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SC firm on unearthing 'larger plot against CJI'

Why in news?

The Supreme Court resolved to “enquire, enquire and enquire” till it gets to the root of whether sexual harassment allegations against Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi is part of a larger conspiracy hatched by a gang of “disgruntled employees and fixers.”

‘Crucial evidence:

- A Special Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra entertained an affidavit handed over to it in a sealed cover by a young lawyer, Utsav Singh Bains, who claimed he was enticed with money to frame the Chief Justice in a false case.
- Mr. Bains said he had crucial evidence to show that a lobby was at work to bring disrepute to the Chief Justice and the judiciary.
- In its four-page order, the Bench recorded that Mr. Bains named two former apex court employees, Tapan Kumar Chakraborty and Manav Sharma, who were recently dismissed from service for allegedly doctoring a judicial order in a contempt case between Ericsson and businessman Anil Ambani.
- The Bench summoned the CBI Director, Director of the Intelligence Bureau and the Commissioner of Police, Delhi, to the judges’ chambers at half-past noon. The judges requested the three top officials to seize relevant material supporting Mr. Bains’ affidavit.
- This development comes a day after the court formed a **committee of three Supreme Court judges to examine the allegations of sexual harassment** raised by a former woman employee against

Chief Justice Gogoi.

- The Bench clarified that its proceedings on Mr. Bains' claims would not 'supersede' the in-house enquiry being conducted by the judges' panel into the woman's allegations.

Apprehensions:

- Senior advocate Indira Jaising voiced apprehensions that the judicial proceedings would negate the mandate of the judges' committee.
- However, the Bench said the court proceedings had nothing to do with the woman's claims, but was only confined to the allegations of Mr. Bains.
- The court has been in the spotlight after the woman's affidavit, narrating a train of events leading to her dismissal and alleged victimisation, was sent to 22 Supreme Court judges and published by several news websites on April 20.
- Disgruntled employees have ganged up... The 'fixing part' itself is of grave concern. It has no place in the system. He (Bains) has named a fixer. We want to go into the root of the matter... We want to know who these fixers are. They have no right to be part of a judicial system... We cannot allow the denigration of the judiciary. We will enquire and enquire and enquire until we get to the truth, to the root of the matter," Justice Mishra declared, referring to the affidavit filed by Mr. Bains
- The Bench, also comprising Justice Deepak Gupta, said it cannot just keep quiet when a lawyer approaches it with an affidavit claiming a frame-up. "Otherwise, this institution will not survive. You will not survive. If we keep quiet, the country will lose faith in this institution. The institution is bigger than all of us," Justice Mishra said.
- Mr. Bains, in his affidavit filed on April 22, said he was approached by a man who identified himself to be a relative of the former apex court employee.
- The judge observed how Chief Justice Gogoi has been leading the court with a sense of independence, and how his uncompromising nature may have irked certain quarters.

Crucial evidence:

- Mr. Bains went on to file a second hand-written affidavit in the post-lunch hearing. He said he had more crucial evidence and wanted to

file another affidavit with more 'clues.'

- When Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal pointed out that a person cannot make allegations and then come to court with half the evidence, the court gave Mr. Bains time till 10.30 a.m. on April 25 to file a comprehensive affidavit.
 - Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said a Special Investigation Team should be constituted by the Supreme Court to investigate the contents of Mr. Bains' affidavit. "Even if there is an element of truth in the affidavit, the allegations in it should be investigated thoroughly."
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Constitution of J. Bobde panel violates the law

Why in news?

A wide range of women across disciplines wrote to the judges of the Supreme Court saying the **constitution of the in-house committee led by Justice S.A. Bobde** to examine the sexual harassment allegations levelled against Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi was in "complete violation" of the sexual harassment of women at workplace law.

Concerns:

- They said the formation of the committee tilted the balance against the woman who had alleged sexual harassment against the CJI.
- Justice Bobde has appointed a committee with himself as chair and Justice N.V. Ramana and Justice Indira Banerjee as members.
- The constitution of this committee with no external member is in complete violation of The **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act 2013**," the petition said.
- The petition is authored by women scholars, advocates, journalists, writers, activists and civil rights organisations across the country
- Quoting media reports, the petition said the Justice Bobde committee would start hearing on April 26 and had no fixed timeframe to finish the proceedings.
- It would "follow an in-house procedure and will not allow legal

representation to either parties. While Mr. Ranjan Gogoi may not need legal representation.

Tilting the balance:

- This is tilting the balance against the complainant, again violating the spirit of the **Visakha judgment** and The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act 2013.
 - The petition demanded that “keeping in mind the magnitude of the complaint” a **special enquiry committee** consisting of credible individuals should be constituted to conduct a thorough enquiry at the earliest and create an atmosphere of transparency and confidence for the complainant woman to depose.
 - It said the Chief Justice should “refrain from transacting official duties and responsibilities until the completion of the enquiry”.
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The Supreme Court committee and institutional bias

What is the issue?

The Supreme Court constituted a committee comprising Justice S.A. Bobde, Justice N.V. Ramana and Justice Indira Banerjee. All three judges command universal respect on account of their competence, objectivity, experience and independence. Two of them, Justices Bobde and Ramana, will become Chief Justice of India in coming years. In normal times, this would be a dream committee.

Serious Questions:

- Yet, the constitution of the committee raises very serious and profound questions that need to be debated and addressed at the outset. Any delay will result in negation of the rule of law.

Visakha Guidelines:

- The Supreme Court’s judgment in **1997 in Visakha v. State of**

Rajasthan is a watershed in its history.

- In the absence of any domestic law occupying a field providing for measures to check the evils of **sexual harassment at all workplaces**, the Supreme Court invoked its extraordinary powers under Article 32 to lay down a new law to fill the vacuum.
- In so doing, the judges laid emphasis on Fundamental Rights under Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(g) and 21 of the Constitution together with International Conventions and Article 51C and 253 of the Constitution.
- They emphasised **guarantee of gender equality and right to work with human dignity** among others.
- The judges relied upon the **Beijing Declaration of 1995** where the Chief Justices of Asia and Pacific had inter alia declared that among the objectives and functions of the judiciary is “**to ensure that all persons are able to live securely under the rule of law**”. Relying upon “Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women”, the judges referred to the **rights of women** and in particular, the right to work, as an inalienable right of all human beings and to “the right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction”.
- Accordingly they declared, “In view of the above, and the absence of enacted law to provide for the **effective enforcement of the basic human right of gender equality and guarantee against sexual harassment and abuse, more particularly against sexual harassment at workplaces**, we lay down the guidelines and norms specified hereinafter for due observance at all workplaces or other institutions, until a legislation is enacted for the purpose.”

The guidelines and norms laid down are:

1. **Duty of the employer or other responsible persons in workplaces and other institutions:** It shall be the duty of the employer or other responsible persons in workplaces or other institutions to **prevent or deter the commission of acts of sexual harassment**.
2. **Complaints Committee:** The **Complaints Committee should be headed by a woman** and not less than half of its members should be women.

3. Accordingly, the court finally directed, “We direct that the above guidelines and norms would be strictly observed in all workplaces for the preservation and **enforcement of the right to gender equality of the working women**.”
4. These directions would be binding and enforceable in law until suitable legislation is enacted to occupy the field.”

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act 2013:

- Parliament enacted the law in 2013. It is “an Act to provide protection against sexual harassment of women at workplace”.
- Section 3 expressly declares “no woman shall be subjected to sexual harassment at any workplace”.
- The expression ‘workplace’ is defined in an inclusive manner and though it **does not include court premises expressly**, they are deemed to be included.
- Sections 4 and 7 are relevant and speak about **constitution of internal complaints committee and local complaints committee** categorically requiring the **chairperson to be a woman** employed at a senior level at the workplace or from among eminent women from the field of social work and committed to the cause of women.
- They also provide that “members be from among the employees, NGO espousing cause of women, etc. be women”.

Court staff outside legal framework:

- **The Gender Sensitisation and Sexual Harassment of Women at Supreme Court (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Guidelines, 2013**, in the Preamble, have laudatory objectives, but appear to exclude the court staff from their umbrella and protection.
- **Constitution of the committee** under Regulation 4 of at least seven members is to be done in accordance with the judgment in the Visakha case and essentially requires **only women to be appointed including as the chairperson** from the Bench, the Bar, Registry or the non-governmental organisations involved with the cause of women.

- This is the safe guide to constitute a committee.
- The Supreme Court has failed to implement Visakha judgment in its own precincts, and Parliament has failed to apply the Act of 2013 to court premises across the country.
- Clearly, the **judges have kept themselves out of the ambit of the Act and the regulations**, at least in the Supreme Court. This raises very serious questions as to the rationale and justification of so doing.

Fairness to complainant:

- Be that as it may, with binding Visakha judgment, the court could not have appointed the committee as it did to examine the allegations of sexual harassment against one of their own, the Chief Justice.
- The constitution of the committee is contrary to the letter and spirit of the Act and the guidelines.
- The very rationale for ensuring that the investigating committee for sexual harassment is **headed by a woman and should comprise essentially women** was to ensure fairness and comfort to the complainant.
- It would be taking away the dignity of the woman if she were to appear before a committee comprised of men even to describe in detail the sexual harassment suffered by her. The sensitivity required will be lost.

Troubling statements:

- To add to the woes of the complainant are extremely troubling statements issued by the Secretary-General of the Court and by the office-bearers of the Union of the Employees of the Court, both terming her allegations to be false and expressing solidarity with the Chief Justice.
- Add to these the newspaper reports to the effect that the judges in a meeting held on Monday morning expressed support to the Chief Justice.
- **Where then is the possibility for her to get fairness in the inquiry?** The only witnesses who could possibly support her version are the employees of the Court.
- It is inconceivable that they can give independent evidence with this background and that too before a committee comprising three judges, two of whom are going to be Chief Justices in the future. The fate of

the complainant stands sealed.

Fairness of Justice:

- Natural Justice or Divine Justice is a great humanising principle intended to empower law with fairness to secure justice and prevent miscarriage of justice. Good administration would naturally require fair play in action.
- As has been well said, **“the history of liberty has largely been the history of the observants of procedural safeguards”**.
- The first principle of natural justice is the rule against bias and is based on two salutary principles, **“Justice should not only be done, but manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done”** and **“Judges, like Caesar’s wife, should be above suspicion”**.
- **Institutional bias is against natural justice.**
- The Supreme Court itself in the case of Institute of Chartered Accountants in 1986 declared that the removal of a member of the institute on a ground of misconduct was vitiated on account of bias as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Disciplinary Committee were Ex-Officio President and Vice-President of the Council and so were other members of the committee drawn from the Council.
- The report will have to be placed before the Full Court, which appears to have unanimously constituted this committee and in that, the three members of the committee will also sit.
- As early as 1957, the Supreme Court in ManakLal’s Case has held “in such cases the test is not whether the bias has effected the judgment: the test always is and must be whether a litigant could reasonably apprehend that a bias attributable to a member of the Tribunal might have operated against him in the final decision of the Tribunal, it is in this sense that it is often said that justice must not only be done but must also appear to be done.”

Way ahead:

Justices must redeem themselves. Events starting from Saturday (including those that have emerged for period prior thereto) have left citizens bewildered. Unless humane corrective measures are taken the court may lose people’s trust.

Court adjourns plea on woman's bail cancellation

Why in news?

A Delhi court adjourned to May 23 the hearing on a Delhi Police plea to cancel bail of a woman who has accused Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi of harassing her when she was employed with the apex court.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Manish Khurana listed the matter for the next date as the summons for the appearance of the complainant could not be served.

The court had on April 20 adjourned the hearing to April 24 as the probe agency failed to supply a copy of the bail cancellation application to her.

Misgivings over SC judges' panel

Why in news?

The former Supreme Court employee, who has levelled allegations of sexual harassment against Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, has expressed reservations on the inclusion of Justice N.V. Ramana in the in-house committee led by Justice S.A. Bobde.

SC Staffer claims:

- In a four-page response addressed to the Supreme Court on a notice issued to her to appear before the committee on Friday, the former staffer claimed that as she was once posted in the CJI's residence office, she knows that "Justice Ramana is a close friend of the CJI and is like a family member to him.
- Honourable Justice Ramana is a frequent visitor to the residence of the CJI. Because of this I fear that my affidavit and evidence will not

receive an objective and fair hearing,” she alleged in her reply on April 24 to the Supreme Court.

- She said she got to know from the news on April 20 that Justice Ramana, while speaking in Hyderabad at the centenary celebrations of the High Court building, said: “We have seen such attempts in the past and we will see more in future. Some friends in their private conversations are pointing out that criticism used to be against politicians only. But today, judges are also under attack. Do not be wary of such criticism as we have to uphold the dignity of the judiciary.”

Lawyer of her own choice:

- She sought the presence of a lawyer of her own choice while appearing before the committee, saying it was her “basic human right”. She said she was hopeful of a fair enquiry.
- Extending her gratitude to the Supreme Court judges for constituting the committee, she said as an ordinary woman she was “full of fear and anxiety as I am in the unfortunate position of having to speak against the Chief Justice of India.”
- She said she was concerned that instead of forming a special inquiry committee of senior retired judges, the judges had formed the in-house committee.
- She asked the Supreme Court judges to reflect on the law laid down under the Visakha guidelines by the apex court and compliance with The Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment in Workplace law enacted in 2013. S
- he said the committee should be headed by a woman and have an external woman member.

Two IS men linked to Easter blasts

Why in news?

Two suspects involved in the deadly Easter attacks in Sri Lanka are Islamic State (IS) returnees from Syria and Iraq, investigators have found.

ISIS Link:

- The suspects' exact role in planning and executing the ghastly serial bombings remains unclear, but Sri Lankan intelligence has established that the two young men were IS-trained.
- Two years ago, Sri Lanka highlighted over 30 of its youth joining IS in Syria.
- They came from "**well-educated, affluent families**", the then Justice Minister told Parliament in November 2016.
- But in the three years since, Sri Lankan authorities have made no public mention of any threat from radical Islamist forces in the island.
- Not even when they arrested a group of Muslim youth last December for vandalising Buddha statues.
- They suspected that the youth had links with militant organisations abroad, but the findings since are unclear to many, the source said.

Local Outfits:

- However, the lead that investigators have now obtained could potentially help Sri Lanka ascertain how the local **National Thowheed Jamaath** may have worked with the IS, which has claimed responsibility for the eight explosions that killed 350 people, including 45 children.
- Further, the ongoing probe has also revealed that the jackets used by the suicide bombers were 'typically used' by the IS, a source familiar with the progress said.
- So far Sri Lanka's investigating agencies have identified 139 persons as members of the NTJ and associated groups and "traced all of them", an official Colombo-based source said.
- It is believed that not all of them are militant, but details of their possible role in the attacks are still emerging
- Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has also established that **nine suicide bombers**, including a woman, were part of the team that executed the deadly serial blasts.
- The identity of all but one of them has been established, according to State Minister of Defence.
- Most of them are well educated youth coming from middle, and upper middle-class families. One of them is believed to have got an undergraduate degree from the UK, and a post-graduate degree from Australia.

- A total of 60 suspects have been arrested so far. The CID, which is chiefly investigating the attacks, is interrogating at least 32 suspects now, while the rest are in custody at different police stations.
- Investigators are also studying if suspects had been moving about in the region in the recent past, official sources said.

International assistance:

- Meanwhile, **eight countries are said to be actively supporting Sri Lanka** in its investigations and response to the mass atrocity, the biggest the island has witnessed in its post-war decade.
- Briefing Colombo-based diplomats recently, President Maithripala Sirisena described them as “very powerful countries” with “extensive technological and military knowledge,” a diplomatic source said, requesting anonymity.
- The FBI, Interpol, and teams from the UK and Australia are currently in Colombo to assist with the investigations, authorities said.

Prior intelligence:

- Further, President Sirisena spoke of Sri Lanka having received prior intelligence on the attacks from a friendly country.
 - Early April, **India had alerted Sri Lanka on the imminent threat**, but both President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said they were personally unaware of the warning, though their intelligence officials had the input.
 - President Sirisena, who has vowed ‘strict action’ on relevant officials who failed to pass on the intelligence to him, has decided to overhaul the security apparatus.
 - Minister Wijewardene, who said he was also not informed of the threat, admitted to a **“major lapse” on the part of the government in intelligence sharing**. “The government has to take responsibility,” he said.
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Potato farmers cry foul as PepsiCo slaps case on them

Why in news?

Just days after multi-billion-dollar conglomerate PepsiCo sued four Gujarati farmers, asking them to pay Rs. 1.05 crore each as damages for **'infringing its rights' by growing the potato variety used in its Lays chips**, farmers groups have launched a campaign calling for government intervention.

Potential threat:

- Warning that the case could set a precedent for other crops, farmers groups are pointing out that the law allows them to grow and sell any variety of crop or even seed as long as they do not sell branded seed of registered varieties.
- The farmers want the **Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPV&FRA)** to make a submission in court on their behalf and fund legal costs through the **National Gene Fund**.
- When asked for a response, a PepsiCo India spokesperson said: "Given the issue is sub judice, it would not be proper to offer detailed comments.
- The PPV&FRA registrar who has jurisdiction for vegetable crops, said that the case had come to the notice of the Authority and it was looking into it.
- These **farmers are small, holding** around 3-4 acres on an average, and had grown a **potato crop from farm-saved seed** after they accessed the potato seed locally in 2018," according to a letter sent to the PPV&FRA by farmers groups.

Secret video footage:

- They alleged that PepsiCo hired a private detective agency to pose as potential buyers and take secret video footage, and collect samples from farmers' fields without disclosing its real intent.
 - PepsiCo then filed suit, the letter said. It added that at least nine farmers in three districts have been charged since 2018.
 - On April 9, an Ahmedabad commercial court judge granted an ex-parte interim injunction against the farmers and appointed a commissioner to prepare an inventory, take samples and send them to a government lab for analysis.
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Magic milk: fighting infections with a clue from the echidna

Why in news?

In yet another attempt to find an **alternative to bacteria-resistant antibiotics**, scientists at the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research - Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (**CSIR-CCMB**) have found out that milk of an egg-laying mammal contains a novel anti-microbial protein that keeps its young ones safe from infections.

Findings of the Study:

- Echidnas, also known as **spiny anteaters**, are unique **egg-laying mammals found only in Australia and New Guinea**.
- Their young one's hatch from eggs at a very early stage of development and depend completely on their mother's milk.
- But the mammary glands of the female echidnas are devoid of nipples, forcing the young ones to lick milk from the mother's body surface and potentially making them vulnerable to micro-organisms.
- However, nature protects its own. A research team led by scientist Satish Kumar found out that the **milk of the echidna has a protein that can puncture the cell membranes of multiple bacterial species, thus destroying the source of infection**.
- The scientist said that the protein could be used as an alternative to antibiotics.
- The research team has found out ways to produce the protein in large quantities using **E. coli**.
- Scientists pointed out that there is a **rise of superbugs** due to the indiscriminate use of antibiotics by the animal husbandry industry to raise healthy livestock.
- These superbugs can cause **mastitis, an infection of the mammary gland**, in lactating dairy animals.
- Dr. Kumar's team has been able to show that the protein from echidna milk is effective against mastitis-causing bacteria.

Ghana launches medical drone service

Why in news?

Ghana launched a fleet of drones to carry medical supplies to remote areas, with President Nana Akufo-Addo declaring it would become the “world’s largest drone delivery service”.

About the Project:

- The craft are part of an ambitious plan to leapfrog problems of **medical access in a country with poor roads**.
- No one in Ghana should die because they can’t access the medicine they need in an emergency,” Mr. Akufo-Addo said in a statement to mark the launch.
- That’s why Ghana is launching the world’s largest drone delivery service,” Mr. Akufo-Addo said.
- It represents a major step towards giving everyone in this country **universal access to lifesaving medicine**.
- The drones have been flying test runs with blood and vaccines, but the project was officially inaugurated at the main drone base in Omenako.
- Omenako is the first of four distribution centres which, when fully operational, will each have 30 drones serving 500 clinics within an 80-kilometre radius.
- Operator Zipline, a U.S.-based company, said the three other sites should be up and running by the end of 2019.
- The drones are planned to ferry 150 different medicines, blood, and vaccines to more than 2,000 clinics serving over 12 million people, roughly 40% of the population.
- Zipline first began delivering blood and medicine in East Africa in 2016, deploying drones in **Rwanda, a country dubbed the “land of a thousand hills”** where access to many villages by road is difficult.
- Millions of people across the world in both developed and developing countries die each year because they can’t get the medicine they need

when they need it.

- Doctors can order blood or medicine by sending a message by mobile phone.
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China announces plan to build moon station in 10 years

Why in news?

Beijing plans to send a manned mission to the moon and to build a research station there within the next decade, state media reported.

Aim for superpower status:

- China aims to achieve space superpower status and took a major step towards that goal when it became the **first nation to land a rover on the far side of the moon** in January.
 - It now plans to build a **scientific research station on the moon's south pole** within the next 10 years.
 - Beijing plans to launch a Mars probe by 2020 and confirmed that a fourth lunar probe, the **Chang'e-5**, will be launched by the end of the year.
 - Originally scheduled to collect moon samples in the second half of 2017, the Chang'e-5 was delayed after its planned carrier, the powerful **Long March 5 Y2 rocket**, failed during a separate launch in July 2017.
 - China also announced that its **Long March-5B rocket** will make its maiden flight in the first half of 2020, carrying the core parts of a planned space station.
 - The **Tiangong or "Heavenly Palace"** will go into orbit in 2022, the China Manned Space Engineering Office said.
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NASA probe picks up first detected marsquake

Why in news?

NASA's **InSight lander** has picked up a gentle rumble at Mars, believed to be the first marsquake ever detected.

Further Studies:

- InSight's quake monitors recorded and measured the faint signal April 6, and scientists announced the finding late on April 23.
 - Philippe Lognonne from the Paris Institute of Earth Physics said that it was exciting to finally have proof that **Mars was still seismically active**.
 - Mars is not nearly as geologically active as Earth and, like our moon, lacks tectonic plates.
 - Researchers are still analysing the data, as well as three other even fainter seismic signals detected since mid-March.
 - By analysing marsquakes, scientists hope to learn more about how rocky planets are formed.
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Libor transition opens up avenues for IT majors

Why in news?

The **London Interbank Offered Rate (Libor)** transition opens up a sizeable business opportunity for large consulting firms such as PwC, KPMG, EY and Deloitte and also for global IT firms, including leading players in India.

Financial Migration:

- Individual banks, financial institutions and lending houses are expected to spend anything from \$50 million to upwards of \$100 million a year for the next two years until the migration is completed by the end of 2021. Analysts say IT will be 50% of this opportunity.
- Regulators globally have asked firms **to move away from Libor to**

other alternate, risk-free rates (RFRs).

- Derivatives, bonds, mortgages, loans, mutual funds, securities, underwriting, deposits, advances, pension funds and contracts, worth \$370 trillion, are currently linked to the **scam-hit Libor**.

Opportunities:

- Opportunities around the migration include assessment of current exposure to Libor, design, development and implementation of new products based on new rates, creation of new valuation models, creation of fresh legal documents and policy frameworks.
- The transition involves a code replacement towards new benchmark rate.
- The Libor marketplace is very large and it comprises of banks and all large lending agencies, including country lending from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.
- As far as the business opportunities are concerned, all financial products that are currently linked to Libor would be moved to an optimum benchmark.
- This would require remodelling, predicting tax implications, contractual changes and system infrastructure including processes and controls.
- The change would also involve designing new products or remodelling existing products, he added.

Another Y2K wave:

- For technology companies, Libor transition is like another Y2K wave and it involves creating new systems, processes and platforms to support the entire migration.
- The Libor conversion would provide opportunity in systems integration, compliance, customization of packaged apps for meeting reporting needs and related consulting in the short term
- Libor involves a seismic change and it provides an opportunity for consulting organisations to bring into play the entire range of their capabilities.
- Majority of large banks and trading houses, including Bank of America, Bank of England, Merrill Lynch, JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley and Japanese banks have started working on Libor transition.
- However, **Indian banks are yet to start any work towards**

migration as the regulator is yet to make any announcement in this regard.

U.S. sanctions won't go without response

Why in news?

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called the end of oil sanction waivers by the United States a "hostile measure" that won't be left without a response.

Action and Reaction:

- U.S. efforts to boycott the sale of Iran's oil won't get them anywhere. We will export our oil as much as we need and we intend," his official English-language Twitter account said, quoting from a speech he delivered to workers in Tehran.
- The United States announced it would halt the practice of exempting countries including India, China and Turkey from sanctions on purchase of Iranian oil.
- In May last year, U.S .President Donald **Trump withdrew Washington from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal with world powers**, which had given the Islamic republic sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme.
- Washington reimposed oil sanctions on Iran in November, but initially gave eight countries, including several U.S. allies, six-month reprieves.
- Five of the countries Greece, Italy, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have already heavily reduced their purchases from Iran.

Iran has said the sanctions are "illegal":

- They (the U.S.) wishfully think they have blocked Iran oil sales, but our vigorous nation and vigilant officials, if they work hard, will open many blockades, Mr. Khamenei said.
- Mr. Khamenei repeated his stance that Iran should move towards the

sale of oil derivatives such as refined oil and petrochemical products instead of crude.

10 Pakistan-based terrorists had role in cross-LoC trade

Why in news?

Ten Pakistan-based terrorists have been found involved in funnelling illegal weapons, narcotics and fake currency into the Valley after the government suspended cross-Line of Control (LoC) trade between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) from April 19, government sources said on Wednesday.

Trade shutdown:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs had cited misuse by militants as the reason for shutting down the trade.
 - The sources said investigations had shown that the 10 from J&K had crossed over to Pakistan and joined terror groups. They were found to be engaged in the trade.
 - Firms under the control of these militants were doing LoC trade with Indian trading firms operated by their own relatives on the Indian side.
 - The channel of LoC trade, meant to facilitate exchange of goods of common use between local populations, was being exploited to fund illegal and anti-national activities in Jammu & Kashmir," a source said.
 - According to sources, the individuals include Basharat Ahmed Bhat from Budgam currently living in Rawalpindi who operates Al Nasir Trading Company in Pakistan and was active in the LoC trade. And many others involved in the illegal trade.
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Army to build tunnels to store ammunition

Why in news?

Indian Army is planning to construct underground tunnels for storage of ammunition **along the border with China and Pakistan** and Public Sector Undertaking NHPC Limited is being roped in for the purpose, army sources said.

About the Project:

- Indian Army is in the process of executing pilot projects for construction of **semi underground and cavern type ammunition storage** construction through **NHPC Ltd.**, for which a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be signed in the next few days," an Army source said.
 - Underground storage offers improved safety, easier camouflage from enemy observation and satellite imagery and protection from enemy strikes like those seen during the aerial engagement on February 27, a day after the Balakot air strike when Pakistan Air Force jets targeted Indian army installations along the Line of Control (LoC).
 - Major armies, including China and the U.S., already use underground ammunition storage, a second source observed.
 - These tunnels will be built in high-altitude areas in the Northern and Eastern borders.
 - Initially, four pilot projects would be taken up at four different locations along the Northern border and in Jammu and Kashmir at a cost of Rs. 15 crores, the source said.
 - These are expected to be completed within two years.
 - As the conditions in the caverns are controlled, it ensures better safety of sensitive ammunition minimising accidental explosions.
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