

GOVERNANCE**Legal dispute over AMU's minority character****Why in news?**

- A seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court started hearing the matter pertaining to Aligarh Muslim University's minority character.
- This is a dispute that dates back almost 57 years and has been adjudicated upon multiple times by different courts.

Aligarh Muslim University

- Origin
 - AMU's origins can be traced back to the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MOA) College.
 - It was established by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in 1875 to help Muslims overcome educational backwardness and prepare for government services.
 - MOA not only imparted Western education but also emphasised Islamic theology. Sir Syed also advocated for women's education.
- University status
 - In 1920, the institution was conferred university status and all assets of MOA College were transferred to it.
 - Currently, AMU is a public central university in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Minorities in India

- Definition
 - The expression minorities appear in some Articles of the Constitution, but is not defined anywhere.
- Identification
 - The subject of identification of the minority community is on the Concurrent List.
 - Currently, the central government decides who gets the minority community status in India. It is done under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992.
 - Only those belonging to the communities notified under Section 2(c) of the 1992 law are regarded as minority citizens.
 - However, this arrangement may change soon.
 - In March 2022, the central government told the SC that states could decide the minority status of the eligible communities within their territorial jurisdiction.
 - This came as a response to a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by Ashwini Upadhyay contending that those from the majority communities in some states are treated as minority citizens and therefore corner undue benefits.
- Current Status
 - Under this law, Centre had notified five groups — Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Jains — as 'minority' communities.
 - Jains were added to the list in January 2014.
- Constitutional provisions dealing with rights of minorities
 - Article 29 deals with the Protection of Interests of Minorities.
 - Article 30 deals with the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
 - Article 350(A) says there shall be a Special Officer for linguistic minorities to be appointed by the President.

Different SC Judgements dealing with minorities

- TMA PAI CASE:
 - In 'TMA Pai', an 11-judge bench of the SC dealt with the question of the scope of right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice under the Constitution.
 - The court ruled that:
 - The State is to be regarded as the unit for determining both linguistic minority as well as religious minority.
 - The question whether a sector denomination of a religion can claim minority status even though followers of that religion are in majority left unanswered.
- INAMDAR CASE:
 - The 7-judge bench ruled that:

- Minority whether linguistic or religious is to be determined by the demography of state,
- Minority institutions may be classified into 3 categories:
 - Those which do not seek aid or recognition
 - Those which want aid, and
 - Those which want only recognition and no aid.
- **BAL PATIL:**
 - In 2005, the SC in its judgment in ‘Bal Patil’ referred to the TMA Pai ruling, and said:
 - The unit for determining status of both linguistic and religious minorities would be state.

Minority Educational Institution (MEI)

- **About**
 - MEIs are colleges or institutions established by a minority group to protect and promote their culture and traditions.
- **Constitutional provision**
 - Article 30 of the Indian constitution gives all minorities the right to establish and run educational institutions.
 - In case the property is taken over by the state, due compensation is to be provided to establish institutions elsewhere.
 - The article also prohibits the state from discriminating against these institutions when granting aid.
- **Legal provisions**
 - The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) Act has been enacted to safeguard the educational rights of the minorities enshrined in Article 30(1) of the Constitution.
 - The Commission is a quasi-judicial body and has been endowed with the powers of a Civil Court for the purpose of discharging its functions under the Act.

News Summary: Legal dispute over AMU’s minority character

- **S. AzeezBasha and another versus Union of India**
 - The legal dispute over AMU’s minority status dates back to 1967 when the Supreme Court was reviewing changes made in 1951 and 1965 to the AMU Act.
 - These amendments affected how the university was run.
 - In its judgement, the court emphasised that AMU was established through a central Act to ensure the government’s recognition of its degrees.
 - So, while the Act may have been passed because of the efforts of the Muslim minority, it does not imply that the University, under the 1920 Act, was established by the Muslim minority.
- **1981 Amendment to the act**
 - The SC ruling triggered nationwide protests from Muslims.
 - In response, political authorities yielded in 1981 and introduced an amendment to the AMU Act, explicitly affirming its minority status.
- **Implementation of reservation policy by AMU in 2005**
 - In 2005, the AMU implemented a reservation policy, reserving 50% of seats in postgraduate medical courses for Muslim candidates.
 - This was challenged in the Allahabad High Court, which, in the same year, overturned the reservation and nullified the 1981 Act.
 - The court reasoned that the AMU could not maintain an exclusive reservation because, according to the Supreme Court’s verdict in the S. AzeezBasha case, it did not qualify as a minority institution.
- **Matter challenged in Supreme Court**
 - In 2006, a set of eight petitions, including one from the Union government, contested the Allahabad High Court’s decision before the Supreme Court.
 - In 2016, the then government informed the SC that it was withdrawing the appeal filed by the government.
 - It said that as the executive government at the Centre, we cannot be seen as setting up a minority institution in a secular state.
- **Matter referred to a seven-judge Bench**
 - In February 2019, a three-judge Bench presided by the then CJI RanjanGogoi referred the matter to a seven-judge Bench.
 - This bench has now started hearing on the issue.

First US Lunar lander since 1972 launched**Why in news?**

- A spacecraft developed by a private US company and carrying a bunch of scientific instruments from NASA, took off from Florida, USA.
- The aim of this launch is to become the first US spacecraft to land on the Moon in more than 50 years.

Artemis programme

- About
 - The Artemis programme is a series of ongoing lunar missions run by NASA.
- Different phases under this programme
 - One Artemis mission has already been completed. In late 2022, Artemis 1, an uncrewed test flight, orbited and flew beyond the Moon.
 - Artemis 2 will be a crewed flight beyond the Moon which will take humans the farthest they've ever been in space.
 - Artemis 3 will be the first crewed Moon landing mission since Apollo 17 in 1972.
 - NASA aims to land the first female astronaut and first astronaut of colour on the lunar surface.
 - They will spend a week on the Moon performing scientific studies, before returning to Earth.
 - Artemis 4 will deliver a core part of a new lunar space station (named 'Gateway') into orbit around the Moon, and land another two astronauts on the Moon's surface.
 - Artemis 5 will add another important module to Gateway and involve a third crewed lunar landing to undertake further surface science.
- Aim
 - It seeks to establish a permanent base camp on the Moon.
 - It also aims to send astronauts and robots for longer stays for more comprehensive exploration, and scientific studies of the lunar surface and atmosphere.
 - It would also explore opportunities for the utilisation of resources available on the Moon with the ultimate objective of launching deep space missions from the lunar surface.

Key highlights of the mission

- Involvement of private player
 - The Peregrine lander module of the mission, as well as the Vulcan rocket that launched it, have both been built by private space companies in the US.
 - The Mission is part of NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative that seeks to involve private space sector in its ambitious Artemis programme.
 - This launch was the first under the CLPS initiative.
 - Under CLPS, so far, at least 14 private companies have been contracted to carry NASA payloads to the Moon.
 - This collaboration is aimed at creating the market and technology ecosystem in the private space industry with respect to science and technology needs of lunar exploration.
- The mission
 - Five payloads from NASA sat inside the Peregrine lander that was launched by the Vulcan heavy rocket.
 - The payloads are meant to carry out various exploratory activities, including detection of water.
 - The spacecraft will take more than 40 days to reach the Moon, and is planned to make a landing on February 23.

News Summary: First US lunar lander since 1972 launched

- The first US lunar lander in more than 50 years rocketed to space recently, launching a race for private companies to deliver experiments and other items to the moon.
- If successful, this mission would also involve the first landing of a private spacecraft on the Moon.
 - In 2023, a Japanese company had attempted a moon landing with its Hakuto-R mission but was unsuccessful.
 - In 2019, the first Israeli attempt to land on the Moon was also engineered by a private company, but the spacecraft, Beresheet, had crash-landed.

PRELIM FACTS**1. INS Kabra**

- Indian warship, INS Kabra, an indigenous fast attack craft, docked at the Colombo port in a move aimed at fostering bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka.

About INS Kabra:

- It is a naval vessel named after an island of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago.
- It belongs to the Car Nicobar class of high-speed offshore patrol vessels are built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) for the Indian Navy.
- It was the eighth in a series of 10 Fast Attack Crafts.
- The vessels are designed as a cost-effective platform for patrol, anti-piracy and rescue operations in India's Exclusive Economic Zone.
- The class and its vessels are named for Indian islands. They are the first water jet propelled vessels of the Indian Navy.
- With a top speed of over 35 knots, and excellent manoeuvrability offered by her water-jet propulsion, the ship is ideally suited for high-speed interdiction of fast moving targets.
- It is with the latest regulations of the International Maritime Organisation on sea compliance pollution control.

2. Drishti 10 'Starliner'

- Chief of Naval Staff recently flagged off the first indigenously manufactured Drishti 10 'Starliner' Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) for the Navy.

About Drishti 10 'Starliner':

- It is an indigenously manufactured Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV).
- It was developed by Adani Defence and Aerospace.
- It is an advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platform with 36 hours endurance and a 450 kg payload capacity.
- It is an all-weather military platform which has clearance to fly in both segregated and unsegregated airspace.
- It is designed to possess high endurance, combat-proven capabilities, and advanced features, providing a significant boost to India's naval capabilities.
- The UAV's autonomous nature, coupled with its mission effectiveness and payload configuration options, makes it an invaluable asset for strategic operations.
- One of the distinguishing features of the Drishti 10 'Starliner' is its minimal maintenance requirements, making it cost-effective and operationally efficient.
- This characteristic ensures increased operational readiness, reducing downtime, and maximizing deployment opportunities.
- It is equipped with advanced communication systems, including satellite communication and Line-of-Sight (LOS) data links, ensuring reliable and secure data transmission.

3. Eucalyptus Snot Beetle

- Scientists have found a natural remedy to protect eucalyptus forest plantations from a pest, eucalyptus snout beetle, which is known to cause serious damage to eucalypts.

About Eucalyptus Snout Beetle:

- It is a leaf-feeding beetle that is a major defoliator of eucalypts.
- It is also known as eucalyptus weevil.
- The pest is indigenous to Australia but occurs in many countries throughout the world where eucalypts are grown.
- The beetle feeds on leaves, buds and shoots, resulting in stunted growth and defoliation and causing heavy losses.
- It can cause damage over vast areas as it had a great flight capability and gets transferred with transport of forest products.
- The pest is mainly controlled with the help of microwasps *Anaphes* spp — an expensive solution.
- This led a team of scientists to look for naturally occurring pathogenic fungi to tackle the problem.

New research:

- The scientists collected the fungi from naturally infected beetles, the pathogen can better adapt to the environmental conditions, making it efficient to control beetles in forest populations.

- The findings of the study showed that Beauveria bassiana was highly effective both by contact and ingestion, with a mortality rate of 100 per cent.
- The fungi could be used to develop a bio-pesticide for sustainable forestry using integrated pest management.
- The fungi could also be used in other countries where the insect is causing severe damage.

4. Supreme Court Legal Services Committee

- Supreme Court judge Justice BR Gavai has been nominated as the Chairman of the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee (SCLSC).

About Supreme Court Legal Services Committee:

- It was constituted under Section 3A of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.
- It was to provide “free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of society”, in cases falling under the top court’s jurisdiction.
 - Section 3A of the Act states that the Central Authority (the National Legal Services Authority or NALSA) shall constitute the committee.
- Composition
 - It consists of a sitting SC judge, who is the chairman, along with other members possessing the experience and qualifications prescribed by the Centre.
 - Both the chairman and other members will be nominated by the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Further, the CJI can appoint the Secretary to the Committee.
 - The Committee, in turn, can appoint officers and other employees as prescribed by the Centre, in consultation with the CJI.
 - Rule 10 of the NALSA Rules, 1995, entails the numbers, experience, and qualifications of the SCLSC members.
 - Under Section 27 of the 1987 Act, the Centre is empowered to make rules in consultation with the CJI, by notification, to carry out the provisions of the Act.

Key facts about Legal Service Authorities Act:

- It was enacted to give a statutory base to legal aid programmes.
- It aims to provide free and competent legal services to eligible groups, including women, children, SC/ST and EWS categories, industrial workers, disabled persons, and others.
- NALSA: Under the Act, NALSA was constituted in 1995 to monitor and evaluate the implementation of legal aid programmes and to lay down policies for making legal services available.
- A nationwide network has been envisaged under the Act for providing legal aid and assistance. It also disburses funds and grants to State Legal Services Authorities and NGOs for implementing legal aid schemes and programmes.
- State Legal Services Authorities (SLSA) were established to implement NALSA’s policies and directions, give free legal services to people, and conduct Lok Adalats.
 - An SLSA is headed by the Chief Justice of the respective High Court and includes the senior HC judge as its Executive
- District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) and Taluk Legal Services Committees were established in districts and most taluks. Situated in the District Courts Complex in every district, each DLSA is chaired by the District Judge of the respective district.
- The Taluka or Sub-Divisional Legal Services Committees are headed by a senior civil judge.

5. Ugram

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation recently launched an indigenous assault rifle named 'Ugram'.

About Ugram:

- ‘Ugram’ is a state-of-the-art indigenous assault rifle.
- It has been developed by the Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE), a unit of DRDO, in collaboration with a private industry partner.
- It was developed in less than 100 days.
- It has been developed as per the General Staff Qualitative Requirements (GSQR) of the army into consideration.
- Features:

- The rifle will deploy rounds of 7.62 mm calibre, making it more ferocious than rifles that use 5.62 mm calibre rounds, like the INSAS rifle, which is popularly used by the armed forces in India, including paramilitary forces.
- It has an effective range of 500 metres.
- It weighs less than four kilograms.
- The rifle has a 20-round magazine that fires robust and in full auto mode.

Key Facts about Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO):

- It is the R&D wing of the Ministry of Defence, Govt. of India, with a vision to empower India with cutting-edge defence technologies and a mission to achieve self-reliance in critical defence technologies and systems.
- It is India's largest research organisation.
- Formation: The organisation was formed in 1958 from the amalgamation of the then-existing Technical Development Establishment (TDEs) of the Indian Army and the Directorate of Technical Development & Production (DTDP) with the Defence Science Organisation (DSO).
- Headquarters: New Delhi.
- It has a network of laboratories engaged in developing defence technologies covering various fields, like aeronautics, armaments, electronics, land combat engineering, life sciences, materials, missiles, and naval systems.

ANSWER WRITING

"Persons with disabilities represent an integral part of our diverse society, yet they continue to face multifaceted challenges in various domains." Discuss. Also, suggest measures to address such challenges.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."

In India, there were around 26.8 million persons with disabilities, constituting 2.21% of India's total population (2011 Census).

Challenges faced by people with disabilities in various domains:

- **Limited Access to Education:** Many persons with disabilities struggle to access quality education due to the lack of inclusive infrastructure, trained teachers, and suitable learning materials. The literacy rate of persons with disabilities is lower than the national average. According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate of persons with disabilities is 52.9%, compared to 74.0% for the general population.
- **Unemployment and Underemployment:** Persons with disabilities often encounter discrimination and biases in the job market, leading to high unemployment and underemployment rates. According to the 2011 Census, the employment rate of persons with disabilities is 36.0% as against 51.6% for the general population.
- **Inadequate Healthcare and Rehabilitation Services:** Access to specialized healthcare and rehabilitation services is often limited, especially in rural areas. This prevents persons with disabilities from receiving proper medical attention and necessary therapies, impacting their overall health and well-being.
- **Social Stigma and Discrimination:** Persons with disabilities frequently face social stigma and discrimination, which isolates them from mainstream society. Prejudice and misconceptions about disabilities contribute to negative attitudes, limiting their social interactions and opportunities. According to the 2011 Census, 33.4% of persons with disabilities have no one to rely on for help, compared to 21.6% of the general population.
- **Inaccessibility of Public Spaces:** Physical barriers in public spaces, such as lack of ramps, elevators, and accessible transportation, restrict the mobility and independence of persons with disabilities, making it challenging to participate fully in various activities.
- **Inadequate Legal Protection and Implementation:** Despite legislative frameworks like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, of 2016, the effective implementation of disability rights remains a challenge. Inconsistent enforcement of laws and policies hinders the protection of their rights and entitlements.

To address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in India, a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach is required like:

- **Inclusive Education:** Develop and implement policies that promote inclusive education, ensuring access to quality education for all students with disabilities. Train teachers and educational staff in inclusive teaching methodologies to cater to diverse learning needs. Example- The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995
- **Employment Opportunities:** Enforce strict anti-discrimination laws and policies in the job market to ensure equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Encourage and incentivise private companies to adopt inclusive hiring practices and create accessible workplaces. Example - The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY):
- **Healthcare and Rehabilitation Services:** Increase the availability and accessibility of specialized healthcare facilities and rehabilitation services across the country. Promote community-based rehabilitation programs that cater to the specific needs of persons with disabilities in rural areas. Example - The National Scheme for the Welfare of the Hearing Handicapped
- **Awareness and Sensitization:** Conduct widespread awareness campaigns to dispel myths and stereotypes surrounding disabilities, promoting a more inclusive and empathetic society. Integrate disability awareness and sensitisation modules in school curricula and professional training programs. Example - The Rashtriya Saksharta Mission (RMS)
- **Accessible Infrastructure:** Ensure that all public spaces, including transportation, buildings, and recreational areas, are made fully accessible through universal design principles. Mandate the incorporation of ramps, elevators, tactile paving, and audio-visual aids in public facilities to enhance accessibility.
- **Accessible Information and Communication:** Enforce web accessibility standards to make digital content and websites accessible for persons with disabilities. Support the development of affordable and user-friendly assistive technologies for persons with visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments.
- **Strengthening Legal Protection:** Ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and other relevant laws and policies. Establish accessible and user-friendly grievance redressal mechanisms to address complaints related to disability rights violations.

Conclusion

It is crucial for the government, civil society, and other stakeholders to address these challenges through proactive policies, awareness campaigns, inclusive infrastructure, and sensitization programs, fostering a more inclusive and accessible society for persons with disabilities.

MCQs

1. Consider the following statements:
1. Camptothecin (CPT) is an important anti-cancer drug lead molecule which is extracted mainly from *Nathapodytes nimmoniana*.
2. *Nathapodytes nimmoniana* is a species of flowering plant widespread throughout India.
Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2
2. Consider the following pairs:

Space Missions	Objectives
1. Aditya-L1	Observing the solar atmosphere
2. Gaganyaan-1	Manned spaceflights
3. Mangalyaan-2	Exploring Venus to expand knowledge of the solar system.
3. The report "Global Economic Prospects Report 2024" has been released by
(a) World Bank
(b) World Economic Forum
(c) International Monetary Fund
(d) United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
4. Consider the following statements regarding the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPVFR) Authority:
1. It is a statutory body under the PPVFR Act, 2001.
2. It works under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

- 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
5. Which of the following are the possible effects of solar flares on the Earth?
 1. GPS and navigation systems could fail.
 2. Tsunamis could occur in equatorial regions.
 3. Orbits of the satellites could be disturbed.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
 (a) Only one
(b) Only two
 (c) All three
 (d) None
6. With reference to Income Inequality, consider the following statements:
 1. Income inequality is captured through the Gini coefficient.
 2. A higher tax base and a shift in taxpayers from lower-income to higher-income tax brackets can be an indicator of decreasing income inequality.
 Which of the statements given above are correct?
 (a) 1 only
 (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
 (d) Neither 1 nor 2
7. Consider the following statements:
 1. Plasma waves are oscillations or fluctuations in the density of charged particles, such as electrons and ions, within plasma.
 2. Plasma waves play a crucial role in energizing and transporting charged particles throughout the magnetosphere.
 3. The planet Mars does not have any intrinsic magnetic field like Earth.
 Which of the statements given above are correct?
 (a) 1 and 2 only
 (b) 2 and 3 only
 (c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3
8. Latitudinal diversity gradient refers to
 (a) It refers to the gradual increase in Coriolis force toward the pole.
 (b) Changing of landscapes as we move further from the equator.
 (c) Gradual decrease in climatic variation towards the pole from the equator.
(d) Species diversity decreases as we move away from the equator.
9. Which of the following statements are correct with respect to Paradip Fishing Harbour?
 1. It is one of the major fishing harbours in Odisha.
 2. It is located on the bank of the river Baitarani.
 3. The modernisation and upgradation of the Harbour is to be done with 100% central financial assistance under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY).
 Select the correct answer using the code given below:
 (a) 1 and 2 only
 (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
 (d) 1, 2 and 3
10. Consider the following statements regarding the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPVFR) Authority:
 1. It is a statutory body under the PPVFR Act, 2001.
 2. It works under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
 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