

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: Jurisdiction of Lokpal, Issues and concerns related to devolution of sufficient powers to Lokpal to make it more effective.

In News, why?

- Citing jurisdictional limitations, the Indian Lokpal recently declared that it could not take up a plea from the wife of an Uttar Pradesh government official who committed suicide.
- The official claimed that he was under pressure from higher-ups to sign completion certificates for projects funded by the Central government under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

What Position Did the Indian Lokpal take?

- Limitations on the Lokpal's Jurisdiction in the Uttar Pradesh Case: The Lokpal made it clear that it is not able to handle a complaint against the Director General of Tourism in Uttar Pradesh or the Principal Secretary of Tourism and Culture.
- Since the matter involves alleged criminal activity, it is within the jurisdiction of criminal law and procedure, which is why the Lokpal has stated that it is unable to consider the plea.
- Forwarding the Complaint: The Lokpal made progress by forwarding the complaint to the Union Tourism Secretary for additional investigation, despite its jurisdictional limitations.

What do Lokpals mean?

- The Lokpal and Lokayukta Act of 2013 established the Lokpal for the Union and the Lokayukta for the States.
- These organizations are statutory bodies that do not have any standing in the constitution.

FUNCTIONS

- Their duties include acting as a "ombudsman" and looking into claims of corruption made against specific public officials as well as other related issues.

What falls under the Lokpal's purview and powers?

- Regarding Prime Ministers (PMs) and Ministers: The Lokpal has jurisdiction over MPs, PMs, Ministers, Groups A, B, C, and D officers, as well as Central Government officials.
- The Prime Minister was under the Lokpal's jurisdiction, with the exception of claims of corruption in the areas of public order, atomic energy, international relations, security, and space.
- The Lokpal lacks authority over Ministers and Members of Parliament with regards to statements made or votes cast in Parliament.

In connection with bureaucrats and civil servants:

- Its jurisdiction also extends to anyone currently or previously serving as the director, manager, or secretary of any organization established by a central act, anybody funded or overseen by the central government, or any individual engaged in the act of aiding and abetting, bribery giving, or bribe-taking.
- All public officials are required by the Lokpal Act to disclose their personal assets and liabilities, as well as those of their dependents.

Associated with the Central Intelligence Agency (CBI):

- It possesses the authority to oversee and provide guidance to CBI.
- The investigating officer in a case that Lokpal has referred to the CBI cannot be moved without Lokpal's consent.

What are the Concerns Regarding the Working of Lokpal?

- Absence of Full-Time Chairperson: Since May 2022, the Lokpal has been operating without a full-time chairperson, which raises questions about its capacity to carry out its mandate.
- Failing to Take Action Against Corrupt Officials: A report submitted to Parliament in April 2023 by a parliamentary committee stated that the Lokpal "has not prosecuted even a single person accused of graft till date."
- The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) panel received data from the Lokpal office indicating that during the 2019–20 fiscal year, the anti-corruption body received 8,703 complaints, of which 5,981 were resolved.
- Nevertheless, questions have been raised regarding the Lokpal's capacity to take action against dishonest officials given that no one has been prosecuted for corruption despite the volume of complaints received.

- Lack of Transparency: The Lokpal's lack of accountability and transparency has also drawn criticism from some experts, who contend that it compromises the organization's legitimacy and efficacy.

The Way Ahead

- The ombudsman's institution needs to be strengthened in terms of its operational independence and human resource availability in order to combat corruption.
- More openness, increased access to information, and the empowerment of individuals and groups of citizens are necessary, in addition to capable leadership that is prepared to be held accountable to the general public.
- The mere appointment of a Lokpal is insufficient. The government will grow in size if investigative agencies are strengthened, but governance won't necessarily improve.
- The government's motto, "less government and more governance," ought to be adhered to in letter and spirit.
- In addition, Lokpal and Lokayukta need to be legally, administratively, and financially independent of the people they are asked to look into and bring charges against.
- Appointing Lokpal and Lokayukta members must be done in a transparent manner to reduce the possibility of the wrong types of people being appointed.
- To prevent the concentration of excessive power in one institution or authority, a variety of decentralized institutions with suitable accountability mechanisms are required.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Until it ends, it's not over.

Introduction:

Those who have been slicing through debates on world power politics have been drawing naive conclusions about how the war between Russia and Ukraine will end. The conflict has lasted for almost two years, and there is no indication that it will end anytime soon.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is now a propaganda war.

- Propagandists from the West are going all out, calling Russia a diminished power with an imminent defeat—a subtle jab at China, which is defying US dominance in the world.
- Putin's appeal to China and North Korea for assistance, coupled with his threat to use nuclear weapons, demonstrates the depth of Russia's downfall.

The war's effects on Russia

- The brightest and best have left. Trade restrictions and sanctions have weakened its economy, particularly the earnings from energy exports.
- The departure of multinational corporations is endangering the nation's high-tech industries.
- It is anticipated that the economy will not expand in the near future. It will only be able to depend on the extraction of resources.
- Russia's political climate has become more closed off to dissent and oppressive.
- Fewer nations are supporting Russia in the diplomatic struggle; not even its allies in Central Asia have endorsed Moscow's policies.
- Putin was forced to miss a number of important international gatherings, such as the G20 and BRICS summits.
- On the other hand, Finland and Sweden are about to join NATO, and Ukraine is about to join the EU.

The situation of the Ukrainian resistance and those who back it

- Whether Ukraine can endure the test of time in light of the US's mounting war fatigue (\$113 billion since 2014), and the Republicans' current opposition to an additional \$24 billion in military aid.
- While the war has undoubtedly brought Europe together, the EU faces a challenge in the form of the Franco-German divide as it hopes to use Ukraine to spark a new wave of integration and enlargement to transform Europe into a "geopolitical force."
- France is apprehensive about EU expansion, while Germany is hesitant to arm Ukraine.
- Additionally, the bloc might eventually lose patience and turn to political expediency to put an end to the conflict
- The ground is already moving in some noticeable ways. Poland, the closest ally of Ukraine and the country that currently houses 2.6 million Ukrainian refugees, is reconsidering. "stop supplying arms to Ukraine."

- The first country to renounce its neutrality, Finland, appears to be hesitating in response to Moscow's gas supply halt, which would raise living expenses throughout the Nordic region.
- Already, Volodymyr Zelenskyy is being forced to advocate for a global "peace summit" in February of next year out of concern that the Gaza war will divert attention from Ukraine.
- Until mid-December, the EU has requested that Kyiv comply with its requirements (tightening minority laws and fighting corruption) before initiating membership negotiations.

The opposing viewpoint: Russia is genuinely winning the conflict

- The fact that Putin has finally called NATO's bluff has pleased those who dislike the West.
- Russia may acquire additional territory if the conflict continues, as it currently controls a sizable portion of the Donbas and Donetsk.
- It is unlikely that Russia will give up those territories, regardless of what happens on the battlefield.
- This will make it harder for Ukraine to negotiate a peace agreement in the future.
- This entails a protracted state of frozen conflict, an arms race, and increased defense expenditures, all of which will fall on the rest of Europe.

Has Russian power suffered irreversible damage?

- Even a weakened Russia will remain crucial to European security, regardless of how the war turns out.
- If Putin is able to overcome Ukraine's resistance, Europe will face more difficulties.
- Rebuilding Ukraine itself would require consistent energy supplies from Russia.
- With a sizable nuclear arsenal and disruptive technologies, Russia will continue to be a potent military force that can tip the strategic balance in the world.
- Actually, the Russian military may have learned how to handle NATO's weapons from this war.
- The strategic culture of Russia and its longstanding tradition of perceiving threats in relation to other countries are not to be taken lightly.
- Actually, if the West had not disregarded Moscow's repeated warnings against NATO expansion, things might not have reached this point.
- Therefore, the assumption that Russia is permanently weakened is premature.

Russia is demonstrating its power in new ways.

- Although the Russian economy is currently in decline, it has also demonstrated resilience due to its increasing market share in the energy sector.
- A historic shift in the balance of power in the world has occurred as a result of Moscow's sharp reorientation of its economy and foreign policy toward China, the Middle East, India, and Africa.

The future for Russia

- Russia will remain strategically bound to Europe in the coming years, but the extent to which it asserts its influence will rely on how broadly the US defines its interests around the world.
- Already, it is reclaiming its global sway, particularly in the Middle East.
- Apart from what happens to Ukraine, the Gaza conflict will influence Russia's foreign policy going forward.
- Although Moscow is aware that the partnership matrix is unbalanced and favours Beijing, it has nevertheless made some tentative moves to strengthen ties with Beijing.

Conclusion:

While observers and analysts tend to quickly reject Russia based on Western conclusions and criticize Putin for his "war of choice," India's official Russia policy is still firmly rooted in realism. It would be too soon to write off Russia's possibilities.

PRELIM FACT

1.Global Talent Competitiveness Index

Context: The Global Talent Competitiveness Index has seen India fall sharply from rank 83 ten years ago to rank 103 in its latest report out recently.

- It measures how countries grow, attract, and retain talent.
- It is an annual benchmarking report published by the prestigious chain of business schools, INSEAD.
- It provides a unique resource for decision-makers to understand the global talent competitiveness picture and develop strategies to boost their economies.
- The index uses two sub-indices: input and output.

- The input measures regulatory and business environments, as well as steps being taken to foster talent and retain it.
- The output side evaluates the quality of talent.
- **Highlights of GTCI 2023:**
 - The 10th edition of the report covers 134 countries around the world across all income groups.
 - Singapore, Switzerland, and the United States are among the top three countries on the index.
 - India is ranked 103, the worst among that of the BRICS countries. China remains at the top of the BRICS group of countries at rank 40, Russia is at 52, South Africa is at 68 and Brazil is ranked at 69.
 - Other countries ranking better than India are Rwanda, Paraguay, Tunisia, Namibia, Bolivia, Ghana, El Salvador, Gambia, Kenya, Morocco, and Eswatini.

2. New Pamban Bridge

Context: The new Pamban Bridge is likely to be inaugurated by the Prime Minister in a few months' time.

- It is India's first vertical-lift railway sea bridge.
- It will replace the iconic Pamban Bridge, India's first sea bridge, which opened in 1914.
- The new bridge is being built parallel to the old Pamban Bridge by Rail Vikas Nigam Limited.

Bridge Length:

- The total length of the bridge is 2.078 km.
- It will have 99 spans with 18.3-meter-long girders. The navigational span will be 63 meters.
- It connects Rameswaram on Pamban Island to Mandapam on the mainland in Tamil Nadu.

Features:

- The most unique feature of the new Pamban Bridge is its vertical lift facility. It will help boats pass under the bridge smoothly.
- The vertical lift span will have electromechanical control interlocked with the train control system.
- To allow for shipping traffic to pass under the vertical lift section of the bridge, rail traffic would be stopped. The navigational span would move up vertically to create enough height for boats to pass.
- While the new Pamban Bridge is 3 meters higher than the old bridge, it also has a navigational air clearance of 22 metres above mean sea level.
- It has been designed for double railway line and future electrification as well.

3. Worldwide Governance Indicators

Context: Recently, the Chief Economic Adviser of India raised concern over the use of World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators in ratings assessment by credit ratings agencies, especially for emerging economies.

- The World Bank compiles the Worldwide Governance Indicators using data from more than 30 think tanks, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and private firms deemed credible.
- The WGI were developed in 1999 by two World Bank researchers, Daniel Kaufmann and Aart Kraay.
- The data are updated annually each September.
- It is released by the World Bank.
- It provides a ranking of 215 countries' territories.
 - It is based on six dimensions of governance:
 - 'Voice and Accountability';
 - 'Political Stability and Absence of Violence';
 - 'Government Effectiveness';
 - 'Regulatory Quality';
 - 'Rule of Law'
 - 'Control of Corruption.'
- These indicators are designed to help researchers and analysts assess broad patterns in perceptions of governance across countries and over time.

4. Leonid meteor shower

Context: Many skywatchers in India and around the globe are poised for a cosmic treat — the Leonid Meteor Shower which is already underway since November 6 is set to reach its peak in the pre-dawn hours of November 17 to 18, 2023.

- It is brought about by the dust and debris abandoned by the comet Tempel-Tuttle.
- It is commonly peaking in mid-November.

- This Tempel-Tuttle comet circles the sun at regular intervals of 33 years.
- When the comet passes near the sun, it warms up and delivers a ton of material, shaping a dense cloud of dust and gas around it.
- This cloud follows the comet's circle and fans out over the long run.
- The shower is called after the Leo constellation, from which the meteors appear to radiate.
- The earth every year crosses the orbit of Tempel-Tuttle in mid-November and in some cases experiences the comet's dust cloud.
- When this occurs, the dust particles enter the earth's atmosphere at high speed (around 70 km/s) and catch fire, creating bright streaks of light in the sky.
- These are what we see as the 'meteors', the Leonid meteor shower.
- The Leonids are noted for sometimes causing meteor storms described by a higher influx of meteors

5. Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)

- The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) is a partnership forum that aims to contribute to long-term global and regional security by offering non-NATO countries in the broader Middle East region the opportunity to cooperate with NATO.
- Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates currently participate in the Initiative.
- The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative was established at the 2004 NATO Summit in Istanbul to promote security cooperation on a bilateral basis between NATO and partner countries in the broader Middle East region.
- Currently, four countries participating in the Gulf Cooperation Council – Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – have joined the Initiative, while Oman and Saudi Arabia participate in selected activities within the ICI framework.
- Initial consultations were held with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, but the Initiative is open to all interested countries in the Middle East that support the objectives and principles of the ICI.
- Activities under the Initiative range from defence planning and defence budgeting to the fight against terrorism, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and civil preparedness.
- The Initiative is based on a foundation of six core principles: non-discrimination, self-differentiation, two-way engagement, non-imposition, diversity and complementarity to other international initiatives in the region.

ANSWER WRITING

Analyze the effects of moral behaviour on accountability and public trust. Give appropriate instances to back up your claims.

Introduction:

Public trust refers to the public's belief in the honesty, skill, and responsiveness of public officials and organizations. Ethical conduct is defined as behaviour that complies with the moral standards and ideals of a profession or community. Accountability is the duty placed on public officials and institutions to take responsibility for their decisions and acts and to be open to inspection, review, and, if required, punishment.

The Effect of Public Trust on Ethical Behaviour:

- **Enhancing Transparency:**
 - Transparency is cultivated by ethical behaviour, giving the public confidence that decisions are made justly and fairly.
- **Encouraging Responsibility**
 - Because they are more inclined to take responsibility for their actions, ethical administrators promote responsible administration and reduce corruption.
- **Increasing Participation of Citizens:**
 - Citizens' confidence is bolstered by ethical behaviour, which promotes their active involvement in the political process.
- **Enhances Efficiency:**
 - By ensuring that public institutions and officials are sensitive to the needs and expectations of the public and use resources in an efficient and equitable manner, ethical conduct can enhance the quality and effectiveness of public services, policies, and programmes

Samples Showing the Impact and Difficulties of Ethics:

- **Whistleblower protection:** striking a balance between the obligation to disclose misconduct and the risk to one's personal safety and career.

- **Procurement & Contracting:** Upholding efficiency and cost-effectiveness while rejecting bribery or partiality in contract awarding.
- **Environmental protection:** Maintaining moral principles in the formulation of public policy, even when doing so has financial ramifications.
- Including the public in the process of allocating public monies for regional priorities or projects is known as participatory budgeting.

Conclusion:

Public officials and institutions should support and encourage moral behaviour by adhering to explicit codes of conduct, offering advice and training, guaranteeing involvement and consultation, setting up procedures for filing complaints and handling them, and cultivating a moral and responsible culture.

MCQs

- Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) that measures how countries grow, attract, and retain talent report is published by which of the following organization?
a) World Economic Forum
b) INSEAD School
c) World Bank
d) United Nations Development Programme
- Consider the following statements about New Pamban Bridge
1. It is India's first vertical-lift railway sea bridge.
2. It connects Rameswaram on Pamban Island to Mandapam on the mainland in Tamil Nadu.
Choose the correct statements:
a) 1 only b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 nor 2
- Consider the following statements about Worldwide Governance Indicators
1. The WGI were developed in 1999 by two Daniel Kaufmann and Sood Ajay
2. It is released by the United Nations Development Programme.
3. Control of Corruption and Political Stability and Absence of Violence are among the six dimensions of governance considered in WGI.
How many of the statements given above are correct?
a) Only one b) Only two
c) All three d) None of the above
- Consider the following statements about Leonid meteor shower
1. It is brought about by the dust and debris abandoned by the Halley's Comet.
2. The shower is called after the Leo constellation, from which the meteors appear to radiate.
Choose the incorrect statements:
a) 1 only b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 nor 2
- With reference to Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), consider the following statements:
1. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) fosters global and regional security by providing non-NATO countries in the broader Middle East the chance to collaborate with NATO.
2. India, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates currently participate in the Initiative. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
a) 1 Only b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2 d) Neither 1 nor 2
- Byopa is a traditional headgear of tribes belonging to _____ ?
a) Jharkhand **b) Arunachal Pradesh**
c) Kerala d) Goa
- Tides occur in the oceans and seas due to which among the following?
1. Gravitational force of the Sun
2. Gravitational force of the Moon
3. Centrifugal force of the Earth
Select the correct answer using the codes given below :
a) Only 1 **b) 1 and 2 only**
c) 1 and 3 only d) 1, 2 and 3
- From which year the Gandhi Peace Prize is given by the government ?
a) 1990 b) 1967
c) 1989 **d) 1995**
- Global Hectare is a measurement unit for the ____.
a) Ecological Volume
b) Ecological Footprint
c) Average amount of water
d) Ecological Area
- If earth stops rotating, the impact on weight of a body will be minimum on which among the following places?
a) Equator
b) North pole
c) Tropic of cancer
d) Tropic of Capricorn