



# PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial

## Current Affairs

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### **Supreme Court pushes for 'full' strength of 31**

#### **Why in news?**

In a single stroke on the same day, the Supreme Court Collegium, led by the Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, recommended the names of two judges to the court and rejected the Union government's disapproval of the elevation of two others.

#### **No review of decision:**

- The Collegium refused the government's request to reconsider its April 12 recommendation to elevate Jharkhand High Court and Gauhati High Court Chief Justices Aniruddha Bose and A.S. Bopanna as Supreme Court judges.
- The Collegium said their names were recommended after all parameters were considered.
- The Collegium said there was no reason to agree with the government as there was nothing adverse found in the two judges' conduct, competence or integrity. Now, the government is bound to appoint Justices Bose and Bopanna to the court.
- If the four judges are elevated without delay, the Gogoi Court would reach the full sanctioned judicial strength of 31 judges by the time it re-opens in July after the summer vacations.
- On May 8, the Collegium also recommended Justice B.R. Gavai, a judge of the Bombay High Court, and Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court Surya Kant for elevation to the Supreme Court.

#### **Due representation:**

- On this recommendation, the Collegium said it zeroed in on Justices Gavai and Kant to provide “due representation”, as far as possible, to all High Courts as well as to all sections, including those belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (SC/ST/OBC) categories, women and minorities.
- The Collegium said Justice Gavai superseded three judges in the Bombay High Court, but this should not be misconstrued as a reflection on the ability of the three senior judges.
- It said that though seniority was to be given due weightage, **merit should be the “predominant consideration”**.
- Representation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes category seems to have played in the mind of the Collegium while recommending Justice Gavai’s elevation.
- The Collegium noted that on his appointment, the Supreme Court Bench will have a Judge belonging to the Scheduled Caste category after about a decade.

#### **Controversial subject:**

- Justice Kant was the subject of controversy over a letter reportedly written by Justice A.K. Goel (retired) to the then Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra.
- Justice Goel, then an Supreme Court judge, had disagreed with a proposal to elevate Justice Kant as Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court.
- However, the Misra Collegium, in a notification dated October 3 last year, went ahead with Justice Kant’s elevation.

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### **Govt. denies perjury charge in Rafale case**

#### **Why in news?**

Rubbishing the charge of perjury, the government said the contents of briefs and responses made in the Supreme Court in the Rafale fighter purchase case were “finalised after extensive deliberations at the highest levels in government after a series of meetings”.

### **Government's stand:**

- In a reply affidavit filed in the court, the Centre said its averments in court were based on the final decisions taken by the Cabinet Committee on Security.
- The submissions were based on the final decisions of the Defence Acquisition Council, the Defence Minister, provisions in the Defence Procurement Procedure and inputs received from the Air Force and the Ministry of Defence.
- These had endeavoured to bring out the final conclusions of the process, which led to the signing of the **Inter-Governmental Agreement** with France, the government said.
- The government played down the “mismatch” between the December 14, 2018, judgment of the court, upholding the deal on the basis of a “non-existent” Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report, and unsigned confidential notes filed by the Centre in the court. “The mismatch is not a substantial error,” the government argued.

### **No fault found:**

- After all, it said, the CAG report had “ultimately not found any fault either in the decision-making process or in the pricing” for the procurement of 36 Rafale jets from France.
- It said that instead of quoting the CAG report, which has a constitutional mandate to scrutinise the procurement and took almost two years to audit and present its report on February 13, 2019, the petitioners continued to rely on selective media leaks to mislead the court.
- The petition for perjury, which was filed on February 15, chose to totally ignore the findings of the CAG report, presented on February 13, which said the entire package price of the 36 Rafale jets procurement is 2.86% lower than the audit aligned price compared to the earlier deal for MMRCA.
- The government said it had already filed an application in court to correct the December 14 Rafale judgment.
- In this application, the government claimed the judgment had erred in English grammar to “misinterpret” information submitted to it in the cover note.
- The government said the petitioners had relied on selective leaks in the media, from ministry files on opinions expressed by individual or a

group of officers.

- They have given the court a “selective and incomplete picture on matters related to national security and defence”, the Centre claimed
- Denying any untruth or suppression of information in the court, the government said media reports cannot form the basis of perjury proceedings.

### **Substantial error:**

- The government was replying to a perjury application filed by review petitioners, including former union ministers Yashwant Sinha and Arun Shourie and senior advocate Prashant Bhushan, against government officials who have “misled” the court about facts in the 36 Rafale jets deal through unsigned confidential notes.
  - The petitioners contended that the December 14 judgment based on a hypothetical CAG report was not merely a “clerical or arithmetical slip” but a substantial error.
  - They had also questioned the judgment’s dismissal of lack of sovereign guarantee from the French government’s side as a “minor deviation”.
  - In a rejoinder filed, the review petitioners asked how the government could have “predicted” that the CAG report would redact the Rafale pricing details.
  - The CAG report is also silent on the aspect of the Prime Minister's announcement of the deal in Paris in April 2015 when the Acceptance of Necessity of the procurement was signed only in May 2015.
  - The petitioners also point out that there is no word in the CAG report about the “parallel negotiations” conducted by the Prime Minister's Office even as the Indian Negotiation Team was brokering the deal.
  - Finally, the CAG report is silent about the removal of standard clauses to ensure transparency.
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## **Smaller parties field more women**

### **Why in news?**

Smaller political parties, both regional and national, have shown the way

in this Lok Sabha election by giving ticket to a higher percentage of women candidates, while big parties with a much larger number of contestants fared poorly in doing so.

### **Gender balancing:**

- As a result, the number of women candidates is a mere 8.82%, according to numbers available for the first five phases.
- A Tamil nationalist party, Naam Tamilar Katchi, led by actor-turned-politician Seeman, is the only party to have given an equal number of tickets to both men and women. Of the 40 candidates, there were 20 women and 20 men.
- Data collected by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) show the Trinamool Congress is well on its way to meet its target of 40% women candidate it has fielded 34.15% women candidates with 14 women out of the total 41 candidates and has two more phases of voting left.
- Biju Janata Dal leader and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has fulfilled his promise of giving 33% of the ticket to women. The party fielded seven women among 21 candidates.
- Parties led by young leaders like Jagan Reddy (YSR Congress Party) and Akhilesh Yadav (Samajwadi Party) have fared better than others.
- The YSRCP has fielded four women, accounting for 16% of its 25 contestants. The SP has 13.89% women candidates — five women and 31 men. These parties are followed by Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Congress and the BJP, in that order.
- The CPI(M) has 12.96% women candidates, or seven out of the total 54 candidates.
- The Congress has 12.8% women candidates or 42 out of 328. The BJP has 12.5%, or 42 out of 336.
- The BJP and the Congress have promised 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies in their manifestos.

### **Bihar at the bottom:**

- Among the worst performers are two parties from Bihar the Janata Dal(U) and the Rastriya Janata Dal. Both parties have failed to field even a single woman candidate so far.
- **Only 534 women are fighting this election out of the total**

**6,049 candidates, which means only 8.82% of the total number of contestants are women.**

- Women are also a small minority among Independent candidates: only 6.69% of the total 2,750 Independent candidates.
  - Among the States and Union Territories that will vote in the remaining two phases are West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar and Delhi.
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## **'India to add 3 million tech jobs by 2023'**

### **Why in news?**

The Indian tech industry will add another three million new jobs in the next five years, said Indian Staffing Federation (ISF), the apex body for the 'flexi' working industry.

### **ISF Forecasting:**

- ISF told that all these new jobs would come up in **digital technology** areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, Internet of things (IOT), data science, analytics, big data, blockchain and augmented reality.
- Jobs would also be created in newer technology areas that are presently unknown but are expected to emerge and evolve in the next few years.
- The ISF's **tech employment projection** comes as a big relief to millions of young techies and software engineering students amid talks of the move towards jobless growth with automation that replaces humans with robots.
- ISF said, are confident of making this job projection for the next five years based on our constant interactions with a wide range of companies, including Indian tech firms, MNCs, global capability centres of hundreds of international firms, enterprises across segments including e-com, BFSI, pharma and telecom.
- There is a visible behavioural change happening in the IT and ITes sectors.



- **India now has about 1,300 captive units.** Some 400 new captive units are coming up in 2019.
- The shift is attributed to a sharp rise in hiring by existing and new global in-house centres (GCCs) due to technology innovation activities in India for their global markets.

### **Changing technology:**

- ISF said the industry had been witnessing winds of change in technology. Today, a robot, with infinite memory analytical capacity, is connected to the cloud. It's impact on productivity of businesses would be 'huge'. **Some 63% of CEOs think that AI would have a larger impact than the Internet** and some 39% of them had already started AI-related initiatives in their organisations.
  - The fact that India does not have a job problem, but it has an employed poverty problem.
  - To addressing this problem, the only sustainable way to achieve this is through formalisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and financialisation of the human capital.
  - Staffing organisations in India are going to play a vital role in helping the industry reach this hiring milestone in terms of identifying and sourcing billable talent Ms. Chakraborty added.
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### **Bank credit grows 13.2% in FY19**

#### **Why in news?**

Bank credit grew by 13.2% in financial year 2018-19 as compared to 10.3% in the previous financial year, mainly aided by **loans to services and retail sector.**

#### **Careful watch:**

- Deposit growth also gained momentum, growing by 10% as compared to 6.7% a year ago.
- We have to be a bit careful while looking at this data because a bump-

up has happened in the month of March. If you see, up to February, credit growth was not that strong,” said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, CARE Ratings.

- Banks typically tend to push for more loan disbursement and also try to get more deposits ahead of the end of a financial year to shore up their balance sheet and meet year-end targets.

### **RBI data:**

- The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) data on deployment of gross credit across different sectors shows healthy credit growth in the services sector followed by retail sector.
- Credit growth in services sector till the middle of February was 23.7% and in retail sector it was 16.7%. Credit growth in the industry sector was 5.6%.
- Most of these are happening in the retail segment and also services sector. Manufacturing is also better than last year but there is a base effect.
- Banks have also benefited from the liquidity crunch that non-banking financial companies are facing following the IL&FS crisis. NBFCs have slowed down their loan growth since their cost of funds increased substantially after September-October. This is particularly true for retail loans, where NBFCs are a major player.
- Banks have been pushing loans to the corporate sector at a slower pace after sharp rise in bad loans, mostly in sectors like infrastructure.
- Manufacturing is also better than last year but there is a base effect.

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### **Govt. shouldn't budget for low fiscal deficit**

#### **Why in news?**

The government should not budget for a low fiscal deficit knowing fully well that it will not be achieved, several prominent economists told the Fifteenth Finance Commission, adding that the overall quality of budgeting needed to improve.



### **Consolidated view of public debt:**

- The economists also suggested that the Fifteenth Finance Commission should take a consolidated view of public debt, including off-budget transactions and the debt taken on by public sector enterprises.
- These suggestions were made during a meeting in Mumbai between economists and officials of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, including its Chairman N.K. Singh.
- The economists pointed out that there was a need to adopt a total view on the borrowing requirements of the consolidated public sector that should include off-budget transactions, borrowings of the public sector undertakings, and contingent liabilities of both the union and state governments.
- Further, the economists pointed out that it was important to carefully examine whether the increased tax devolution by the 14th Finance Commission had led to improvements in the **social spending of state governments**.
- The meetings have sharpened the Commission's understanding on some of the key things that need to be kept in mind for continued macroeconomic stability," Mr. Singh said in a note following the meeting.

### **Demand-supply mismatch:**

- The economists also said that there was a possible mismatch between the **demand and supply of state development loans**, which could affect the cost of borrowings of state governments in the next five years.
- Regarding the devolution of taxes to the states, the economists also said that there needed to be an incentive structure built into the devolution mechanism, and that the mechanism must also take into account the composition of the population, since many states are seeing a significant change in their proportion of the elderly populations.

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### **Finance panel to reconcile data**

## Why in news?

The 15th Finance Commission will be reconciling data that it gets from various sources amid serious concerns over the credibility of macro data.

## Credibility issue:

- Speaking to reporters, Commission Chairman N.K. Singh said, We ourselves are going to undertake a process of economic data reconciliation among the CAG, the RBI and the data which we have received from the Ministry of Finance and other sources, so that we can make conclusions based on what we would consider reliable data in public domain.
  - He also voiced concern over GST collection as projections were not looking healthy. Projections of indirect tax collections, especially with regard to GST, have not been as healthy, Mr. Singh said.
  - On the **Bimal Jalan panel** set up to review the **economic capital framework** of the RBI, Mr. Singh said the issue was not and should not have been discussed in depth by the Finance Commission and the RBI.
  - He, however, said they would possibly be submitting their report well in time for the Union Budget this year
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## SC frowns on foreigners' tribunals plan

## Why in news?

The Supreme Court questioned a proposal by the Assam government to quickly throw open 1,000 foreigners' tribunals all over the northeastern State to try suspected illegal immigrants.

## SC observations:

- A Bench led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi said it looked like the State government hatched the plan without bothering to conduct a "basic

study” of how to carry it out.

- This, especially when the deadline for publishing the final National Register of Citizens (NRC) looming large.
- A 1,000 tribunals means 1,000 judicial officers to preside over them. Where will you find them overnight? How many advocates above the age of 35 years would be willing to join? What is the available pool of retired judicial officers? Should the government not have foreseen this situation, considering the fact that the final NRC for the State would be published by July 31? Do we judges have to tell you everything?” Chief Justice Gogoi asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Assam government.
- The CJI hinted at the possible flood of petitions which would hit the foreigners’ tribunals once the final NRC was published on July 31.
- These petitions would be from people who had not been able to prove their Indian citizenship. Remember, the final list of NRCs will be published in three months,CJI Gogoi addressed the Assam side.

#### **Detention centres:**

- The court, which is also examining the plight of 900-odd illegal immigrants languishing in Assam’s detention centres for years, said it was in favour of releasing them, provided that a foolproof mechanism was evolved to keep an eye on them.
- The court agreed with amicus curiae Prashant Bhushan’s suggestion that detenus should be released after six months or a year.
- Mr. Bhushan said they could be released if Indian citizens stand surety for them. And what happens to these Indian citizens if the person they stood surety for does not turn up eventually?” the CJI asked Mr. Bhushan.Mr. Bhushan suggested “some imprisonment”. To this, the CJI asked “under what law would we imprison these citizens?”
- Mr. Bhushan, this court has to be provided with a mechanism by which their production is assured. When you can suggest such a mechanism, we will pass the order,” the Chief Justice said.

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### **Navy joins exercises in South China Sea**

## Why in news?

Navy ships INS Kolkata and Shakti carried out Group Sail with the naval ships of Japan, the Philippines and the U.S. in the South China Sea (SCS) from May 3-9, the Navy said.

## Committed to safety:

- The ships undertook various exercises en route which included formation manoeuvring, under way replenishment runs, cross-deck flying and exchange of sea riders," the Navy said in a statement.
- The group sail exercise showcased India's commitment to operating with like-minded nations to ensure safe maritime environment through enhanced interoperability," it said.
- China, which claims a major part of the SCS, has disputes with most of its maritime neighbours.
- Six ships, including a frigate and helicopter carrier JMSDF Izumo from Japan, a Philippines frigate and an Arleigh Burke class destroyer from the U.S. Navy took part in the six-day exercise.
- Indian Navy ships were on return passage from their deployment to the South and the East China Seas as part of the **annual Eastern Fleet overseas deployment** during which they visited Vietnam, China and South Korea.
- In China, the ships took part in the **International Fleet Review** (IFR) as part of the 70th anniversary celebrations of the People's Liberation Army (Navy).
- They later took part in the Phase I of the maritime security field training exercise under the aegis of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) from May 1 to 3 off South Korea.

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## **Gujarat facing massive water crisis**

## Why in news?

With rising mercury levels and severe heatwave, Gujarat is facing a

massive water crisis. The scarcity is particularly acute in the Saurashtra region, Kutch, North Gujarat and parts of tribal pockets in central and South Gujarat.

### **Severely Scarce:**

- More than 20 districts are severely affected as towns and villages hardly get water twice a week.
- In more than 500 villages in 14 districts, drinking water is being supplied through tankers; the number will only rise in days to come.
- Recently, Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani admitted that the State is in the midst of a **major water shortage** but assured that drinking water will be provided to every village.
- Except the Narmada, all other waterbodies and dams have negligible water, he said.

### **The challenge:**

- The available water in all the dams of these regions is negligible. However, thanks to the **Sardar Sarovar dam and the Narmada canal network**, people will not face any difficulty till July-end.
- Water is available in the dam. The only challenge is **to supply it to far-flung areas**, some 500 km away from the dam.
- Subsequently, the State government asked the district administrations to start plying tankers in villages where water was not available.
- After a review and reports from local authorities, we have decided to provide drinking water to villages located in different districts by tankers so that people don't face any shortage," said Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel.
- According to officials, the number of villages needing water tankers will only rise due to high temperatures that push the demand.
- In Rajkot, water is supplied only for 20 minutes a day and in many localities and societies located on the outskirts, supply is on alternate days or through tankers.
- Even in Jasdan, the Assembly constituency of Kuvarji Bavalia, the Water Supply Minister, shortage of drinking water forced villagers to hold protests demanding its regular supply.

- Local legislators have made representations demanding adequate water supply in areas where the Narmada water is the only source now.
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## **Barn owls to play Tom, fight Jerry in Lakshadweep**

### **Why in news?**

With a thriving rat population playing havoc with its coconut yield, the Union Territory of Lakshadweep is turning to barn owls for help.

### **Owls on duty:**

- The scenic islands have 'recruited' three pairs of barn owls from Kerala to fight what has so far been a losing **battle against the rodents**.
- After a lengthy bureaucratic process that began in 2017, the winged hunters have now reached Kavaratti by ship. For the time being, the three males and three females are getting acclimatised in specially built cages.
- They will gradually be released into the coconut plantations under a closely monitored breeding and **rodent management programme**.
- According to the authorities, the owls were chosen from among healthy birds rescued by the Kerala Forest Department.

### **Biocontrol measure:**

- The biocontrol measure is spearheaded by the Lakshadweep Administration, with the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) at Kavaratti providing the technical knowhow.
- Coconut is an important money-spinner for the islands, but the **pesky rodents account for 30 to 40% of the yield loss**. Total production stood at 8.76 crore nuts in 2017-18.
- However, employing owls to hunt down rats is not exactly a new idea for the islanders.
- You could say we are witnessing a reintroduction of the birds. Even



the British had made an attempt in the 19th century for rodent management, said Abdul Gafoor, subject matter specialist with the KVK.

### **Past attempts:**

- Similar attempts were reportedly made in the 1960s as well. Again, it's not just about collecting a few birds and releasing them into the coconut plantations. It has to be a breeding programme.
- Also, these are birds in the scheduled list and need to be cared for as such," he said.

### **Why barn owls?**

- The reason is that the **rats in the Lakshadweep Islands practically live on treetops**.
- The coconut palms here grow so close together that they resemble a jungle. The fronds overlap, allowing the rodents to move easily from one tree to another.
- Besides, the **nocturnal barn owls are natural rat hunters**, armed with a powerful auditory mechanism.
- There is also an important environmental angle to Lakshadweep's decision to choose biocontrol.
- The **islands being a designated organic zone**, use of chemicals for pest control is a strict no-no.
- If successful, the barn owl campaign will be extended to other islands in Lakshadweep as well.

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## **A plan to survive global warming**

### **Why in news?**

Solutions to the biggest threats facing our planet lie underground, according to experts who insist climate change, overpopulation and food shortages can all be tackled by going subterranean.

### **Going Underground:**

- We are coming to a point in our history in which we need to start looking for more space,” Han Admiraal, a civil engineer with over two decades of experience in underground space, said on the sidelines of this year’s World Tunnel Congress.
- Efforts to meet seven of the **United Nations’ 17 sustainable development goals** from cleaning up pollution-clogged metropolises to ending world hunger could be given a big boost by repurposing spaces below street level, he said.
- We don’t seem to realise that **we’re losing a lot of arable land** at an alarming rate each year (to **soil degradation, urbanisation and intensive farming**), where we should be increasing it to feed the growing world population.
- Underground spaces could easily be used for growing crops,” he said, as he toured the **cavernous Bourbon Tunnel**, dug deep under the Italian city of Naples as a potential escape route for King Ferdinand II of Bourbon after the 1848 riots.
- Scientific developments in areas like aquaponics where vegetables and fish are farmed together could help relieve the pressure on the food supply chain, and dramatically cut transport costs if such new farms were situated under cities.

### **New lease of life:**

- Micro greens tiny seedlings of plants such as fennel, radish or coriander usually harvested when they are full size are already being grown underground, as is lettuce, Mr. Admiraal said.
- We could look at adding products like soy or lupin, which can be used as the basis for creating more protein-rich products that can be used as a substitute for meat, reducing our reliance on one of the **biggest climate destroyers: the meat industry**.
- You can also think about underground car parks: we know that cars are killing cities. We’re moving towards electrical vehicles, autonomous vehicles. So the question is, will those spaces still be needed in the future in the way they are now?
- You could give them a new lease of life that actually supports the livability of the city,” he said.
- From Boston to Oslo, Rio de Janeiro, Seattle and Sydney, structures such as **multi-lane highways are being moved underground**, with the disused spaces converted into parks, according to urban planner

Antonia Conaro.

- Cities, where the population growth is very strong, and which are struggling with resources, are looking at innovative ways to expand,” she said.
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