OBC Quota Expenses Missing

❖ **Context:**

- In response to Right to Information (RTI) requests filed by The Hindu, it has been revealed that the government has no documented records of office expenditure associated with the Justice G. Rohini Commission for the sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) since September 2021.

❖ **What is G Rohini Commission?**

- The Commission was formed in 2017 to sub-categorise the nearly 3,000 OBC caste groups and recommend a quota break-up among them.
- It was initially given 12 weeks to submit a report in this regard but has so far received 14 extensions - the latest one in January this year.
- The panel is headed **by former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, Justice G. Rohini (retd.) and consists of Dr. J.K. Bajaj** of the Centre for Policy Studies as a Member.
- In addition to this, a Director of the Anthropological Survey of India and the Registrar General of India are ex-officio members while a Joint Secretary of the Social Justice Ministry is the Secretary of the Commission.

❖ **Findings**

- As part of its work, the Commission had found that a small group of dominant OBC caste groups were routinely crowding out a large number of communities within the OBC grouping from benefits like reservation, according to sources aware of the panel's working.
- As a result, the Commission had decided to sub-categorise OBC caste groups into four broad groups - with the most percentage of reservation going to the groups that have historically been crowded out and the least going to the groups that have historically been able to avail benefits.

❖ **What is the expenditure issue?**

- Expenditure records accessed under the Right to Information Act, 2005 showed that ₹3,75,53,250 was spent on salaries and allowances for the Chairperson and Member and ₹26,04,775 was spent on salaries for consultants from October 2017 to April 2023.
- The expenditure for the Commission was being taken care of by the National Commission for Backward Classes from October 2017 to August 2021.
- Following this, the expenditure for the Commission started coming directly from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE).

Comptroller and Auditor General(CAG)

❖ **Context:**

- A team headed by the Deputy Comptroller and Auditor General (Report Central) recently held an interactive session with senior officers from Union Ministries to identify systemic issues, financial irregularities, and areas for improvement.

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- This partnership will promote **fiscal discipline, good governance**, and responsible decision-making, ultimately benefiting Indian citizens.
- The **CAG, legislature, and the executive** are integral to the Indian democratic system.
- Audit reports by the CAG provide vital information to the legislature, enabling it to hold the **executive accountable** and serve as a valuable resource for legislative debates and decision-making.
- Effective communication and **prompt response** from ministries in providing relevant information and documents are crucial for a **constructive dialogue** between auditors and auditees.
- Delays in furnishing records **hinder the audit process** and lead to incomplete assessments.

❖ **About CAG:**

- **Constitutional Authority:** The CAG is an important constitutional authority established under Article **148** of the Indian Constitution.
- **Audit Responsibilities:** The CAG is responsible for auditing and examining the accounts and financial transactions of the **central and state governments, public sector undertakings, and autonomous bodies.**
- **Independent Watchdog:** The CAG operates independently of the executive branch and acts as a watchdog to ensure adherence to financial rules and regulations.
- **Types of Audits:** The CAG conducts **financial audits, performance audits, and compliance audits** to assess the financial health and effectiveness of government programs and schemes.
- **Audit Reports:** The CAG's reports, known as Audit Reports, **highlight financial irregularities, deficiencies**, and areas for improvement in government functioning. These reports are submitted to the **President or Governor, who then presents them to the Parliament or State Legislature.**

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India

- **Appointment and Tenure:** The CAG is appointed by the President of India and holds office for a fixed term.

News in Between the Lines

2023 Michelin Award

❖ **Context:**

- India achieved success at the 2023 Michelin Awards for Dubai, with **Tresind Studio** winning two stars.

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- The Michelin Guide, considered the **Oscars of the food industry**, was launched in France in the early 1900s and is now available in **41 destinations, including Dubai.**
- This year, a total of 14 restaurants received stars, with 11 receiving one star.
- **Omkar Walve of Avatāra,** known for its vegetarian fine dining with "soulful Indian" cuisine, won the **Young Chef Award**.
- Avatāra also earned its **first Michelin star**, alongside Dinner by Heston Blumenthal and Moonrise, which were added to the list this year.
- The Michelin Guide is famous for its **anonymous inspectors** who assess restaurants worldwide to determine their star ratings.
- A single star denotes **excellence,** while three stars indicate extraordinary establishments.
- Gwendal Poullennec, the guide's international director, highlighted that they have selected **16,000 restaurants globally**, with only around 3,300 having stars and approximately 140 having three stars.

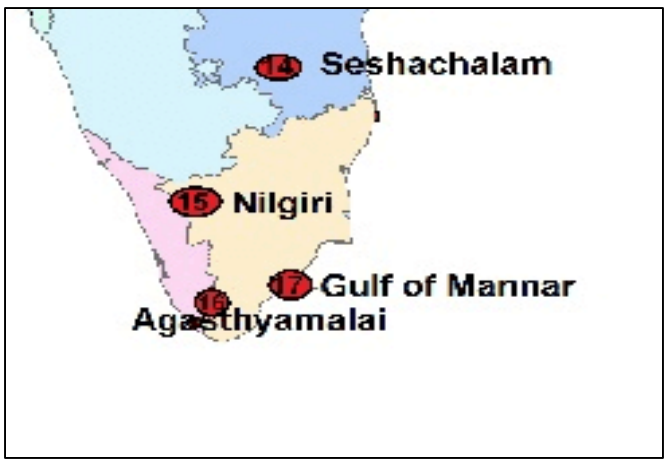
Nilgiri Marten

❖ **Context:**

- The Nilgiri marten, an endemic species in the Western Ghats, is facing significant challenges due to habitat fragmentation and encroachment.

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- The Nilgiri marten, also known as **the Nilgiri pine marten** or the white-bellied marten, is a small carnivorous mammal that belongs to the mustelid family.
- It is endemic to the Western Ghats mountain range in southern India.



- The Nilgiri marten has a slender and agile body, with a head and body length of **about 45 to 65 centimeters (18 to 26 inches).**
- It has short legs and a long, bushy tail, which helps with balance.
- **Conservation status**: It is listed as Vulnerable on the **IUCN Red List.**
- The Western Ghats encompass five main habitat clusters for the Nilgiri marten: **Brahmagiri, Nilgiris, Anamalai, Cardamom Hills, and Agasthyamalai.**

Nigeria's Dangote Refinery

❖ **Context:**

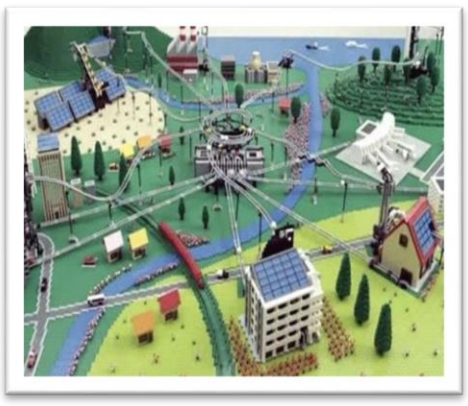
- Recently,Nigeria has commissioned the Dangote Refinery.

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- The refinery aims to address persistent fuel shortages in Nigeria, which is Africa's biggest oil producer.
- With a capacity of 650,000 barrels per day, the refinery plans to export surplus petrol, making Nigeria an export hub for petroleum products.

- Additionally, it intends to export diesel.
- Nigeria spent $23.3 billion on petroleum product imports last year.
- The **Dangote Refinery aims** to reduce this expenditure by increasing domestic production and decreasing the need for imports.
- Nigeria's daily petrol consumption is estimated at 33 million liters (8.7 million gallons).
- The Dangote Refinery is a massive petrochemical complex and is **considered the world's largest single-train refinery.**

Smart City Project



❖ **Context:**

- 73% Of Work Completed in Smart Cities, informs Union Minister Puri.

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- As of May 1 this year, **over 5,700 projects funded by the government's Smart Cities** Mission, with an investment of Rs 1.1 lakh crore, have been completed.
- The completed projects represent 73% of the total 7,800 projects worth Rs. 1.8 lakh crores sanctioned under the scheme for a New India.
- The remaining projects are expected to be finished **by June 30, 2024.**
- The Minister emphasized that the innovations nurtured in these 100 smart cities will heavily influence India's urban future as the country progresses **towards Amrit Kaal.**
- The Apex Committee, chaired by the **Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs,** oversees the Smart Cities Mission and utilizes the **Real Time Geographical Management Information System (GMIS)** to monitor project progress.

❖ **About Smart City Project:**

- India's Smart Cities Project is a government-led initiative aimed at transforming selected cities into sustainable and technologically advanced urban centers.
- Launched in 2015, the project focuses on improving **infrastructure, services, and quality of life for residents.**
- The mission emphasizes the integration of technology and data-driven solutions, **including IoT, smart sensors, and digital platforms**, to enable real-time monitoring and management of city infrastructure.
- The project encourages citizen participation, transparency, and citizen-centric service delivery.
- Funding is provided by the central and state governments, and cities are encouraged to explore **innovative financing mechanisms.**
- There is successful deployment of **Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCCs)** in all 100 smart cities.
- ICCCs utilize **cutting-edge technologies** to provide better situational awareness and consolidated visualization for **civic officials,** enabling effective urban management.
- ICCCs have become the **nerve centers of these smart cities**, demonstrating the efficient use of technology.

India Gives Bangladesh Key Rail Infra

❖ **Context:**

- India has provided 20 Broad Gauge (BG) locomotives to Bangladesh, modified according to the requirements of Bangladesh Railway.

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- The locomotives will assist in managing the growing volume of passenger and freight train operations in Bangladesh.
- In addition to the locomotives, India has offered Bangladesh the use of the IT system **deployed by the PM-GATI SHAKTI scheme**, which provides detailed information based on satellite imagery.
- The IT system can pinpoint the exact locations of rivers, forests, towns, and rail links, aiding in streamlined planning.
- The Geospatial Information System and IT platform behind Gati Shakti, developed by the **BISAG-N agency, can be utilized by Bangladesh.**
- The diesel locomotives provided by Indian Railways have a horsepower of **330 and can reach speeds of up to 120 kilometers per hour.**
- Currently, five BG connectivity routes are operational, with two more cross-border rail connections nearing completion.
- **Three pairs of passenger** trains are running between India and Bangladesh to facilitate people-to-people contact.
- Trade between the two countries via rail has been steadily growing, with approximately 100 cargo trains exchanged each month.
- In the previous financial year, around **2.66 metric tonnes of cargo**, including items such as stone, foodgrains, china clay, gypsum, maize, and onions, were transported from India to Bangladesh.

Heal in India initiative

❖ **Context:**

- Recently, delivering a keynote address at the **76th World Health Assembly in Geneva**, Health and Family Welfare Minister highlighted the significance of the "Heal by India" and "Heal in India" programs.

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- The Heal by India initiative seeks to **bolster the mobility of health professionals** from India to various parts of the world, aligning with the Indian philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World is One Family).
- The Heal in India initiative aims to **provide integrated and comprehensive treatment solutions within India,** ensuring accessibility to world-class and affordable healthcare services.
- India is home to world's oldest medical systems **called Ayurveda and since its unique** strengths has come to the fore, demands for AYUSH treatments including Yoga, Siddha, Unani and Homeopathy have increased globally.

Foreign Tourist Arrivals

❖ **Context:**

- India received 6.19 million Foreign Tourist Arrivals in 2022 as compared to 1.52 million during same period of 2021.

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- The central government has taken several initiatives to give a boost to the tourism sector in the country by launching **Dekho Apna Desh, 'Capacity Building for Service Providers' Scheme, Incredible India Tourist Facilitator Certification Programme and Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive-PRASHAD.**
- On the recommendation of the Ministry of Tourism, 59 tourism routes have been awarded to the identified airlines by the Ministry of Civil Aviation under the **RCS UDAN Scheme.**
- In order to boost visitor arrival, the Government has declared "**Incredible India! Visit India Year 2023".**
- The Ministry of Tourism has approved a total number of 45 projects in the country under **PRASHAD Scheme** so far, which was launched in 2014-2015.
  - The scheme focuses on developing and identifying pilgrimage sites across India for enriching the religious tourism experience.

Colorado River Conservation Deal

❖ **Context:**

- A historic agreement has been reached among seven states, including Arizona, California, and Nevada, with the goal of conserving water from the Colorado River, aiming to achieve a **13% reduction** in water usage over a three-year period.

❖ **Key Highlights:**

- The deal aims to conserve at least 3 million acre-feet of water and will be in effect until the end of 2026.
- The Colorado River has experienced a 20% decline in water flow since the 1900s, primarily due to the effects of climate change and prolonged drought conditions in the western United States.
- **Federal Compensation:**
  - As part of the agreement, more than $1 billion in federal funds from the Inflation Reduction Act will be allocated.
  - These funds will support near-term water conservation efforts, increase system efficiency, and prevent the reservoirs of the Colorado River System from reaching critically low levels.
  - Approximately 2.3 million acre-feet of water will be conserved through this compensation.
- **Importance of the Colorado River Basin:**
  - The Colorado River Basin is crucial for the well-being of 40 million people, seven states, and 30 Tribal Nations.
  - It provides essential services such as drinking water and electricity to these communities.

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