

## Mains Master

### T.N. Governor Ravi refuses to read out customary address

**Governor's Unprecedented Move:** Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi's refusal to read the customary inaugural address for the Legislative Assembly in 2024 raised eyebrows, marking an unprecedented development in the state's political landscape.

**Grounds for Refusal:** Governor Ravi justified his decision by pointing out concerns about the content of the government-prepared address. He specifically highlighted numerous passages containing misleading claims and facts, asserting that reading them would compromise the constitutional integrity of the Governor's address.

**Assembly's Immediate Response:** In response to the Governor's refusal, Speaker M. Appavu took charge and read the entire prepared address in Tamil. The Assembly swiftly passed a unanimous resolution, proposed by Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan, stating that only the officially provided text of the speech would be recorded.

**Echoes of a Previous Incident:** This resolution mirrors a decision made by the Assembly in the previous year when the Governor omitted certain parts of the address and made impromptu remarks. The current resolution reaffirms the Assembly's commitment to recording only the authorized text.

**Expunged Remarks and Clarifications:** Prior to the resolution, Speaker Appavu made remarks on the Governor's brief speech. However, in a subsequent press conference, he clarified that both the Governor's remarks and his own were officially declared "expunged," signifying their exclusion from the official records.

**Raj Bhavan's Counterstatement:** The Raj Bhavan, in an official release, shifted blame onto Speaker Appavu. It accused him of launching a tirade against the Governor in the Assembly, suggesting that he should have adhered to protocol by playing the national anthem instead.

**Underlying Political Tensions:** Beyond the immediate incident, the ongoing rift between Governor R.N. Ravi and the State government adds a deeper political dimension to the unfolding events, creating a backdrop of persistent disagreements and tensions.

### The real travesty

- Recent controversy: Governor R.N. Ravi's refusal to deliver DMK-prepared address in Tamil Nadu. This recent incident involves Governor R.N. Ravi's decision to abstain from delivering the customary address prepared by the DMK-run government in Tamil Nadu. The refusal has sparked debates on the appropriate role of Governors in parliamentary democracies.

Constitutional Issues Involved:

- Debate on Governors: Critics argue that a Governor profoundly disagreeing with State policies should vacate office. There's a critical discussion on whether Governors who strongly oppose the policies of the State government should continue holding office. Critics contend that such disagreement compromises the Governor's ability to fulfill the constitutional role impartially.
- Governor's role: Stressed as representing constitutional principles, not obstructing elected governments. The essence of a Governor's role is emphasized as one that should represent and uphold constitutional principles. The argument is against Governors becoming impediments to the functioning of elected governments.

Eroding the Dignity of Institutions:

- Politicization concern: Instances like Ravi's refusal contribute to controversies overshadowing the occasion. The politicization of the Governor's customary address, exemplified by instances such as Ravi's refusal, raises concerns about the potential for controversies to detract from the solemnity of the occasion.
- Questioning institutional dignity: Raises concerns about the growing politicization of customary addresses. The broader issue here is the impact of incidents like Ravi's refusal on the dignity of institutions. There's a worry that the increasing politicization of customary addresses could erode the respect and decorum associated with these formal proceedings.

Breaking the Norms of Parliamentary Democracy:

- Departure from tradition: In parliamentary democracy, elected government addresses should be delivered without interference. A fundamental norm in parliamentary democracies is the tradition that elected government addresses are delivered by Governors without interference. Ravi's refusal is viewed as a departure from this established practice.
- Ravi's refusal: Viewed as a deviation, potentially undermining democratic norms. The refusal by Governor Ravi is seen as a deviation from the norm of Governors playing a neutral role in parliamentary democracies. This has led to concerns about the potential impact on democratic norms.

Critical Estimate:

- Role of Governors: Tendency to align with ruling parties raises concerns about obstructing State governments led by adversaries. There's a critical examination of the observed tendency of Governors aligning with the ruling party at the Centre. This alignment is seen as a potential obstacle to the smooth functioning of State governments led by political adversaries.
- Threat to democratic principles: Governor's disagreement while retaining office seen as a potential challenge to democratic norms. The broader concern is that a Governor expressing profound disagreement with policies while continuing to hold office poses a potential threat to democratic principles. It introduces a dynamic that challenges the neutrality and impartiality expected from constitutional offices.

### A global alliance to bridge the gender equity gap

**India's Development Journey:** Emphasizing India's commitment to equality and inclusion in its development strategy, seen through initiatives like the G-20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, which prioritizes socio-economic empowerment, bridging the digital divide, and ensuring food security and healthcare with a focus on inclusivity, especially for women.

Background:

**Women's Reservation Bill:** A significant achievement, this bill reserves one-third of seats in Parliament and state assemblies for women, aiming to politically empower them and contribute to improved governance processes.

**Gender Budget Allocations:** The 2023-24 budget allocation of nearly \$27 billion demonstrates tangible financial commitment to advancing women-led development across various sectors.

Issues Involved:

**Limited Data:** Commendable progress is showcased in female labor force participation and education, but the absence of data on the gender pay gap in India leaves a gap in understanding the issue and its specific causes.



Potential Underlying Factors: Though not explicitly stated, potential reasons for the gender pay gap in India may include occupational segregation, limited access to opportunities, and wage discrimination.

Corrective Measures Taken:

Policy and Legislative Initiatives: Steps like the Women's Reservation Bill and increased gender budget allocations are significant in addressing structural inequalities.

Education and Skill Development Programs: Initiatives focusing on female education and skill development empower women with better qualifications and bargaining power in the workforce.

Self-Help Groups: Empowering women through self-help groups fosters financial independence and entrepreneurship, contributing to economic progress and closing the gender gap.

What Further Needs to be Done:

The Alliance for Global Good: Aims to share and develop scalable solutions through collaboration with experts and stakeholders, focusing on key areas like ed-tech, medical capacity building, healthcare interventions, skill development, agrotech, women's enterprise development, and access to capital.

Global Collaboration: Bringing together industry, think tanks, and investors worldwide fosters knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and coordinated action towards global gender equality.

Opportunity:

For Businesses: Opportunities lie in sharing best practices for gender diversity, investing in proven programs for women's empowerment, and actively participating in shaping inclusive business practices.

For the Global Community: The Alliance provides a platform for learning, development, and collective action, working together to address the gender gap at local, national, and international levels, leveraging India's expertise in areas like digital technology and pharmaceuticals.

Conclusion:

India's leadership in championing gender equality through initiatives like the Alliance for Global Good sets a positive example. Addressing the data gap, tackling root causes of the gender pay gap, and implementing effective solutions through collaborative efforts can move us closer to achieving a truly equitable and inclusive world.

## Anti-Profiteering

Supreme Court of India issuing notices to the Union of India, the GST council and the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, on the constitutional validity of anti-profiteering provisions under the GST regime.

The petitioner has argued that these provisions are arbitrary and vague and cannot be sustained. The court has asked the government to respond to these notices.

This is a significant development as it could potentially impact the way businesses are taxed under the GST regime. The outcome of this case will be keenly watched by businesses and tax experts alike.

Anti-Profiteering Activity:

- Ensures any reduction in GST rates or benefit of input tax credit is passed on to recipients through price reductions.
- Failure to adjust prices despite tax reductions constitutes "profiteering."

Anti-Profiteering Mechanism under CGST Act:

- Three-tier structure for investigation and adjudication of profiteering complaints.
- National Anti-Profiteering Authority
- Directorate General of Safeguards
- State-level screening committees and standing committees.

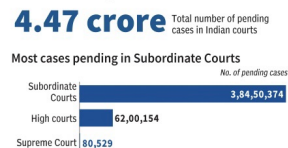
## Allahabad, Bombay high courts have maximum backlog of cases

Context:

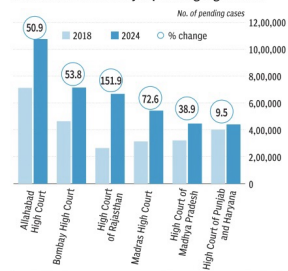
- India's growing population and evolving socio-economic landscape have placed increased pressure on the legal system.
  - Aspiring for a truly equitable and inclusive society necessitates a well-functioning judiciary that delivers timely and fair justice.
  - However, the Indian judicial system currently faces a critical challenge: a massive backlog of pending cases.
- Problem:

- Massive Case Backlog: A staggering 4.47 crore cases are pending in Indian courts, with numbers continuously rising since 2018. This creates a significant burden on the justice system, leading to lengthy delays and frustrations for litigants.

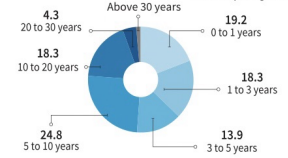
Justice delayed



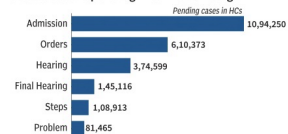
Allahabad and Bombay top among high courts



Half the cases in HCs drag for more than 5 years



66% cases are pending in admission stage



Source: National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)

As of Feb 12, 2024

## Reasons:

- **Population Pressure:** As India's population grows, so does the potential for litigation, placing additional strain on courts in densely populated areas. This highlights the need for proactive measures to adapt the judicial system to a growing population.
- **Government as Litigant:** The government's frequent involvement in legal disputes contributes significantly to the caseload, raising questions about streamlining its legal strategies and exploring alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. This emphasizes the need for reforms within the government's approach to litigation.
- **Vague Criminal Laws:** Overly broad and ambiguous criminal offenses lead to unnecessary arrests and court involvement, adding to the burden on the system. This necessitates reforming criminal laws to ensure clarity and precision, minimizing unnecessary cases.
- **Inefficient Investigations:** Flawed investigative processes might result in bringing weak cases to court, further straining resources and delaying genuine cases. This underscores the importance of strengthening investigative practices to focus on strong cases.

## Possible Solutions:

- **Increase Judge Strength:** Appointing more judges is crucial to address the workload imbalance and expedite case resolution. This requires addressing factors like judicial vacancies and streamlining appointment processes.
- **Optimize Government Litigation:** Analyzing the reasons behind the government's frequent involvement in court cases and exploring alternative dispute resolution mechanisms could reduce its burden on the judicial system. This necessitates collaboration between the legal system and the government.
- **Reform Criminal Justice System:** Revising vague criminal laws and improving investigative practices to focus on strong cases could minimize unnecessary litigation and free up resources for genuine matters. This demands coordinated efforts from lawmakers, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary.
- **Embrace Technology:** Utilizing virtual courts and online platforms for hearings and submissions can improve accessibility, affordability, and potentially expedite case processing. This requires investment in technology infrastructure and training for relevant stakeholders.
- **Streamline Processes:** Analyzing and optimizing court procedures, admission processes, and case management systems can potentially reduce delays and improve efficiency. This involves collaboration within the judiciary to identify and implement effective reforms.

## Farmers' protest 2.0

## Farmers Protest 2024: Expanded Breakdown

### Context:

- Two years after the successful year-long protest against three farm laws, Indian farmers are once again mobilizing under new leadership.
- Over 250 unions representing a significant portion of the farming community are demanding better support and reforms, claiming unfulfilled promises from the government.

### Background:

- The 2020-21 protests led to the repeal of the contentious farm laws that aimed to liberalize agricultural markets. However, key demands like a comprehensive Minimum Support Price (MSP) guarantee remain unaddressed.
- Two new groups are leading the current protest:
  - Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM), formed by Sarwan Singh Pandher, convener of the Punjab-based Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee (KMSC).
  - Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political), a breakaway faction from the original Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) led by Jagjit Singh Dallewal.
- The original SKM, comprising over 500 farmer unions, is not directly involved but supports the cause and criticizes government actions against the current protest.

### Key Demands of Farmers:

- **MSP Guarantee:**
  - Enact a law guaranteeing MSP for all crops, based on the C2 + 50% formula recommended by the M.S. Swaminathan Commission.
  - This formula considers the cost of production (C2) plus 50% profit margin to ensure fair returns for farmers.

- **Debt Waiver:**
  - Provide complete debt relief for all farmers and agricultural laborers struggling under financial burden.
  - This aims to address one of the biggest challenges faced by Indian farmers, leading to poverty and distress.
- **Land Acquisition Reform:**
  - Implement the Land Acquisition Act of 2013 effectively, requiring written consent from farmers before land acquisition and ensuring fair compensation at four times the collector rate.
  - This aims to protect farmers' land rights and prevent forced displacement without adequate compensation.
- **WTO Withdrawal:**
  - Exit the World Trade Organization (WTO) and freeze all free trade agreements (FTAs), arguing that these have harmed Indian agriculture by exposing it to unfair competition.
  - This demand reflects concerns about the impact of globalization on domestic markets and farmer livelihoods.
- **Other Demands:**
  - Pensions for farmers and farm laborers for financial security in their later years.
  - Compensation for families of farmers who died during the 2020-21 protests, including job opportunities for one family member.
  - Scrapping the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020, fearing potential harm to farmers' interests.
  - Expanding the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to 200 days of employment per year with a daily wage of Rs. 700, and linking it with farming activities for better income opportunities.
  - Stricter penalties on companies producing fake seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers to ensure quality and protect farmers from exploitation.
  - Establishing a national commission for spices like chili and turmeric to support this important agricultural sector.
  - Protecting the rights of indigenous communities over resources like water, forests, and land, recognizing their traditional and sustainable practices.

### M.S. Swaminathan Commission Recommendations:

- This commission, led by eminent agricultural scientist M.S. Swaminathan, submitted a comprehensive report in 2006 outlining a roadmap for agricultural development in India.
- Key recommendations include MSP guarantee, input cost reduction, market infrastructure development, income support measures, and promoting sustainable farming practices.
- While some aspects have been partially implemented, full-fledged reforms based on the commission's report remain a demand of many farmers.

### Challenges with Agricultural Marketing:

- Indian farmers face several challenges in the marketing system, leading to low incomes and vulnerability:
  - Uncertain markets with volatile prices and limited bargaining power due to fragmented individual selling.
  - Inadequate storage facilities, transportation infrastructure, and processing units, leading to post-harvest losses and reduced value realization.
  - Limited access to information, technology, and market linkages, hindering informed decision-making and fair market participation.

### Government Initiatives:

- The current government has undertaken some initiatives to address these challenges:
  - Increasing MSP for some key crops like paddy and wheat.
  - Launching the e-NAM (electronic National Agriculture Market) platform for online trading of agricultural produce.
  - Promoting Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to empower farmers through collective bargaining and market access.
  - Investments in rural infrastructure development and irrigation schemes.
- However, these initiatives haven't addressed the core concerns of farmers regarding a comprehensive income security framework, wider market reforms, and tackling structural issues in the agricultural sector.

# Prelims Booster

## Merchant Shipping Act recast in the works

- Objective: Revise the existing Merchant Shipping Act of 1958 to incorporate updated international maritime conventions and facilitate ship registration under the Indian flag.
- Incorporating International Conventions: New provisions aim to align with current international maritime agreements and enhance adherence to global standards in merchant shipping practices.
- Facilitating Ship Registration: Allow easier registration of ships for NRIs, OCIs, corporate entities, and LLPs, streamlining the registration processes.
- Electronic Registration and Recognition: Enable electronic registration of vessels and recognition of e-documents for streamlined processes, enhancing efficiency.
- Addressing Air Pollution and Unsafe Vessels: Define and address air pollution from ships operating at sea and take appropriate actions against "unsafe vessels."
- Three-Tier Dispute Resolution Mechanism: Establish a three-tier mechanism for resolving disputes, focusing on disagreements between ship-owners and salvors, as well as between seafarers and ship owners, masters, or agents.
- Statutory Measures for Vessel Safety: Introduce stringent rules for marine incidents and emergent response, boosting ship-owner confidence with appropriate statutory measures ensuring vessel safety.
- Prevention of Pollution: Implement strict rules for preventing pollution, emphasizing environmental protection and legal consequences for violations.
- Digital Technology and Ease of Doing Business: Focus on reducing compliance burden and promoting ease of doing business through embracing digital technology for improved ownership criteria and efficient processes.
- Ongoing Deliberations: The Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways is leading the deliberation process, with proposed changes currently under discussion for comprehensive updates.
- History of Revision Attempts: Previous attempts in 2016 were unsuccessful, but the revision process restarted in February-March 2021, with the draft reviewed by the Legislative Department between July 2022 and July 2023, receiving concurrence.

## India, Bangladesh join hands for tiger conservation in Sunderbans

- India and Bangladesh have joined forces for tiger conservation in the Sunderbans, with a focus on preserving biodiversity and promoting harmonious coexistence with tigers, reflecting a cross-border initiative aimed at mutual conservation efforts.
- The initiative involves the active participation of twelve students (Tiger Scouts) from the Madhya Purba Gurguria Adarsha Vidyalaya school in Kultali block, along with their teachers, the Wildlife Trust of India's (WTI) primary response team (PRT) members, and "Bagh Bondhs" (friends of the tiger) from the local community in Kultali, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, in collaboration with counterparts from Bangladesh.
- This people-centric engagement includes knowledge exchange on livelihood interventions and sustainable practices, aiming to prevent human-wildlife conflicts and promote coexistence with tigers, supported by the Integrated Tiger Habitat Conservation Program backed by IUCN and Germany's KW Development Bank.
- Students from remote areas of the Indian Sunderbans gain valuable insights from their visit to Bangladesh, learning about tiger conservation efforts and biodiversity preservation, providing them with a unique opportunity to understand the involvement of the local community in tiger conservation.
- Successful shared experiences include livelihood interventions to prevent human-wildlife conflicts, resulting in no tiger or human casualties in the Indian Sunderbans since 2018-19, highlighting the effectiveness of the conservation efforts and the importance of sustainable practices.
- The project, supported by non-governmental organizations, aims to continue interactions between India and Bangladesh despite concluding in October 2024, emphasizing the long-term commitment to conservation and collaboration between the two countries.

## Earth-wide telescope confirms black hole's shadow is 'real'

- Scientists have unveiled new details of a colossal black hole located 53 million light-years away, initially photographed by the earth-wide Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) in 2017, providing the first visual evidence of the existence of black holes and confirming a fundamental prediction of general relativity. This groundbreaking feat marked a significant milestone in astrophysics, offering a glimpse into the mysterious and awe-inspiring nature of these cosmic entities.
- In a new paper published on January 18, EHT scientists reported capturing details at the level of the black hole's event horizon, showcasing the formation of a distinct ring around it. This achievement represents a remarkable advancement in our understanding of black holes, shedding light on the intricate dynamics near the event horizon, including the phenomenon of gravitational lensing, which distorts the light emitted by objects in the vicinity of the black hole.
- The EHT, a worldwide network of radio telescopes, improved its data-recording rate, spatial tracking ability, and added the Greenland Telescope to the array, enhancing the resolution and enabling the capture of the black hole's 'shadow' and the subsequent details at the level of the event horizon. This technological advancement has revolutionized our ability to observe and study cosmic phenomena, providing unprecedented insights into the behavior and characteristics of black holes.
- The new campaign involved nine stations gathering data across six observation days in April 2018, in four frequencies, with subsequent correlation of the datasets to increase the signal-to-noise ratio. This meticulous and comprehensive approach allowed scientists to reveal significant changes in the closure phase and track shifts in the configuration or structure of the black hole, offering a deeper understanding of its complex nature and behavior.
- The findings confirmed the presence of an asymmetric ring structure approximately 42 microarcseconds wide, consistent with predictions for a shadow formed by lensed emission around a rotating black hole with a mass of around 6.5 billion times that of the Sun. These revelations provide valuable insights into the hidden physics that control the relationship between the accretion disk, the jet, and the magnetic environment around the black hole, contributing to our understanding of the fundamental forces at play in the cosmos.
- Future plans for the EHT collaboration include a 'movie project' in 2026 to track the black hole over a month or two, enabling the observation of brightness changes along the black hole and further enhancing our understanding of these cosmic phenomena. This ambitious endeavor holds the potential to unlock even more secrets of black holes, offering a captivating and dynamic view of these enigmatic cosmic entities.

## Event Horizon

- The event horizon is a theoretical boundary that delineates the region around a black hole where the gravitational pull is so intense that nothing, not even light, can escape its gravitational grasp, representing a critical concept in our understanding of black holes and their enigmatic properties.
- In the framework of general relativity, this phenomenon arises due to the extreme curvature of spacetime caused by the massive concentration of matter within the black hole, leading to the formation of a boundary that isolates the inner workings of a black hole from the external universe.
- When an object or light passes beyond the event horizon, it becomes subject to the irreversible gravitational force pulling it toward the central singularity of the black hole, a point of infinite density where the normal laws of physics break down, creating a region of extreme gravitational influence.
- For an outside observer, events occurring inside the event horizon become hidden, as any information or signals emitted from within cannot traverse the gravitational field to reach an external observer, emphasizing the isolating nature of the event horizon in spacetime.
- This characteristic creates a distinct boundary in spacetime, shaping our comprehension of gravity's extreme effects on the fabric of spacetime in these regions of the cosmos, and contributing to our understanding of the fundamental forces at play in the universe.

## Gravitational Lensing

- Gravitational lensing, a phenomenon predicted by Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity, occurs when the gravitational field of a massive object, such as a galaxy or a black hole, bends the path of light as it passes near the object, creating a distortion or lensing effect that influences the apparent shape, brightness, and position of the background object being observed.
- This effect is a result of massive objects causing spacetime to curve around them, leading to the bending of light paths as light from a distant object passes through the curved spacetime near a massive foreground object, altering its trajectory and resulting in observable effects such as the bending of light paths, magnification, and distortion of shapes.
- Gravitational lensing has become a valuable tool for astronomers to study distant galaxies, dark matter distribution, and even detect exoplanets, offering unique opportunities to explore the universe and test the predictions of general relativity, with strong and weak gravitational lensing providing insights into the distribution of mass in foreground objects and enabling detailed studies of distant celestial phenomena.