

## Mains Master

### Revision sans vision

#### Context

*The editorial outlines the passing of three Bills in India's Parliament to update criminal laws, highlighting concerns about the process due to the absence of many opposition members. It discusses revisions in the laws, including positive changes and contentious points, while pointing out procedural improvements. However, it emphasizes the absence of a comprehensive plan to address broader issues in the criminal justice system. ( See THS-21 Dec)*

#### Legislative Process Concerns:

- **Absence of Opposition Presence:** Over 140 missing members, primarily from the Opposition, raised concerns about thorough discussions and checks during Bill passing.
- **Limited Deliberations:** Absence hindered comprehensive debates, limiting diverse perspectives on revised criminal laws.
- **Inadequate Addressing of Concerns:** Despite prior scrutiny, limited engagement in Parliament left many unaddressed issues with the Bills.

#### Content of New Codes:

- **Retained Original Language:** New laws largely kept original language, prompting questions about transformative changes.
- **Challenge to Purely Indian Legal Framework Claim:** Minimal changes question the assertion of a purely Indian legal framework.

#### Improvements in the BNS:

- **Removal of Outdated Sections:** Eliminated sedition section; included provisions against mob lynching.
- **Inclusion of Mob Lynching as Separate Offense:** Addressed hate crimes related to race, caste, etc.
- **Exclusion of Adultery as Gender-Neutral Offense:** Complied with the Supreme Court's directive.

#### Contentions and Questionable Inclusions:

- **Inclusion of 'Terrorism' in General Penal Law:** Raises redundancy and potential legal issues.
- **Concerns About Lightly Invoking Grave Charges:** Potential misuse or casual application of severe charges.

#### Procedural Aspects:

- **Welcome Provisions:** Allowed FIRs irrespective of offense location; emphasized forensic use and videography.
- **Lack of Clarity on Police Custody Beyond 15-Day Limit:** Unclear extension beyond 15-day limit in new criminal procedure.

#### Lack of Comprehensive Framework:

- **Criticism for Revisions Without Vision:** Revisions lacked a comprehensive approach to address systemic inadequacies in the criminal justice system, necessitating broader reforms.

### Staying alert

#### Context

*Another editorial delves into the emergence and swift dissemination of the JN.1 COVID-19 variant, spotlighting its features, influence in India, and the necessity to preventively act without politicizing public health efforts. It emphasizes heightened surveillance, widespread testing, and discouraging regional stigmatization as essential measures for effective COVID-19 management.*

#### JN.1 Variant's Emergence and Characteristics:

- **Rapid Spread and Prevalence:** JN.1 variant, a descendant of BA.2.86 Omicron lineage, has reached over 27% globally in a month.
- **Identification and Features:** First found in Luxembourg in late August, the JN.1 variant carries an additional mutation (L455S) in the spike protein, enhancing immune evasion, and shares high transmissibility with other Omicron sublineages.
- **Potential Dominance:** Likely to become the dominant strain globally, particularly with the upcoming winter season facilitating its spread.

#### World Health Organization's Classification and Insights:

- **Variant of Interest Designation:** Recently classified as a separate variant of interest by the World Health Organization due to its prevalence within the BA.2.86 lineage.
- **Health Implications:** Limited evidence suggests JN.1 doesn't increase disease severity or lead to higher fatality compared to other circulating variants.

## JN.1 Variant in India:

- **Case Incidence:** Kerala reported the first case; Goa has reported the highest number of cases (19) out of the total 21 cases in India.
- **Clinical Impact:** All 21 cases in India have been clinically mild, requiring home isolation.
- **Surge in COVID-19 Cases:** India experienced a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases in the last fortnight.

### Recommendations and Health Measures:

- **Masking for High-Risk Individuals:** Encouragement for high-risk individuals to wear masks, especially in poorly ventilated closed spaces.
- **Revised Surveillance Guidelines:** All patients with influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) are tested for COVID-19; positive cases sequenced as per updated guidelines.
- **Emphasis on Genome Sequencing:** Continued focus on genome sequencing for novel variants to monitor and understand their spread.
- **Avoiding Stigmatization:** Caution against shaming states reporting more cases or novel variants; emphasizes a non-politicized and communal approach to public health issues.

## Should an All-India Judicial Service be created?

### Context

The article explores the challenges and potential impacts of the All India Judicial Service (AIJS) proposal, focusing on its influence on judicial diversity, recruitment hurdles, career prospects for aspiring judges, and the broader implications for federalism and judicial independence. Additionally, it discusses alternative strategies to fortify the judiciary, emphasizing the importance of career path enhancements and infrastructural improvements for a more effective judiciary system.

### AIJS: Addressing Judicial Diversity and Recruitment Challenges:

- **Diversity Challenges:** The judiciary faces representation issues, with low percentages of women and underrepresented communities in subordinate courts.
- **Entrance Barriers:** Rigorous exam preparation and years of practice create challenges, particularly for marginalized groups entering the judiciary.
- **Existing Efforts:** State governments and High Courts have made affirmative action efforts, evident in the increasing participation of women in judicial services.

### AIJS's Potential Impact on Recruitment and Vacancies:

- **Vacancy Concerns:** Persisting vacancies in the district judiciary raise questions about the efficacy of a centralized recruitment system to address this issue.
- **Age and Experience Factors:** Introducing lawyers with established practices to a transferable AIJS might deter potential candidates due to age and established local connections.

## Appeal and Career Prospects for Aspiring Judges:

- **Attractiveness of AIJS:** The allure of serving in an AIJS compared to State services may not significantly influence young lawyers' preferences.
- **Facilities and Pay Structures:** Issues like basic facilities and pay disparities compared to private legal practice impact the judiciary's attractiveness as a career choice.

### Challenges to Federalism and Judicial Independence:

- **Federalism Concerns:** Implementing an AIJS might challenge state and High Court autonomy, raising concerns about centralized control.
- **Judicial Independence:** Ensuring judicial independence becomes a significant concern if litigants, especially the government, have influence over judge appointments and decisions.

### Alternative Solutions for Strengthening the Judiciary:

- **Career Path Enhancement:** Emphasizing the need for a smoother career trajectory from district judiciary to higher courts to address systemic issues.
- **Infrastructure and Support:** Highlighting the necessity to improve infrastructure and provide adequate support, particularly in non-metro areas, to bolster the effectiveness of the judiciary.

## Analysing the Post Office Bill, 2023

### Context

The explainer article delves into the Post Office Bill, 2023, examining its provisions allowing interception, raised concerns by MPs over privacy violations and unchecked emergency powers, the government's defense citing national security, legal context, and expert opinions highlighting the lack of safeguards potentially fostering state surveillance. It primarily focuses on the debate surrounding interception, privacy, and surveillance concerns within the bill.

### Background and Overview of Post Office Bill, 2023:

- Rajya Sabha passed the Bill replacing the **colonial-era Indian Post Office Act, 1898**, aiming to enhance Postal Department's operations.
- Shashi Tharoor raised concerns in Lok Sabha over provisions allowing Centre's interception of postal items, drawing opposition from various leaders.

### Key Provisions of the Post Office Bill, 2023:

- **Grounds and Powers of Interception:** Allows interception based on state security, public order, emergency, or contravention of laws; officers can 'intercept, open, or detain' postal articles.

- **Delivery to Customs:** Authorizes Post Office to deliver suspected articles to customs authority for further action according to existing laws.
- **Exemption from Liability:** Exempts Post Office from liability unless fraud or wilful negligence is proven.
- **Removal of Offences:** Omits offences present in the earlier Act except for recovering unpaid amounts.

Concerns Raised by MPs Regarding the Bill:

- **Violation of Privacy:** MPs flagged concerns about violating privacy rights, citing recent alerts regarding state-sponsored hacking attempts.
- **Unspecified 'Emergency' Powers:** Lack of clarity on defining 'emergency' grants unchecked powers to authorities, raising concerns.
- **Ambiguity in Authority Selection:** Lack of clarity on selecting officers empowered for interception raised questions among MPs.
- **Absence of Interception Procedure:** MPs criticized the bill for not specifying the interception procedure, leading to arbitrary actions.
- **Encouragement of Surveillance:** MPs criticized the Bill for fostering state surveillance without proper guidelines or limitations.
- **Absence of Grievance Redressal:** Absence of mechanisms for citizens to contest or address interception raised concerns among MPs.

#### Government's Response and Legal Context:

- Government defended the provision citing the need for interception amid India's diverse society for national security purposes.
- Law Commission and legislative history show past attempts to regulate interception but faced hurdles.
- Supreme Court rulings emphasized privacy rights, necessity, and proportionality in surveillance measures.

#### Expert Opinion and Surveillance Concerns:

- Legal expert highlighted the lack of safeguards in the Bill, pointing out the absence of typical interception order requirements.
- cautioned that the Bill's provisions could lead to state surveillance due to insufficient safeguards and lack of written orders.

- 🌲 Aaranyak's 79-day expeditions across ten expeditions in 2021 led to the rediscovery of the squirrel, with Tajum Yomcha, a research officer with the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Department, contributing to the search effort.
- 🔍 A reddish and grizzled furry mammal was observed high up in a tree, and following meticulous scrutiny and examination, experts tentatively identified the creature as the Namdapha Flying Squirrel.
- 🧬 Plans are underway to conduct a detailed study, including DNA sample collection from the field, for comparison with the specimen collected in 1981 and stored at the Zoological Survey of India in Kolkata.
- 🌿 The potential confirmation of the squirrel's rediscovery carries significant implications for conservation, possibly highlighting the need for increased protection measures and biodiversity preservation efforts in the Namdapha Tiger Reserve and the broader region.

#### WHO prequalifies a malaria vaccine by Serum Institute

- 🌿 The R21/Matrix-M Malaria Vaccine, developed by Oxford University and produced by Serum Institute of India, has been added to WHO's list of prequalified vaccines for malaria prevention in children.
- 🌍 WHO endorsed its use in October 2023 for malaria prevention in children, making it the second malaria vaccine to receive prequalification status after RTS,S/AS01 in July 2022.
- 🚀 Prequalification facilitates larger access to vaccines for preventing malaria in children and is essential for UNICEF's vaccine procurement and Gavi's funding support for vaccine deployment.
- 🏥 Clinical trials have demonstrated the safety and efficacy of both prequalified malaria vaccines in preventing the disease in children.
- 🌍 Malaria disproportionately affects children in the African region, causing nearly half a million deaths annually, with 249 million malaria cases reported worldwide in 2022, resulting in 608,000 deaths across 85 countries.
- 🩺 WHO ensures vaccine safety, efficacy, and compliance with international standards, with regular evaluation, site inspection, and targeted testing maintaining the safety and effectiveness of prequalified vaccines, including criteria such as potency, thermostability, presentation, labelling, and shipping conditions tailored to national immunization programs.

## Prelims Blaster

### Missing for 42 years, Namdapha flying squirrel resurfaces in Arunachal Pradesh

- 🐿️ The Namdapha Flying Squirrel, last observed in 1981 in the Namdapha Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh, was rediscovered in April 2022 after exhaustive explorations by Aaranyak, a biodiversity conservation group, led by Firoz Ahmed and including Sourav Gupta and Sourav Mardi.

### Bengaluru airport wins award at UNESCO's 2023 Prix Versailles

- 🏆 Kempegowda International Airport's Terminal 2 (KIA T2) was recognized at UNESCO's 2023 Prix Versailles for interiors, receiving the world special prize and announced among the latest architectural projects to win a World Title by the World Judges Panel chaired by Elie Saab.

- 🏛️ The award, established in 2015, emphasizes intelligent sustainability, honoring innovation, local heritage, ecological efficiency, and social interaction values.

- 🏠 Inaugurated on November 11, 2022, KIA T2 covers 255,661 square meters and stands on four foundational pillars: technological leadership, garden-like ambiance, environmental stewardship, and celebration of Karnataka's culture, featuring interiors using engineered bamboo and unique aesthetics such as an indoor garden, rammed-earth walls, waterfalls, and hanging planted bells.

- ☁️ Hari Marar, MD and CEO of Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL), expressed immense pride in T2's nomination and its recognition, highlighting its role as a distinctive gateway leaving a lasting impression on global travelers and showcasing the State and country's offerings.

- 🌍 The design of KIA T2 focuses on curated art and décor elements as part of BIAL's Art Programme to enhance the passenger experience, with a strong emphasis on sustainable design, reflected in its pre-certification with a Platinum LEED rating by the US Green Building Council and attaining the prestigious Platinum certification under the IGBC Green New Building rating system, showcasing its commitment to sustainability.

## Coming soon, a 'cafeteria' for oil spillhit birds at creek in T.N.

- 🐦 Industries in Manali caused an oil spill, leading to a significant decline in bird population at Ennore Creek, with about 10 pelicans and painted storks remaining in distress.

- 🌿 Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary (BMAD), in collaboration with the State Department of Environment, Climate Change, and Forests, local volunteers, Wildlife Warden Chennai, and WTI, plan to establish feeding stations for affected birds, requiring the capture of the birds, especially those impacted by the spill.

- 🐟 The collaborative approach aims to assess and aid affected birds, with the team planning to set up 'cafeterias' with nets to feed birds fresh fish and using paddle boats in areas inaccessible to motorized boats to reach the feeding stations, aiming to help the sick birds while they feed.

- 🌍 While the oil spill has affected both birds and fish in the area, the ecosystem is expected to recover gradually, with the impact being temporary, despite the challenges posed by capturing the elusive distressed birds.

## India Skills Report finds Kerala the most preferred State to work

- 🌐 Kerala emerged as the most favored state for employment, with Kochi securing the second and Thiruvananthapuram the fourth spot among preferred cities for both genders and all age groups, as per the India Skills Report 2024 by talent assessment agency Wheebox.

- 🇮🇳 The report surveyed 3.88 lakh youths through a National Employability Test across India, indicating a significant improvement in India's employability, with 51.25% of the assessed youths deemed employable, possessing the necessary skills.

- 🎓 Kerala ranked second in overall employability among 18-21-year-olds, showcasing prowess in nurturing computer skills, and securing the third position overall among states for the highest concentration of employable talent in B.E./BTech and polytechnic domains and for English language proficiency.

- 🏠 Kerala's diverse talent pool was emphasized, indicating its ability to meet varied job market demands, showcasing resilience and adaptability in evolving work environments, with Thiruvananthapuram showing a rising number of highly skilled individuals migrating to the State capital.

- 🏫 The report praised ASAP Kerala's role in imparting skills to over 2.5 lakh higher secondary students in the last decade and the establishment of community skill parks and centers of excellence by the agency as models for training in advanced technologies nationwide.

## Internationalisation of Rupee

🌐💱 The internationalization of the rupee involves promoting and increasing the use of the Indian currency in international trade and finance. Vostro and Nostro accounts play a crucial role in this process by facilitating smoother transactions between domestic and foreign banks, contributing to the broader goal of making the rupee a more widely accepted and utilized currency on the global stage.

- 💰 \*\*Vostro Account:\*\* It's an account held by a domestic bank for a foreign bank in the domestic bank's currency, facilitating trade transactions such as import and export payments. For instance, Indian banks like IndusInd Bank and UCO Bank manage Vostro accounts for trade with Russia, handling rupee transactions.

- 💱 \*\*Nostro Account:\*\* In contrast, a Nostro account is held by a foreign bank in a domestic bank's currency, enabling foreign banks to handle transactions in the domestic currency, such as a US bank holding a dollar account in an Indian bank.

These accounts, with names derived from Latin ("Nostro" meaning 'ours' and "Vostro" meaning 'yours'), streamline international trade by allowing domestic and foreign banks to manage payments and settlements in each other's currencies.

