



20 February, 2024

Court Vacations

Context: CJI Chandrachud had spoken about the criticism leveled against court vacations in the past.

➤ Debate Over Court Vacations:

- The issue of court vacations has been a subject of debate, with concerns raised about the convenience for justice-seekers.
- In 2022, then Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju conveyed the public sentiment regarding the extended court vacations to Parliament.
- Rijiju emphasized the need to address the message from the House to the judiciary concerning the vacation duration.

➤ Duration of Court Vacations:

- The Supreme Court operates for 193 working days annually, while High Courts function approximately 210 days, and trial courts for 245 days.
- The Supreme Court observes a summer vacation of seven weeks, a week each for Dussehra and Diwali, and a two-week break in December.
- This schedule, rooted in colonial practices, has faced criticism due to its impact on judicial proceedings and case pendency.

➤ Handling of Important Cases During Vacations:

- Despite vacations, judges hear urgent cases in vacation benches comprising two or three judges.
- Cases like bail and eviction often receive priority listing before vacation benches.
- Notable cases, including constitutional challenges and hearings on significant legal matters, have been heard during court vacations in the past.

➤ Vacation Benches

- A Vacation Bench of the Supreme Court is established by the Chief Justice of India to handle urgent matters during court vacations.
- The Supreme Court observes two extended breaks each year, namely the summer and winter vacations, but remains technically operational to address urgent cases.
- Litigants retain the ability to approach the Supreme Court during vacations, and the Vacation Bench decides whether a case qualifies as an "urgent matter" deserving immediate attention.
- While there is no precise definition of what constitutes an "urgent matter," the court typically entertains writs related to habeas corpus, certiorari, prohibition, and quo warranto for the enforcement of fundamental rights during vacations.
- Rule 6 allows the Chief Justice to appoint one or more judges to hear urgent cases during vacations, and a Division Court may be constituted if necessary.
- High Courts and trial courts also establish Vacation Benches to handle urgent matters within their respective jurisdictions.

➤ Efforts to Reform Court Vacation System:

- Former Chief Justices of India proposed reforms to reduce vacation periods and keep courts open throughout the year.
- Suggestions included seeking judges' schedules at the beginning of the year and planning the court calendar accordingly.

- However, these proposals have not been implemented due to various factors.

➤ Comparison with Other Countries:

- The Indian Supreme Court has the highest caseload globally and delivers a substantial number of judgments annually.
- By contrast, the US Supreme Court hears fewer cases and sits for oral arguments for a limited number of days each month.
- Similarly, UK courts have a defined schedule of sitting days throughout the year, with specific sessions for High Courts and Courts of Appeals.

Hike in ministries' reporting limits for financial expenditure

Context: After nearly two decades, the government is ready to revise the financial limits for 'New Service' and 'New Instruments of Service' with approval from Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

➤ Approval by Public Accounts Committee (PAC):

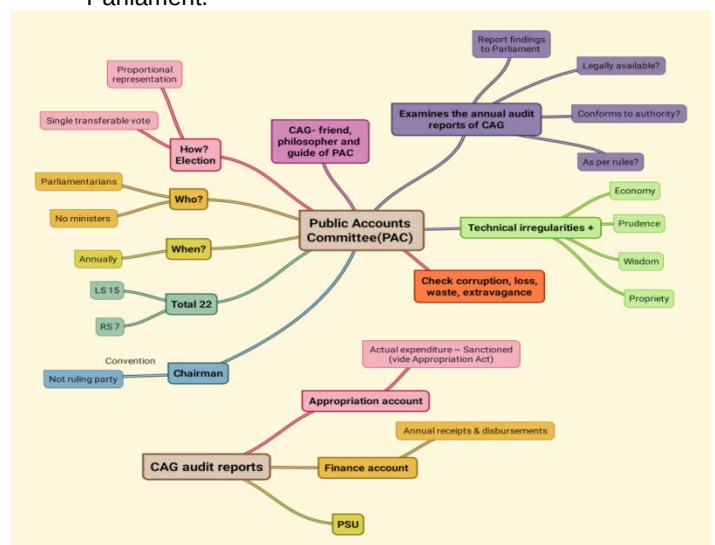
- The PAC has approved the Finance Ministry's proposal to revise the reporting limit for new policy-related expenditure by ministries/departments.
- The reporting limit for new policy-related expenditure has been raised to above Rs 50 crore but not exceeding Rs 100 crore.
- Parliament's prior approval is mandated for spending over Rs 100 crore.

➤ Revision in Financial Limits:

- This marks the fourth revision since Independence and is aimed at reducing the frequency of Supplementary Demands for Grants presented to Parliament.
- The last revision was in 2006, and low financial limits led to an increase in supplementary proposals from ministries/departments, causing delays in project execution.

➤ Types of Expenditure:

- 'New Service (NS)' refers to expenditure arising from a new policy decision not previously presented to Parliament.



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- 'New Instrument of Service (NIS)' refers to relatively large expenditure from significant expansion of an existing policy.
- **Purpose of Amendments:**
 - The proposed amendments aim to encourage ministries to estimate budgetary requirements meticulously.
 - The necessity for upward revision arises due to a surge in supplementary proposals causing delays in project execution.
- **Expected Growth and Budget Size:**
 - With GDP growth expected in the range of 6-7% annually, the Budget size is anticipated to grow substantially in the next decade.
 - This necessitates an upward revision in financial limits to accommodate increased expenditure.
- **Consultations and Changes:**
 - This is the fourth change in 50 years and has come after wide consultations.
 - The revisions aim to streamline the government spending process and simplify the scrutiny process for the PAC.
- **Simplification of Process:**
 - The Finance Ministry aims to simplify the process for easier adoption by ministries.
 - This is expected to speed up decision-making and improve the pace of scheme implementation.

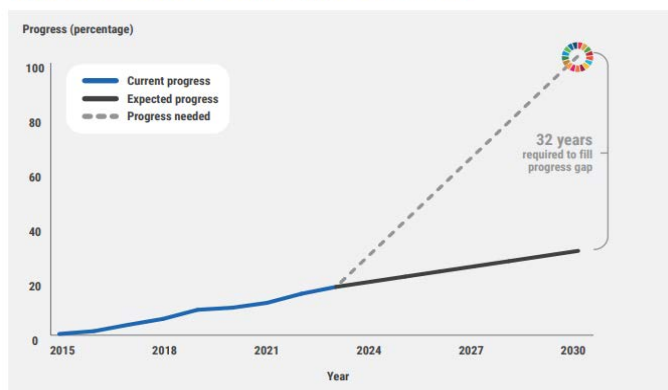
Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2024

Context: UNESCAP reports that the Asia-Pacific region is currently 32 years behind the 2030 target for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- **SDGs Progress in Asia-Pacific Region**
 - None of the 17 UN-mandated SDGs are currently on track in the Asia-Pacific region.
 - The region is projected to achieve only one-third of the required progress by 2030 at its current pace.
 - This delay in achieving the SDGs is estimated to be 32 years, with the target year pushed to 2062.
- **Concerns on Climate Action (SDG 13)**
 - Progress toward SDG 13, particularly climate action, remains critically behind.
 - All targets under SDG 13 show stalled or reversed progress, with 20 targets from 14 SDGs showing deterioration compared to the 2015 baseline.

- The report emphasizes the urgent need to integrate climate action into national policies to address climate-related disasters effectively.
- **Challenges in Data Availability**
 - Approximately 67% of the 169 SDG targets in the region are currently not measurable due to data gaps.
 - While data availability for SDGs has doubled since 2017, significant gaps remain, particularly in climate-related indicators.
 - Insufficient data hampers progress monitoring, with about 62.5% of indicators under SDG 13 lacking data altogether.
- **Impact on Key Goals**
 - Progress on key goals such as hunger (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), clean water (SDG 6), affordable energy (SDG 7), and sustainable cities (SDG 11) has been insufficient.
 - These goals are interconnected with climate change, which poses significant challenges to the region's food security, livelihoods, and economy.
 - Climate change and extreme weather events threaten the achievement of SDG targets and are identified as severe global risks over the next decade.
- **Recommendations for Action**
 - The report calls for increased investment in sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy sources to address climate challenges effectively.
 - Urgent attention is needed to prioritize goals related to climate action, food security, health, and sustainable development to mitigate the impact of climate change on the region's progress towards SDGs.

Figure 1.1 Will Asia and the Pacific close the gap to achieve the SDGs?



Note: For each year, the percentage represents the average progress recorded towards all 17 SDGs.

NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

ICCCAD



Recently, a report released by ICCCAD unveiled Bangladesh's exposure to 185 extreme weather events between 2000 and 2019, ranking it as the world's seventh most vulnerable country to climate change.

About ICCCAD:

- The International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) is a **research and capacity building organization** that focuses on climate change and development in Bangladesh.
- It was established in **2009** through collaboration between the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) and IIED (UK).
- It is located at the **Independent University, Bangladesh** (IUB) campus in Dhaka.
- Its aim is to facilitate the **adaptation process for communities impacted by climate change** by integrating local expertise, knowledge, and research.
- **Saleemul Huq** has been the Director of the International Centre for Climate Change & Development (ICCCAD) since **2009**.

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Shri Kalki Dham Temple



Recently, the Prime Minister of India laid the foundation stone of Shri Kalki Dham Temple at Achonda Kamboh in Sambhal district of Uttar Pradesh.

About Shri Kalki Dham Temple:

- **Kalki Avatar** is predicted to be born in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh.
- The temple is being **constructed by the Shri Kalki Dham Nirman Trust**, led by **Acharya Pramod Krishnam**.
- This Temple is dedicated to Lord Kalki, who is considered to be the **10th and 24th avatar of Lord Vishnu**.
- Described in the 'Agni Purana,' Kalki Avatar will be depicted as a horseman holding a bow and arrow.
- The temple is significant because it is the **first "Dham"** where a temple is established before the incarnation of God.

Green Anaconda



Scientists recently discovered that the green anaconda, previously thought to be a single species, actually consists of two genetically distinct species.

About the Green Anaconda:

- The green anaconda (**Eunectes murinus**) is a snake found in **Amazon** and the **Orinoco basins**.
- It is the largest and heaviest snake in the world with the largest females reaching over seven meters in length and weighing more than **250 kilograms**
- It is **well-adapted to aquatic life**, with nostrils and eyes positioned on top of its head to breathe and see while submerged.
- It is dark green with black spots along its back and black spots with yellow centers along its sides.
- It is stealthy predator known for its ability to ambush prey, including capybaras, **caimans** and **deer**, by crushing them with its powerful body.
- It is classified as a species of least concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List.

Mimas



Recently, NASA's Cassini spacecraft's images suggest Saturn's moon Mimas may have ocean under its crust.

About Mimas:

- Mimas, also known as Saturn I is a **natural satellite of Saturn**, and the smallest and innermost of its major moons.
- Its heavily cratered surface resembles the **Death Star from Star Wars**.
- It has a mean radius of **198.2 kilometers** and a mean diameter of **396.4 kilometers**.
- It has a **crater** that is a third of its whole diameter.
- It was discovered in **1789** by **English astronomer William Herschel** and named after a Gigantes from Greek mythology.
- It is **large enough** for its own gravity to have made it round, but isn't one of the really large moons in our solar system, like **Titan**.
- Researchers believe the ocean is relatively young, having formed between 2 million and 25 million years ago.

Place in News

Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Recently, the President of India has visited Cellular Jail and attended civic reception at Port Blair in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Capital: Port Blair)

Location: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, also known as the Emerald Islands is a union territory of India, located in the **Bay of Bengal**, in the Indian Ocean.

Boundaries:

- The islands are bordered by the **Andaman Sea to the east** and the **Bay of Bengal to the west**.
- It is also Separated from **Thailand** and **Myanmar** by the Andaman Sea.

Physical Features:

- The islands are **separated by the 10°N channel**, which separates Little Andaman in the south from the Nicobar Islands.
- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are considered as a submerged extension of the **Arakan Mountains**.
- Among the Andaman Islands, the **North, Middle and South islands are prominent**, with **Saddle Peak** (737 m) in North Andaman being the highest peak.
- Recently, Ross Island has been renamed as **Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Dweep**, Neil Island as **Shaheed Dweep** and **Havelock Island** as **Swaraj Dweep**.



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Current affairs summary for prelims

20 February, 2024

POINTS TO PONDER

- Where is Pandaram land, which recently made headlines, located? – **Lakshadweep**
- In which lake of Odisha was a newly discovered species of marine amphipod found? – **Chilika lake**
- Where was the 11th International Puppet Festival inaugurated? – **Chandigarh**
- India signed a Memorandum of Understanding with which country for sharing open-sourced digital public infrastructure? – **Colombia**
- Which specific day is observed as Global Tourism Resilience Day? – **17 February**

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