

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