

INTERNAL SECURITY

Context: An Army investigation revealed that the Indian Army Major was involved in grave breaches of national security, for which the President of India sacked him from his position in a Strategic Forces Command (SFC) unit.

Using Article 310 of the Constitution, the Army Act of 1950, and other pertinent authorities, the President swiftly terminated his services.

What Moral Issues Are Raised by the Activities of the Army Major and His Later Termination?

National Security Concerns and Ethical Violations:

- An Army investigation, launched in March 2022, exposed the Major's shortcomings and transgressions, which included the dissemination of classified material, dubious financial dealings, and social media relationships with a Pakistani intelligence agent.
- Army regulations were also broken by the Major's possession of classified documents on electronic devices. These acts endangered national security and brought up serious ethical issues.

Presidential Power and Legislative Framework:

- In line with the authority granted by Section 18 of the Army Act, 1950, as well as other pertinent enabling powers, the President issued an order to immediately terminate the Major's employment.
- This action is an example of the executive branch using its power within the bounds of existing laws. It emphasizes the dedication to preserving moral principles and the military's integrity.

Broader Implications and Ongoing Investigations:

- The orders pertaining to termination underscore the significance of moral behaviour, honesty, and national defence in the military.
- The significance of the Code of Conduct is underscored by the fact that the Army disciplined a Lieutenant Colonel and a Brigadier for violating social media policies connected to their membership in this group.
- This instance highlights the Army's alertness and initiative in dealing with possible security breaches and a deficiency in devotion to duty.
- The military continues to place a high priority on maintaining the security of classified military data and counterintelligence issues, not to mention upholding the constitution's core values and moral obligations.

What Does the Indian Constitution's Articles 309, 310, and 311 Have to Do with Civil Services?

- The Indian Constitution's Part XIV addresses services provided by the Union and the State.
- Article 309 gives the Parliament and State legislatures the authority to control the hiring practices and terms of employment for individuals appointed to public positions and services related to the Union's or any State's affairs, respectively.
- Article 310 states that, with the exception of the provisions outlined in the Constitution, a civil servant employed by the Union is subject to the President's discretion, while a civil servant employed by a State is subject to the Governor of that State's discretion (the English doctrine of pleasure).
- However, the government's authority is not unqualified.

Article 311:

- According to Article 311 (1), no employee of a state government or the All India Service may be fired or removed by a body beneath the one that appointed them.
- According to Article 311(2), a civil servant cannot be fired, removed, or demoted without first undergoing an investigation during which they will be made aware of the charges against them and given a fair chance to defend themselves.

Exceptions to Article 311 (2):

- 2 (a) - When an individual is dismissed, removed, or lowered in rank due to behaviour that resulted in a criminal conviction
- 2 (b) - When the authority having the authority to dismiss, remove, or lower an individual's rank is satisfied that it is not reasonably practicable to hold such an inquiry for some reason, to be documented by that authority in writing
- 2 (c) - When the President or the Governor, as the case may be, is satisfied that it is not expedient to hold such an inquiry.

Which Army Act of 1950 provisions are particularly significant?

- **Terms of Service and Enlistment Procedures:** It outlines the requirements for joining the army as well as the terms of service, which cover recruitment, training, and retirement policies.
- **Conduct and Discipline:** The Army Act offers a thorough framework for upholding discipline in the armed forces. It lists a number of transgressions and their associated punishments, including disobedience, insubordination, desertions, and behaviour unfit for a soldier.
- **Court Martial:** The Act creates the legal foundation for holding courts-martial to try charges against military personnel. It describes various court-martial classifications, including Summary General Court-Martial (SGCM), District Court-Martial (DCM), and General Court-Martial (GCM).
- **Rights of the Accused in Law:** The Act outlines the legal protections and rights available to people facing a court-martial, such as the right to counsel, the right to silence, and the right to appeal.
- **Detention:** Under some conditions, such as when they pose a threat to army discipline or security, the Act permits the detention of military personnel.
- **Service Tribunals:** The Armed Forces Tribunal is a specialized court that hears appeals and petitions pertaining to military matters. It was established by the Armed Forces Tribunal Act of 2007.
- **Other Provisions:** The Act has a number of other provisions, such as those pertaining to the rules for administering oaths, the appointment of Judge Advocates, and the protection of witnesses.

Command for Strategic Forces

- Two tri-service commands exist: officers from all three services alternately lead Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) and Strategic Forces Command (SFC).
- The nation's nuclear assets are delivered and operated under the direction of the Strategic Forces Command, or SFC. Although it was established in 2003, it is an integrated functional command rather than an integrated theatre command since it lacks a defined role and specific geographic responsibilities.

Conclusion:

National security stands as the bedrock of a nation's stability and prosperity, In an ever evolving global landscape the role of military leadership is indispensable in safe guarding a nation's interests and sovereignty

ECONOMY

CONTEXT: India's Widening Tax Base

Why in News?

- The Income Tax Department recently released statistics on income tax returns for the assessment years 2021–2022 and 2019–20. These statistics provide insights into how tax compliance patterns are evolving.
- The information reveals a shift in the taxpayer profile, with higher income brackets being the focus of this transformation, but it also emphasizes ongoing difficulties in making sure all eligible taxpayers file their returns.

An income tax return: what is it?

- **Income Tax:** Income tax is a levy imposed on the yearly earnings of a business or individual during a fiscal year.
- **The Income Tax Act, 1961** governs India's income tax system, which is a direct tax.
- **Income Tax Return:** This is a specific document that is used to report to the Income-tax Department information about an individual's earnings for a given fiscal year and the taxes that were paid on that income.
- Additionally, this form makes it easier for people to claim refunds from the income tax department and to carry forward losses.

What Are the Key Findings from the Latest Statistics on Income Tax Returns?

Total Tax Filings:

- During the assessment year (AY) 2021–22 (financial year 2020–21), 6.75 crore taxpayers filed income tax returns, which is 5.6% more than the 6.39 crore filings made in the previous year.
- On the other hand, about 2.1 crore taxpayers made tax payments but failed to submit returns.

Development of the Taxpayer Base

- There has been a gradual rise in the number of taxpayers in the last few years, going from 5.87 crore in the AY 2018-19 to 6.75 crore in the AY 2021-22.
- However, from 40.3% in the tax year 2018–19 to 66% in the tax year 2021–22, more taxpayers are opting to pay no taxes.

Income Trends:

- Over time, the department noted, individual taxpayers have migrated towards higher income brackets.

- The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) reports that over time, the share of income from the bottom 25% of earners increased while the proportionate contribution from the top 1% of earners decreased.

Critique:

- The critique draws attention to the growing disparity in wealth between India's ultra-rich and middle class, with the top 1% of earners witnessing an increase in their income share from 17% to 23% between 2013–14 and 2021–22.
- When adjusted for inflation, the real income of the bottom 25% fell as a result of their income growth lagging behind.
- Concerns concerning economic justice and the difficulties faced by the middle class in making steady financial advancement are brought up by this income disparity.
- ✓ The time frame for assessing or evaluating income received in a specific fiscal year for tax purposes is known as the assessment year. It is the year that comes right after the fiscal year that the income is being evaluated for.

What is the Direct Tax Central Board?

- Operating under the Central Board of Revenue Act of 1963, the Central Board of Direct Taxes is a statutory body.
- It functions under the Ministry of Finance's Department of Revenue.
- It serves two purposes: first, it provides vital information that helps shape direct tax policies and strategies in India; second, it monitors the Income Tax Department's implementation and enforcement of direct tax laws.
- There is a chairman and six members that make up this group.

Conclusion

The government's strategic choices regarding tax rates have influenced the country's tax landscape, expanded the tax payer base while maintaining stable tax to GDP ratios. As India's economy continues to evolve, these gains should not be squandered through excessive giveaways but rather strategically allocated to promote sustainable development and economic growth

PRELIM FACTS
1. Gwalior and Kozhikode are now members of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

They are among the 55 cities that joined UCCN on World Cities Day (October 31st).

New cities were recognized for their great commitment to incorporating culture and creativity into their development initiatives.

Kozhikode ('City of Literature'), Kerala

- It has a strong literary foundation, with over 500 libraries and over 70 publishers, and a high degree of literary education.
- It also serves as a permanent home for the annual Kerala Literature Festival and other book festivals.

Gwalior ('City of Music'), Madhya Pradesh

- It has a long musical heritage that includes legends such as Mian Tansen (Ramtanu Pandey) and Baliti Bawra.
- Gwalior Gharana (the oldest Hindustani musical Gharana) is also said to have originated there.

Other Indian cities on UCCN: Mumbai (Film), Chennai (Music), Hyderabad (Gastronomy), Varanasi (Music), Jaipur (Crafts and Folk art) and Srinagar (Crafts and Folk art).

About UCCN

- It was created in 2004.
- The UCCN tag gives global recognition and boosts tourism.
- It has 350 creative cities in more than 100 countries, spanning seven creative fields:
 - Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music

2. "Bletchley Declaration", world's first agreement on Artificial Intelligence (AI) signed at UK AI Safety Summit

- The Declaration is named after Bletchley Park, which hosted the meeting and was famous for being Britain's code-breaking center during WWII.
- It was signed by the European Union and 28 other countries, including India, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, France, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
 - In the next six months, South Korea will co-host a short virtual AI summit.

Key highlights of the declaration

- Recognizes the potential of AI to improve human well-being as well as the threats posed by AI, notably frontier AI.

- Frontier AI refers to very capable foundation generative AI models that may have harmful characteristics that endanger public safety.
- Significant hazards may come from potential purposeful misuse or inadvertent control difficulties related to alignment with human intent.
 - These challenges arise in part because their skills are not fully known and thus difficult to predict.
- Because such hazards are inherently international in nature, international collaboration is required to address them.
 - All parties, including companies, civil society, and academics, will need to collaborate.
- The risk-mitigation agenda will focus on developing a shared scientific understanding and risk-based policy across countries.

Criticism: There are no definite commitments or tangible measures.

3. Mhadei wildlife sanctuary (MWS)

- A contempt petition is filed against Goa government for not notifying a tiger reserve in MWS as directed by Bombay high court.
- MWS is an International Bird Area and is part of Mhadei river basin.
 - Mahadei river has catchment area spread over Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- Forest types range from Moist Deciduous, Semi-evergreen and Secondary Scrub.
 - Sacred grove Nirankarachi is dominated by a unique plant species Myristica malabarica, which is endangered and endemic to the site.
- Fauna: Ruby-throated Yellow Bulbul (State Bird of Goa), Atlas Moth, tigers, etc.

4. CAR-T Cell Therapy

Context: The drugs regulator has granted market authorisation to CAR-T cell therapy for cancer patients with B-cell lymphomas who didn't respond to standard treatments like chemotherapy.

About

- CAR-T is revolutionary therapy that modifies immune cells (specifically T-cells) by turning them into strong cancer fighters known as CAR-T cells.
- T-cells are special cells (white blood cells that find and fight illness and infection) whose primary function is cytotoxic, meaning it can kill other cells.
- In CAR-T therapy, we genetically modify them into cancer-fighting cells. These super charged cells are then put back into the body which fights with cancer cells — especially in blood cancers like leukaemia and lymphomas.
- NexCAR19 is an indigenously developed CD19-targeted CAR-T cell therapy
- Immuno ACT—an IIT Bombay incubated company— developed the treatment.
- CD-19 is a biomarker for B lymphocytes and can be utilized as a target for leukemia immune therapies.

Significance

- Now patients in India and countries with limited resources will have access to this life-saving drug at an affordable cost.
- Abroad, the CAR-T cell therapy costs around ₹3-4 crore per patient. The NexCAR19 will be ₹30-40 lakh per patient, which is 10% of the cost abroad.
- In terms of technical achievement, it puts India on the elite list of select countries that have access to CAR-T therapy.
 - India is now one of the first developing countries to have its indigenous CAR-T and gene therapy platform.

5. Electoral Bonds

- A 5-judge Constitution Bench remarked that the Electoral Bonds Scheme suffers from “selective anonymity” leading to an “information hole”.
- Donors, instead of investing a big sum to purchase the bond, may aggregate bonds for smaller amounts from different buyers.
- It is easier for the party in power to get that information about donations of opposition parties.
- Electoral Bond Scheme:
 - Electoral bonds are interest-free bearer instruments announced in the 2017 Union Budget.
 - State Bank of India is the only bank authorized to sell them.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. The root of all ills in the local governance of India is their poor financial standing. Describe briefly the sources of the funding that the local government is provided. Make recommendations for ways to improve local governments' funding.

Introduction:

"Everyone wants decentralization, but only until his level," according to a quote from Professor Raja Chelliah. This is the state of Indian local government. The states have received more financial authority over time, but local levels of devolution have not benefited from this devolution.

Funding sources for local government:

1. **Central and state programs:** The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, among other programs, are implemented by Panchayats and municipalities.
2. **Central Grant under Finance Commission:** In accordance with the Finance Commission's recommendations, the Union government offers both a performance-based and a fixed basic grant.
3. **State grants under the State Finance Commission:** By virtue of the constitution, state governments must augment local bodies' resources.
4. **Fees and taxes:**
 - **Assigned Revenue:** The state assigns different taxes, including professional taxes, stamp duty surcharges, entertainment taxes, and motor vehicle taxes, to local bodies.
 - **Own Tax Revenue:** The primary source of income for urban local bodies is property tax, which can account for up to 30% of total revenue or more. In addition, local bodies, such as panchayats, are also subject to octroi tax and local market taxes
 - **Own Non-Tax Revenue:** They also receive funding from municipal levies and fees, like those associated with birth certificate applications, among other things.
 - **Borrowings:** Municipal bonds may be issued by primarily urban local governments.
5. **Other receipts:** It includes Miscellaneous sales, lapsed deposits, fees and fines etc.

Limitations of the above financial resources

- **Tied-funds:** Local governments are not always free to use scheme-related funds for their own purposes.
- **Inefficiency in tax collection:** The local bodies' tax collection systems are rife with corruption.
- **Removal of Octroi:** Local governments' ability to levy some indirect taxes has been hindered since the implementation of the GST.
- **Weak financial powers:** The transfer of functional and financial powers to the ULBs varies significantly between states. In certain states, municipalities are not even permitted to impose property taxes.
- **Feeble constitutional mandate:** The 74th Amendment gives state legislatures the authority to distribute funds so that ULBs can carry out their duties.
- **Small grants from the federal government:** The funding allocated to local bodies by the federal government and the states is insufficient. For instance, the Finance Commission only sets aside Rs 90,000 Cr annually for the 2.5 lakh Panchayats and local bodies; this means that, for the fiscal year 2021–2026, the Union government will give local governments Rs 4,36,361 crore.

Measures to be taken to strengthen the financial position of local bodies:

- **To get rid of inefficiencies and corruption:** timely and easily accessible audited accounts.
- **Legislative Improvements:** For prompt State Finance Commission recommendations and appropriate follow-up on them.
- **Grants based on property tax performance:** To mobilize property tax revenues, particularly in ULBs.
- **Increase in untied federal and state grants:** More money must be spent on local government by the federal and state governments. The Finance Commission's mandate needs to be given more emphasis.
- **Assigning additional tax items:** Additional taxes, like entrance fees, may be assigned to local bodies.
- **Smart taxation:** With the development of digital technologies and digital property records, cleverer strategies for evading property taxes are now possible.
- **Cutting Expenses:** Effective good governance can be provided at a lower cost by the private sector. If the city does not establish an initial cohesive development plan, the transaction costs will also increase. The costs of developing infrastructure after growth are significantly higher and occasionally unaffordable.
- **Active role of civil society:** The active participation of civil society can lessen the detrimental externalities linked to the fast urbanization process and stop overuse of resources

Conclusion:

The secret to raising governance and facilitating a better quality of life is local government. Improving the local bodies' financial situation becomes crucial for this. The Economic Survey of India 2016–17 examined urban local bodies' revenue sources and came to the conclusion that it is critical to raise own-revenue by properly taxing properties.

MCQs

- Which of the following are India's operational research stations at Antarctica?
 - Maitri
 - Bharati
 - Dakshin Gangotri
 Select the correct answer using the code given below:
 - 1 and 2 only**
 - 2 only
 - 1 and 3 only
 - 1, 2 and 3
- Consider the following statements regarding the State Food Safety Index (SFSI) 2022- 2023:
 - Over the past five years (2019-2023), Maharashtra has witnessed the steepest decline in its food safety score.
 - Gujarat and Kerala ranked as the best performers in 'Food Testing Infrastructure'.
 - Karnataka is the only state to show any significant improvement in the 'Improvement in SFSI Rank' category introduced in SFSI 2022-23.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
 - Only one
 - Only two**
 - All three
 - None of the above
- With reference to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, consider the following statements:
 - He headed advisory committee on Fundamental Rights.
 - He is remembered as the 'Patron Saint of India's Civil Servants' as he established the modern all India services system.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2**
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Consider the following statements regarding the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021:
 - According to the Act, any woman between the ages of 35 and 45 can opt for surrogacy if she has a medical condition that makes it necessary.
 - The Act has provisions that allow women to opt for Gestational Surrogacy.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
 - 1 only
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2**
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- Consider the following statements:
 - India is a signatory of the Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety signed at the second Global High Level Conference on Road Safety.
 - Sustainable Development Goal 3 aims to reduce global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by half.
 - The UN General Assembly has adopted the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
 - Only one
 - Only two
 - All three**
 - None of the above
- With reference to recent Income Tax returns statistics, consider the following statements:
 - There has been a rise in income tax return filings compared to the previous year.
 - The number of taxpayers has progressively decreased in recent years.
 - The wealth gap between the ultra-rich and the middle class in India is shrinking.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
 - Only one**
 - Only two
 - All three
 - None of the above
- Which one of the following pairs of islands is separated from each other by the 'Ten Degree Channel'?
 - Andaman and Nicobar**
 - Nicobar and Sumatra
 - Maldives and Lakshadweep
 - Sumatra and Java
- Consider the following statements about Three Basins Summit, 2023
 - The three basins include Amazon, Congo and Borneo-Mekong-Southeast Asia.
 - The central vision of the Summit for the preservation and restoration of the planet's three ecological lungs
 - The three global ecosystems account for 80% of the world's tropical forests and 2/3rd of the earth's biodiversity.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 - Only one
 - Only two
 - All three**
 - None of the above
- Consider the following statements about Operation Sesha
 - Operation Sesha was launched in 2015 to bust organised syndicates of smugglers of precious woods.
 - It is a joint initiative of Ministry of Earth Sciences and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB).
 Choose the correct statements:
 - 1 only**
 - 2 only
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Neither 1 nor 2
- "Varaha", recently seen in news is related to which of the following?
 - Gaganyaan Mission
 - Anti-tank guided missile
 - Samudrayaan Mission**
 - Aditya-L1 mission