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Social Audit to Track Construction Workers' Benefits

- The Labour Ministry has issued the draft framework for the social audit on the implementation of the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 (BOCW).
- Social Audits of the implementation of the BOCW Act are being carried out after the directions of the Supreme Court in its March 18, 2018 judgment on a petition from National Campaign Committee for Central Legislation on Construction Labour (NCC-CL). The apex court had also noted that the BOCW would be useless without accountability in registration efforts.
- The construction industry is India's second largest employer, with estimates suggesting that there are between five and seven crore workers in the sector, of whom less than half are registered.

Objectives of Social Audit

- The objective of the social audit is to check if construction worker welfare boards are registering workers and also to weed out non-workers registered illegally.
- The objective of Social Audit is to make sure that construction workers and their children are getting benefits they are entitled to under BOCW Act, 1996 like the scholarship for children, pension, and maternity benefits,

Building and Other Construction Worker Act, 1996

- The 1996 Act is meant to regulate the employment and conditions of service of building and other construction workers and to provide for their safety, health, and welfare.
- The law mandates that any construction activity that engages more than 10 workers must follow the guidelines set by it.
- The Act provides for the establishment of state welfare boards to counsel and assist workers, fixed hours of work and ensure regular payment to the workers.

- The boards also provide identity cards to the workers upon registration that may be used for availing benefits.
- Under the Act, 1% of the total amount of every construction project worth over Rs 10 lakh, whether private or public, must be submitted to the Labour Department as 'welfare cess'.
- This money can be utilized for various schemes meant for labour welfare such as scholarships for labourers' children, compensation for families in case of death or physical handicap, low-cost housing, among others.

Social Audit

- Social audit is a democratic process where the concerned community demands information and verification from agencies in a systematic manner, thus ensuring/leading to public accountability.
- The process of social audit is used to establish whether benefit meant for an individual or community has reached them or not.

Green Tribunal Steps in to Conserve Ghats

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has restrained the **six Western Ghats States** (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat), from giving environmental clearance to activities that may adversely impact the eco-sensitive areas of the mountain ranges.

- The panel further directed not to reduce the extent of Eco-Sensitive Zones of Western Ghats, taking cognizance of the recent floods in Kerala.
- Earlier the Madhav Gadgil-led Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) report had created a political furore in the State with most of the political parties and a section of the church opposing it.
- Therefore the Government appointed Kasturirangan-led High Level Working Group, to look into the WGEEP report. The Kasturirangan panel reduced areas under the eco-sensitive zone.
- The Government accepted the Kasthurirangan report and issued the draft notifications on ecologically sensitive zones.

Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP)

- A committee headed by ecologist **Madhav Gadgil** also known as the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) in 2011 recommended that **all of the Western Ghats be declared as the Ecological Sensitive Areas (ESA)** with only limited development allowed in graded zones.

- The panel had classified the Western Ghats into **Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ) 1, 2 and 3** of which ESZ-1 is high priority, almost all developmental activities (mining, thermal power plants etc) were restricted in it.
- Further, no new dams based on large-scale storage be permitted in ESZ 1.
- It specified that the system of governance of the environment should be **bottom to top approach (right from Gram sabhas)** rather than a top to bottom approach.
- Constitution of a **Western Ghats Ecology Authority (WGEA)**, as a statutory authority under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, with the powers under Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- The report was criticized for being more environment-friendly and not in tune with the ground realities.

Kasturirangan committee

The committee's major recommendations were:

- Instead of the total area of Western Ghats, **only 37% (i.e. 60,000 sq. km.) of the total area to be brought under ESA.**
- Complete ban on mining, quarrying and sand mining in ESA.
- Current mining areas in the ESA should be phased out within the next five years, or at the time of expiry of mining lease, whichever is earlier.
- No thermal power projects to be allowed and hydropower projects be allowed only after detailed study.
- Red industries i.e. which are highly polluting to be strictly banned.
- The report recommended exclusion of inhabited regions and plantations from the purview of ESAs making it a pro farmer approach.
- The Kasturirangan report was accepted by all states, however Kerala was most vocal against the report.

Way forward

- It is a Development vs Conservation debate and politicisation of the issue will not give any fruitful results.
- In the light of recent Kerala floods, a proper analysis based on scientific study followed by consensus among various stake holders by addressing respective concerns is required urgently.
- Holistic view of threats and demands on the forest land, products and services, devising strategies to address these with clearly stated objectives for the authorities involved must be taken.
- Destruction in the name of development should not be encouraged and sustainable development should be given priority.
- Any further delay in the implementation will only accentuate degrading of the most prized natural resource of the country.

Prime Minister Launched India Post Payments Bank

- The Prime Minister launched India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) on September 1, 2018.
- The government has a target to link all 1.55 lakh post office branches with IPPB services by end of this year.
- The **IPPB app** was also launched and it will enable customers to pay for services like phone recharges and bill, electricity bill, DTH service, college fees etc that are present on Bharat Bill Payments System of National Payments Corporation of India.
- With IPPB in place, people in the rural area will be able to avail digital banking and financial services, including money transfer, to any bank account either with help of mobile app or by visiting a post office.

About India Post Payment Bank

IPPB has been incorporated as a public limited company with 100% government holding under the Department of Posts. This would be the first PSU under the Department of Posts.

Services offered by IPPB

- As mandated by the RBI, the India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) will focus on providing basic financial services such as:
 - All kinds of payments including utility bill payments.
 - Social security payments like NREGA wages, direct benefit transfer.
 - Person to person remittances (both domestic and cross-border).
 - Current and savings account up to a balance of Rs 1 lakh.
 - Access to third-party services insurance, mutual funds, pension products.
 - Acting as a business correspondent to other banks for credit products especially in rural areas and among the underserved segments of the society.
- More than 3 lakh Postman and Grameen Dak Sevak will act as Mobile bankers and provide the facility of "*banking at your doorstep- Aapka Bank Aapke Dwar*".
- The doorstep banking will be chargeable at Rs. 15-35 per transaction and maximum banking limit of Rs. 10,000.
- India Post Payments Bank will offer three types of savings accounts—regular, digital and basic—at an interest rate of 4% per annum.
- They can issue debit cards and ATM cards, usable on ATM networks of all banks, but they cannot issue credit cards and cannot loan money.

Benefits of IPPB

- Financial Inclusion

Financial Inclusion is critical for the socio-economic development of the country, considering the vast network of post offices throughout the nation, IPPB can act as a catalyst for social and financial inclusion.
- Accessibility

Department of Post's wide network, resources and reach, enables it to be a provider of low-cost, quality financial services to customers all over the country.
- Rural Banking

IPPB will fill the gaps in financial inclusion in the remotest areas of the country.
- Ease of Banking
 - Given their long experience with various investment and monthly income schemes, providing deposit facility with ATM/debit cards would be simply an extension of their current services.
 - It will also not have to gain the trust of customers like its competitors, especially in the rural areas, as the local postman is still an integral part of the day-to-day lives of the rural populace.
- Diversifying Postal Department Services

It will give India post a new life as in today's digital era, telegrams and postcards are no longer used and new business ventures are needed to sustain.
- Delivery of Government Services
 - IPPB will enable the government to deliver the benefits of schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, better penetration of schemes like Sukanya Samridhi Yojna.
 - Banking through IPPB would give a boost to Government's initiatives like promoting digital transactions and Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT)
- Employment Generation

IPPB will generate employment opportunity for more than 3500 banking professional, who will be engaged in propagating financial literacy across the country.

Payment Bank

- A committee headed by Dr. Nachiket Mor recommended setting up of 'Payments Bank' to cater to the lower income groups and small businesses.
- A payments bank is a differentiated bank, offering a limited range of products.
- It can accept demand deposits only that is savings and current accounts, not time deposits.
- Payment banks are restricted to holding a maximum balance of Rs. 100,000(Rupees one lakh only) per individual customer.
- Payment Banks cannot accept Non-Resident Indian (NRI) deposits.

- The Payment Banks cannot set up subsidiaries to undertake non-banking financial services activities.
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UN Begins Talks to Regulate the High Seas

The United Nations started talks on a 2020 treaty that would regulate the high seas, which cover half the planet yet lack adequate environmental protection.

- The talks will take place over two years with the objective to protect marine biodiversity and avoid further exploitation of the oceans.
- Since, marine life is already reeling from the impact of industrial fishing, climate change and other extractive industries, its important to protect our global oceans before it is too late.

High Seas

- Countries can protect or exploit waters under 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) to their shorelines, but everything outside these 'exclusive economic zones' is considered international waters: the high seas.
- The high seas make up two-thirds of Earth's oceans, providing 90% of its available habitat for life and accounting for up to US\$16 billion a year in fisheries catch.
- They are also prime territory for the discovery of valuable mineral deposits, potent pharmaceuticals and oil and gas reserves.
- International law identifies four global commons namely: the High Seas; the Atmosphere; Antarctica; Outer Space.
- Global commons refer to resource domains that lie outside the political reach of any one nation.

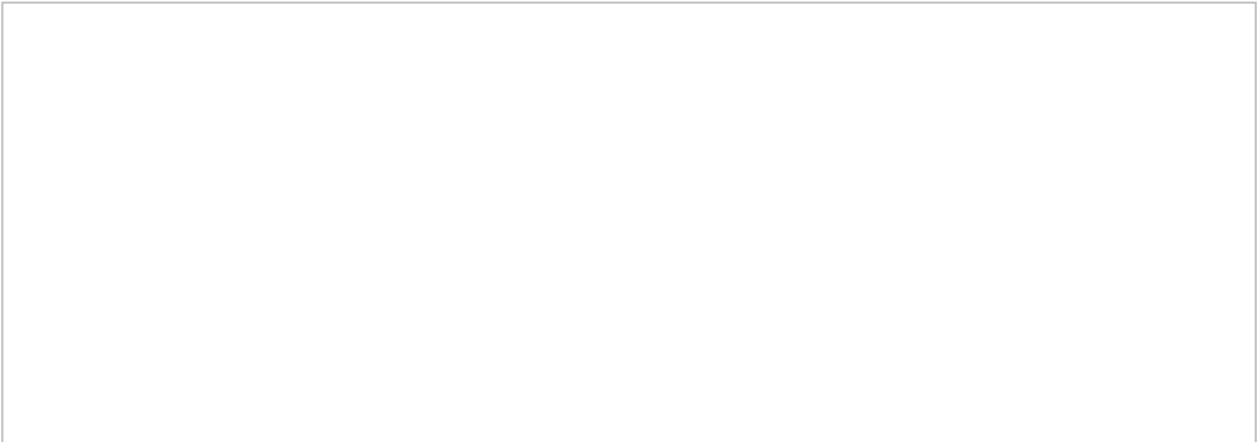
Present Scenario

- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regulates activities in international waters, including sea-bed mining and cable laying.
- It lays down rules for the use of the ocean and its resources, but does not specify how states should conserve and sustainably use high seas biodiversity.
- No overarching treaty exists to protect biodiversity or conserve vulnerable ecosystems in the oceans.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- The 'Law of the Sea Treaty', formally known as United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted in 1982 to establish jurisdictional limits over the ocean areas.

- The convention defines distance of 12 nautical miles from the baseline as Territorial Sea limit and a distance of 200 nautical miles distance as Exclusive Economic Zone limit.



- It provides for technology and wealth transfer from developed to underdeveloped nations and requires parties to implement regulations and laws to control marine pollution.
- India became a signatory to the UNCLOS in 1982.
- UNCLOS created **three new** institutions:
 - **International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea**- It is an independent judicial body established by UNCLOS to adjudicate disputes arising out of the convention.
 - **International Seabed Authority**- It is a UN body set up to regulate the exploration and exploitation of marine non-living resources of oceans in international waters.
 - **Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf**- It facilitates the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the Convention) in respect of the establishment of the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.

Upgrade At CERN

Six years after the Higgs boson was discovered at the CERN Large Hadron Collider (LHC), particle physicists have recently observed how the elusive particle decays.

- Higgs boson has been observed to decay into fundamental particles known as **bottom quarks**.
- The Higgs boson was detected by studying collisions of particles at different energies. But they last only for one zeptosecond, which is 10^{-21} seconds, so detecting and studying their properties requires an incredible amount of energy and advanced detectors.

What is Higgs Boson?

- In 2012, the Nobel-winning discovery of the Higgs boson(also known as 'God particle') validated the **Standard Model of physics**, which also predicts that about 60% of the time a Higgs boson will decay to a pair of bottom quarks.
- In 1960s Peter Higgs was the first person to suggest that this particle might exist.
- The Standard Model of particle physics is the theory which describes three of the four known fundamental forces (the electromagnetic, weak, and strong interactions, and not including the gravitational force) in the universe, as well as classifies all known elementary particles.
- Scientists do not yet know how to combine gravity with the Standard Model.
- The Higgs particle is a boson. Bosons are thought to be particles which are responsible for all physical forces. Other known bosons are the photon, the W and Z bosons, and the gluon.

What is Large Hadron Collider (LHC)?

- It is a kind of **atom smasher** machine.
- It is the world's largest and most powerful **particle accelerator**.
- It is essentially two 16-mile-round rings that overlap in four places.
- Bunches of protons (or heavier atoms) race around the tracks at nearly the speed of light and collide in one of the four intersections.
- Enormous detectors surround those crossings and record the particles that coalesce out of the high-energy collisions. Discoveries are made when these resulting collisions behave differently than the existing laws of physics would predict—or when they behave in predicted but never-before-seen ways.
- It first started up in 2008, and remains the latest addition to CERN's accelerator complex.
- It consists of a 27-kilometre **ring of superconducting magnets** with a number of accelerating structures to boost the energy of the particles along the way.

Significance

- Particle physics probes nature at extreme scales to understand the fundamental constituents of matter. Just like grammar and vocabulary guide (and constrain) our communication, particles communicate with each other in accordance with interactions through fundamental forces.
- Studying the patterns in the emission of these particles help us understand the properties and structure of particles.

- Testing the prediction is crucial because the result will either lend support to the Standard Model — which is built upon the idea that the Higgs field endows quarks and other fundamental particles with mass — or rock its foundations and point to new physics.
- Experiments like these allow physicists to not only validate what the Standard Model predicts about the Higgs boson and bottom quarks but also challenge what the Standard Model predicts.

Why is Upgradation Needed?

- CERN announced earlier this year that it is getting a massive upgrade, which will be completed by 2026.
- It will allow scientists to conduct even bigger and better physics experiments.
- It will turn the LHC into the High-Luminosity Large Hadron Collider (HL-LHC). The upgrade will allow the machine to collide even more particles, potentially helping physicists see new stuff.
- The upgrade could also make discoveries happen faster.
- Making new discoveries faster requires making more collisions and that's exactly what the High-Luminosity LHC will do. Currently, the LHC can produce a billion collisions between protons per second which would be increased by five to seven times.
- Such an upgrade would make measurements of particles like the Higgs boson more accurate.

India and CERN

- India in **2016** became an **associate member** of the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN).
- India's association with CERN goes back decades with an active involvement in the construction of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), in the areas of design, development and supply of hardware accelerator components/systems and its commissioning and software development and deployment in the machine.
- India was inducted as an 'Observer' at CERN in 2004. Its upgrade as associate member allows Indian companies to bid for lucrative engineering contracts and Indians can apply for staff positions at the organisation.
- The associate membership would cost India Rs. 78 crore annually though it still wouldn't have voting rights on decisions of the Council.
- Indian scientists have played a significant role in the A Large Ion Collider Experiment (ALICE) and Compact Muon Solenoid (CMS) experiments that led to the discovery of the Higgs Boson.

About CERN

- European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) is the world's largest nuclear and particle physics laboratory and best known as operator of the Large Hadron Collider, which found the elusive Higgs boson in 2012.
 - CERN is based in Geneva on the French-Swiss border. It has 22 member states.
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Important Facts for Prelims (3rd September 2018)

MOVE Cyclathon

- The Move Cyclathon, a cycle rally was organized by NITI Aayog to promote cleaner, accessible modes of transport.
- It was held in the run up to the MOVE: Global Mobility Summit on September 7, 8 in New Delhi.

MOVE: Global Mobility Summit

- NITI Aayog, in collaboration with various ministries and industry partners, organized 'MOVE: Global Mobility Summit' in New Delhi.
 - The Summit, is the first of its kind, with participants from across the world including leaders from the government, industry, research organizations, academia, think tanks and civil society.
 - They came together and engaged with key stakeholders within the rapidly transforming global mobility landscape to evolve a shared, connected, zero emission and inclusive mobility agenda for the future.
 - It will help drive the government's goals for vehicle electrification, renewable energy integration and job growth and also speed up India's transition to a clean energy economy.
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