



News Analysis (26 Apr, 2021)

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Section 144 of CrPC

Why in News

Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) of 1973 has been **imposed in Gurugram**, owing to the rising number of **Covid-19** cases.

Section 144 has often been **used to clamp down on telecommunication services and order Internet shutdowns.**

Key Points

- **About Section 144 CrPC:**
 - This law empowers the **magistrate of any state or union territory** in India to pass an order **prohibiting the gathering of four or more people in a specified area.**
 - It is **imposed in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger of some event** that has the potential to cause trouble or damage to human life or property.
 - This order can be passed **against a particular individual or general public.**

- **Features of Section 144:**
 - It places **restrictions on handling or transporting any kind of weapon** in the given jurisdiction. The **maximum punishment** for such an act is **three years**.
 - According to the order under this section, there shall be **no movement of public** and **all educational institutions** shall also **remain closed**.
 - Further, there will be **a complete bar on holding any kind of public meetings or rallies** during the period of operation of this order.
 - It is **deemed a punishable offence to obstruct law enforcement agencies** from disbanding an unlawful assembly.
 - It **also empowers the authorities to block internet access in the region**.
 - The ultimate purpose of Section 144 is **to maintain peace and order** in the areas where trouble could erupt to disrupt the regular life.
- **Duration of Section 144 Order:**
 - No order under this section can remain in force for a **period of more than 2 months**.
 - Under the state government's discretion, it can choose to **extend the validity for two more months with the maximum validity extendable to six months**.
 - Once the situation becomes normal, Section 144 levied can be withdrawn.
- **Difference between Section 144 and Curfew:**
 - **Section 144 prohibits gathering of four or more people** in the concerned area, while **during curfew people are instructed to stay indoors** for a particular period of time. The government **puts a complete restriction on traffic as well**.
 - Markets, schools, colleges and offices remain closed under the curfew and only essential services are allowed to run on prior notice.
- **Criticism of the Section:**
 - The criticism is that it is **too broad and the words of the section are wide enough** to give **absolute power to a magistrate** that may be exercised unjustifiably.
 - The **immediate remedy** against such an order is a **revision application to the magistrate himself**.
 - An aggrieved individual **can approach the High Court** by filing a **writ petition** if his fundamental rights are at stake. However, fears exist that before the High Court intervenes, the **rights could already have been infringed**.

- **Court's Ruling on Section 144:**
 - *Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya case 1967*, the Supreme Court held that “no democracy can exist if ‘public order’ is freely allowed to be disturbed by a section of the citizens”.
 - The Supreme court in another recent judgement said that the **section cannot be used to impose restrictions on citizens' fundamental right to assemble peacefully**, cannot be invoked as a 'tool' to 'prevent the legitimate expression of opinion or grievance or exercise of any democratic rights'.

Way forward

- Section 144 is a **useful tool to help deal with emergencies. However, absence of any narrow tailoring of wide executive powers with specific objectives, coupled with very limited judicial oversight** over the executive branch, makes it ripe for abuse and misuse.
- Before proceeding under this section, the **Magistrate should hold an enquiry and record the urgency of the matter.**
- There is a **need to balance the granting of plenary powers by the legislature to deal with emergent situations, and the need to protect the personal liberty and other freedoms granted to the citizens** under the fundamental rights of the Constitution.

Source: TH

Ways and Means Advance

Why in News

The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has decided to continue with the existing interim **Ways and Means Advances (WMA)** scheme limit of Rs. 51,560 crore for all States/UTs upto September 2021, given the prevalence of **Covid-19**.

Key Points

- **About Ways and Means Advances:**
 - **Launch:** The WMA scheme was **introduced in 1997**.
 - **Purpose:** To **meet mismatches** in the receipts and payments of the government.
 - **Features:**
 - The **government can avail immediate cash from the RBI**, if required. But it has to return the amount within 90 days. Interest is charged at the existing **repo rate**.
 - Section **17(5) of the RBI Act, 1934** authorises the central bank to lend to the Centre and state governments subject to their being repayable “not later than three months from the date of the making of the advance”.
 - Repo Rate is basically the **rate at which RBI lends short-term money to banks**.
 - If the WMA **exceeds 90 days**, it would be **treated as an overdraft** (the **interest rate on overdrafts is 2 percentage points more** than the repo rate).
 - The **limits for WMA (for Centre) are decided by the government and RBI mutually** and revised periodically.
 - **A higher limit provides the government flexibility** to raise funds from RBI without borrowing them from the market.
 - **Types:**
 - There are **two types** of Ways and Means Advances — **normal and special**.
 - A **Special WMA or Special Drawing Facility is provided against the collateral of the government securities held by the state**.
 - **After the state has exhausted the limit of SDF, it gets normal WMA**.
 - The **interest rate for SDF is one percentage point less** than the repo rate.
 - The **number of loans under normal WMA** is based on a three-year average of actual revenue and capital expenditure of the state.
- **Significance:**
 - The **cash flow problems of States have been aggravated by the impact of Covid-19**, thus many States are in need of immediate and large financial resources to deal with challenges, including medical testing, screening and providing income and food security to the needy.
 - WMA **can be an alternative to** raising longer-tenure funds from the markets, issue of State government securities (State development loans) or borrowing from financial institutions for short-term funding. WMA funding is **much cheaper than borrowings from markets**.

- **Other Related Decisions:**
 - The **Special Drawing Facility (SDF)** availed by State Governments/UTs shall **continue to be linked to the quantum of their investments in marketable securities** issued by the Government of India, including the **Auction Treasury Bills (ATBs)**.
 - The annual incremental investments in **Consolidated Sinking Fund (CSF)** and **Guarantee Redemption Fund (GRF)** shall continue to be eligible for availing of SDF.

Auction Treasury Bills

- These are **money market instruments** issued by the Government of India as a promissory note with guaranteed repayment at a later date.
- Funds collected through such tools are typically **used to meet short term requirements** of the government, hence, to reduce the overall **fiscal deficit** of a country.

Consolidated Sinking Fund

- CSF was **set up in 1999-2000 by the RBI** to meet redemption of market loans of the States.
- Initially, 11 States set up sinking funds. Later, the **12th Finance Commission (2005-10) recommended** that all States should have sinking funds for amortisation of all loans, including loans from banks, liabilities on account of National Small Saving Fund (NSSF), etc.
 - The fund should be maintained outside the consolidated fund of the States and the public account.
 - It should not be used for any other purpose, except for redemption of loans.
- As per the scheme, **State governments could contribute 1-3% of the outstanding market loans each year to the Fund.**
- The Fund is **administered by the Central Accounts Section of RBI Nagpur.**

Guarantee Redemption Fund

- A Guarantee Redemption Fund (GRF) has been **established in the Public Account of India from 1999-2000** for redemption of guarantees given to **Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), Financial Institutions**, etc. by the Union Government whenever such guarantees are invoked.
- The fund is fed through budgetary appropriations with an annual provision in the Budget Estimates (BE).
- On the **recommendations of Twelfth Finance Commission**, fifteen States have set up a Guarantee Redemption Fund.

- This fund is maintained outside the consolidated fund of the States in the public account and is not to be used for any other purpose, except for redemption of loans. This ensures good fiscal governance.

Source: TH

#FOSS4GOV Innovation Challenge

Why in News

Recently, the **Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY)** has announced **#FOSS4GOV Innovation Challenge to accelerate adoption of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) in Government.**

Key Points

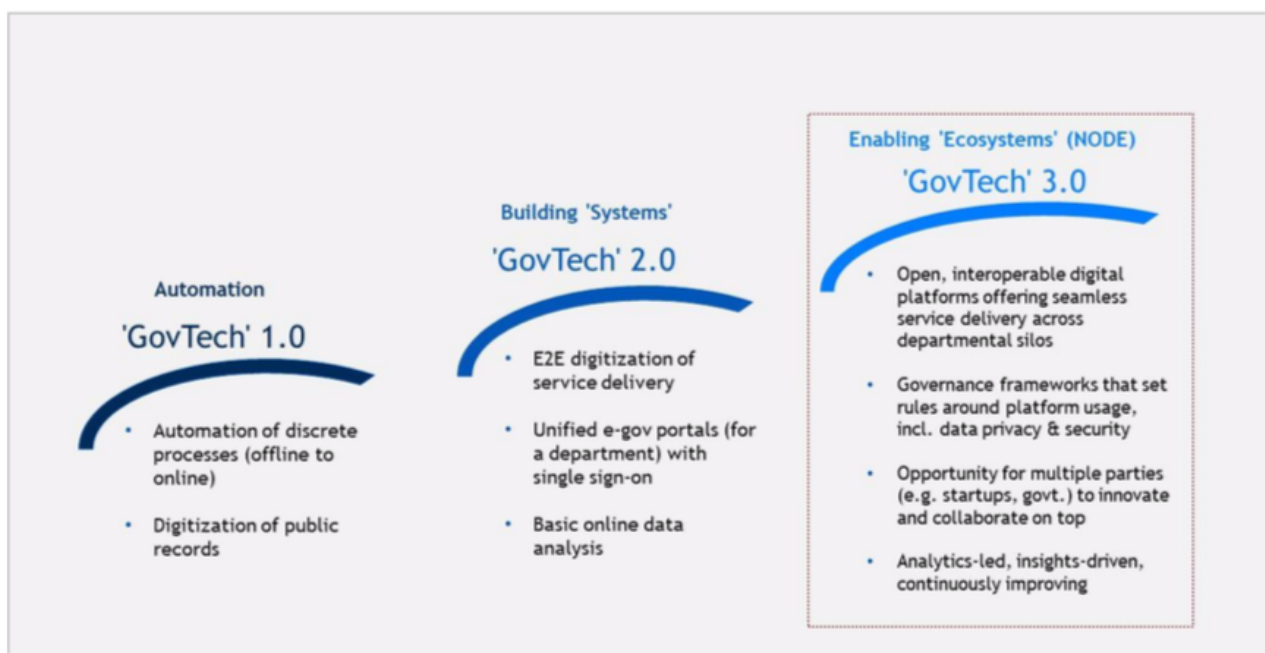
- **Free and Open Source Software (FOSS):**
 - It **doesn't** mean software is **free of cost**.
 - The **term "free"** indicates that the **software does not have constraints on copyrights**.
 - It means that **source code of the software is open for all** and anyone is free to use, study and modify the code.
 - It **allows other people also to contribute to the development and improvement of the software** like a community.
 - The Free and Open Source Software may also be referred to as **Free/Libre Open Source Software (FLOSS)** or **Free/Open Source Software (F/OSS)**.
 - **Examples** of FOSS include MySQL, Firefox, Linux, etc.
 - Another category of software is '**Closed Source Software**'.
 - The software which uses the proprietary and closely guarded code.
 - Only the original authors have the authority to access, copy, and alter that software.
 - In this case one does not purchase the software, but only pay to use it.

- **About the Challenge:**
 - It will harness the **innovation potential of the FOSS community** and start-ups **to solve critical issues in Government Technologies (GovTech)**.
 - It calls upon FOSS innovators to submit implementable open source product innovations in CRM and ERP with possible applications for Govtech in Health, Education, and Agriculture etc.
 - **CRM** stands for “**Customer Relationship Management**”.
 - **ERP** stands for "**Enterprise Resource Planning**" and refers to software and systems used to plan and manage all the core supply chain, manufacturing, services, financial and other processes of an organization.
 - It is a key component of **GovTech 3.0**, which is about building secure and inclusive **Open Digital Ecosystems (ODEs)**.
 - The participants are eligible for incubation support, prize money, mentorship by domain experts, institutional support from eminent organizations for incubation of ideas and listing of solutions on **Government e Marketplace (GeM)**.
- **Significance:**
 - India is well positioned to become a vibrant hub for **Free and Open Source Software (FOSS)** innovations, due to the large number of 4G data subscribers in India.
 - **96%** of the subscribers access the digital world via open-source based mobile operating systems (primarily Android).
 - India’s largest-government projects (including **Aadhaar**) and many technology start-ups have also been built using FOSS.
- **Other Related Initiatives:**
 - The Government of India had issued a **Policy on Adoption of Open Source Software in 2015**.
 - **Free and Open Source Software for Education (FOSSEE) Project:** It is a project **promoting the use of open source software in educational institutions**. It does that through instructional material, such as spoken tutorials, documentation, such as textbook companions, awareness programmes, such as conferences, training workshops, and internships.
 - The government **has also made the android version of the Aarogya Setu app open source**.

GovTech 3.0

- **GovTech1.0** was the era of “computerisation” of manual processes such as putting income tax forms online.
- **GovTech 2.0** was about building systems which digitised end-to-end processes, for example, the government’s “**e-office**” file management system.

- GovTech 3.0 is **focussed on Open Digital Ecosystems (ODEs)**, the underlying philosophy suggests that the government should focus on creating the “digital commons”.
 - It **envisages the government becoming a facilitator by creating digital infrastructure on which innovators can collaboratively build solutions** for the public good.
 - ODEs are: “open and secure digital platforms that enable a community of actors to unlock transformative solutions for society, based on a robust governance framework”.
 - Several path-breaking ODEs are already in play in India: **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** in the financial services space; the National Digital Infrastructure for Teachers called **DIKSHA**; etc.



Evolving paradigms of digital governance or 'GovTech'

Source:PIB

Groundwater Depletion and Cropping Intensity

Why in News

In a recent study, it has been found that **groundwater depletion** in India could reduce **winter cropped acreage** significantly in years ahead.

- The researchers studied India’s three main **irrigation types** on winter cropped areas: dug wells, tube wells and canals.

- The researchers also analysed the groundwater data from the **Central Ground Water Board**.
- **Wheat, barley, peas, gram and mustard** are **grown in winter**.

Key Points

- **Present Scenario:**
 - India has **achieved impressive food-production gains since the 1960s**, due to an increased reliance on irrigation wells, which allowed Indian farmers to expand production into the mostly dry winter and summer seasons.
 - India is the world's **second-largest producer of wheat and rice** and is home to more than 600 million farmers.
 - India produces **10% of the world's crops** and is now the **world's largest consumer of groundwater**, and **aquifers are rapidly becoming depleted** across much of India.
 - In the **green revolution era**, policy-supported environment led to a large increase in rice cultivation in northwestern India mainly in Punjab and Haryana which are ecologically less suitable for rice cultivation due to predominantly light soils.
 - This policy-supported intensive agriculture **led to unsustainable groundwater use for irrigation** and in turn groundwater scarcity.

- **Findings of the Study:**

- **Related to Groundwater:**

- Groundwater is a critical resource for food security, accounting for **60% of irrigation supplies in India**, but unsustainable consumption of groundwater for irrigation and home use is leading to its depletion.
- Groundwater depletion in India could result in a **reduction in food crops by up to 20% across the country** and up to 68% in regions projected to have low future groundwater availability in 2025.
 - It is found that 13% of the villages in which farmers plant a winter crop are located in critically water-depleted regions.
 - The results suggest that these losses will largely occur in northwest and central India.

- **Related to Switching to Canal Irrigation:**

- **Indian government has suggested that switching from groundwater-depletion wells to irrigation canals** is one way to overcome projected shortfalls.
 - The irrigation canals divert surface water from lakes and rivers.
 - However, switching to canal irrigation has **limited adaptation potential at the national scale.**
- The study suggests that switch to canal irrigation **will not fully compensate for the expected loss of groundwater** in Indian agriculture.
- Further, in comparison to tube well irrigation, **canal irrigation was associated with less winter cropped area** and cropped area that was more sensitive to rainfall variability.

- **Related to Impact on Crop Production:**

- **Reduction in Cropping Intensity:** Even if all regions that are currently using depleted groundwater for irrigation will switch to using canal irrigation, cropping intensity **may decline by 7% nationally** and by 24% in the most severely affected locations.
 - It is found that irrigation canals would favour farms close to canals, leading to unequal access.
- **Reductions in Wheat Production:** The reductions in crop area will occur largely in the states that grow wheat, potentially leading to substantial reductions in wheat production in the future.
- **Food Security:** The low wheat production could have ramifications for food security given that India is the second largest producer of wheat globally and wheat provides approximately 20% of household calories in India.

Cropping Intensity

- It refers to **raising of a number of crops from the same field during one agricultural year**; it can be expressed through a formula.
- **Cropping Intensity = Gross Cropped Area/Net Sown Area x 100.**
 - **Gross Cropped Area:** This represents the total area sown once and/or more than once in a particular year, i.e. the area is counted as many times as there are sowings in a year. This total area is also known as total cropped area or total area sown.
 - **Net Sown Area:** This represents the total area sown with crops and orchards. Area sown more than once in the same year is counted only once.
- Around 51% of India's geographical area is already under cultivation as compared to 11% of the world average.
- The present cropping intensity of 136% has registered an increase of only 25% since independence. Further, rainfed drylands constitute 65% of the total net sown area.

Central Ground Water Board

- It is a subordinate office of the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** and is the National Apex Agency entrusted with the responsibilities of providing scientific inputs for management, exploration, monitoring, assessment, augmentation and regulation of groundwater resources of the country.
- It was **established in 1970** by renaming the Exploratory Tubewells Organization under the Ministry of Agriculture and later on merged with the **Groundwater Wing of the Geological Survey of India** during 1972.

Way Forward

- **Irrigation Infrastructure in Eastern India:** There are enough groundwater resources supported with higher monsoon rainfall in eastern Indian states like Bihar. But due to lack of enough irrigation infrastructure, farmers are not able to make use of natural resources there.
 - There is a need for better policies in eastern India to expand irrigation and thus increase agricultural productivity.
 - This will also release some pressure from northwestern Indian states.
- **Water-saving Technologies:** Adoption of water-saving technologies like a sprinkler, drip irrigation.
- **Less water-Intensive Crops:** Switching to less water-intensive crops in some areas may help use the limited groundwater resources more effectively.

Source: TH

Reasons for Rising Covid-19 Infections: Second Wave

Why in News

The ongoing second wave of **Covid-19 infections** has shaken the country and is more devastating than the first wave.

The **rise in case numbers has been exponential** in the second wave.

Age group	1st wave	2nd wave
<10	0.27%	0.34%
10-20	0.53%	0.31%
20-30	2.08%	1.72%
30-40	5.27%	5.39%
40-50	11.98%	10.82%
50-60	23.29%	21.23%
60-70	28.76%	28.21%
70-80	19.99%	22.17%
80+	7.82%	9.81%

Key Points

- **Protocol Fatigue:**

- When cases started declining, people just broke out of the protocol of **wearing a face mask, washing hands regularly and maintaining social-physical distance.**

Gatherings began becoming large particularly January 2021 onwards.

- **Rules** were relaxed. **Penalties** were not enforced. The pattern was seen across the country allowing the novel coronavirus to create a second and possibly stronger wave.

- **Mixed Signal from Government:**

The queues outside polling booths and **gatherings at the election rallies of all the parties defied Covid-19 protocol.** This sent a confusing message to the public and also the grassroots-level functionaries of the government. It weakened the vigil against the pandemic.

- **Urban Mobility:**

India has recorded over 1.2 crore cases of Covid-19 yet the pandemic is still mostly concentrated around cities, especially the bigger cities. These **cities have greater mobility giving more opportunities for the virus to spread** from one person to another when the guard is lowered.

- **Containment Zones:**

In the current wave, the **marking of the containment zone has been less strict**. In cities, the government has asked civil authorities to adopt **micro-containment**, with perhaps just a floor or a house defined as a containment zone.

Earlier, an entire apartment or area would be made a containment zone, reducing the chances of transmission of the virus.

- **Mutations:**

Besides the human factors, the **evolution of coronavirus is among the major reasons for the second wave**. Scientists have detected numerous mutations in the SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes Covid-19. Some of these mutations have produced what they call is **Variants of Concern (VOCs)**.

- India has reported such VOCs from several states including the worst-impacted ones by the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.
- The L452R mutation found in the **variant B1.671**, first detected in India, too has been associated with increased infectivity.

Variants of Concern

These are variants for which there is evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures.

- **Increased Testing:**

- Increased testing is another reason why **India is detecting more cases in the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic**.
- The **sero-surveys** have shown that India had greater Covid-19 exposure than revealed through confirmed cases of coronavirus infection on the basis of laboratory tests.
- Earlier people were reluctant to go for Covid-19 tests but now easier availability of Covid-19 testing, improved disease-management in hospitals and rollout of Covid-19 vaccination programme has made people more confident about opting for the test.

- **Asymptomatic Persons:**

Asymptomatic (showing no symptoms) person, who carries the virus, would have spread the infection. In India, **80-85% of the population are asymptomatic**.

- **Inadequate Health Infrastructure:**

India also failed to seize the opportunity to augment its healthcare infrastructure and vaccinate aggressively.

For Example: Oxygen shortage and lack of beds in Hospitals.

Way Forward

- There are only two ways of getting immunity from the virus, one is getting infected, and the other is via a vaccine therefore it is important to **fast track the vaccine programme** across the country, but testing is equally important.
- The number of tests must go up again and **contact tracing**, ideally 20 persons for every case, should be taken up intently.
- There is a need for a **renewed emphasis on following safety protocols**. Draconian total lockdowns are no longer necessary. However, there is also **need to formulate District Action Plans with a focus on mapping of cases**, reviewing of ward/block wise indicators, 24x7 emergency operations centre, incident command system area specific rapid response team and timely sharing of information.

Source: IE

Mahavir Jayanti

Why in News

The Prime Minister of India greeted the people on occasion of '**Mahavir Jayanti**' (**25th April 2021**).

Mahavir Jayanti is **one of the most auspicious festivals in the Jain community**.

Key Points

- **About Mahavir Jayanti:**
 - This day marks the birth of **Vardhamana Mahavira**, who was the 24th and the **last Tirthankara** and who succeeded the **23rd Tirthankara, Parshvanatha**.
 - According to Jain texts, Lord Mahavira was **born on the 13th day of the bright half of the moon in the month of Chaitra**.
 - As per the **Gregorian calendar**, it is usually celebrated in the month of **March or April**.
 - **Celebration:** Usually, a procession is called with the idol of Lord Mahavira called the **Rath Yatra**. **Reciting stavans** or Jain prayers, statues of the lord are given a ceremonial bath called **abhisheka**.

- **About Lord Mahavira:**

- **Mahavira** was born to **King Siddhartha of Kundagrama** and **Queen Trishala**, a Lichchhavi princess in the **year 540 BC** in the **Vajji kingdom**, identical with modern day **Vaishali in Bihar**.
- Mahavira belonged to the **Ikshvaku dynasty**.
- Lord Mahavir was named **Vardhamana**, which means “**one who grows**”.
- He **abandoned worldly life** at the **age of 30** and attained ‘**kaivalya**’ or **omniscience** at the **age of 42**.
- Mahavira taught **ahimsa** (non-violence), **Satya** (truth), **asteya** (non-stealing), **brahmacharya** (chastity) and **aparigraha** (non-attachment) to his disciples and his teachings were called **Jain Agamas**.
- Ordinary people were able to understand the teachings of Mahavira and his followers because **they used Prakrit**.
- It is believed that the Mahavira passed away and attained moksha (liberation from the cycle of birth and death) at the age of **72 in 468 BC** at a place called **Pavapuri** near modern **Rajgir in Bihar**.

Jainism

- The word **Jaina** comes from the **term Jina**, meaning **conqueror**.
- **Tirthankara** is a Sanskrit word meaning '**Ford maker**', i.e., one who is able to ford the river, to cross beyond the perpetual flow of earthly life.
- **Jainism attaches** utmost importance to **ahimsa or non-violence**.
- **It preaches 5 mahavratas** (the 5 great vows):
 - **Ahimsa** (Non-violence)
 - **Satya** (Truth)
 - **Asteya or Acharya** (Non-stealing)
 - **Aparigraha** (Non-attachment/Non-possession)
 - **Brahmacharya** (Celibacy/Chastity)
- **Among these 5 teachings**, the **Brahmacharya** (Celibacy/Chastity) was added by **Mahavira**.
- The **three jewels or Triratna of Jainism** include:
 - **Samyak Darshana** (right faith).
 - **Samyak Gyana** (right knowledge).
 - **Samyak Charitra** (right conduct).
- **Jainism** is a religion of **self-help**.
 - **There are no gods** or spiritual beings that will help human beings.
 - **It does not condemn** the varna system.
- In later times, it got divided into **two sects**:
 - **Shvetambaras** (white-clad) under Sthalabahu.
 - **Digambaras** (sky-clad) under the leadership of Bhadrabahu.
- The important **idea in Jainism** is that the entire world is animated: even stones, rocks, and water have life.

- **Non-injury to living beings**, especially to humans, animals, plants, and insects, is central to Jaina philosophy.
- According to Jain teachings, the **cycle of birth and rebirth is shaped through karma**.
- **Asceticism and penance** are required to free oneself from the cycle of karma and achieve the liberation of the soul.
- The **practice of Santhara** is also a part of Jainism.
 - It is the ritual of fasting unto death. Svetambara Jains call it Santhara whereas Digambaras call it Sallekhana.

Source: PIB

National Commission for Minorities

Why in News

Recently, the Delhi High Court has directed the Centre **to fill up the vacant posts of chairperson and five other members of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM)** by 31st July 2021.

Key Points

- **Genesis:**
 - **In 1978**, setting up of the **Minorities Commission (MC)** was envisaged in the **Ministry of Home Affairs Resolution**.
 - **In 1984**, the **MC** was detached from the Ministry of Home Affairs and placed under the newly created **Ministry of Welfare**, which excluded linguistic minorities from the Commission's jurisdiction **in 1988**.
 - **In 1992**, with the enactment of the **NCM Act, 1992**, the **MC** became a statutory body and was **renamed as the NCM**.
 - **In 1993**, the first Statutory National Commission was set up and five religious communities viz **the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis)** were notified as **minority communities**.
 - **In 2014**, **Jains** were also notified as a **minority community**.
- **Composition:**
 - NCM consists of **a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and five members** and all of them shall be from **amongst the minority communities**.
 - **Total of 7 persons** to be nominated by the **Central Government** should be from amongst persons **of eminence, ability and integrity**.
 - **Tenure:** Each Member holds office for a period of three years from the date of assumption of office.

- **Functions:**

- Evaluation of the **progress of the development of minorities** under the Union and States.
- **Monitoring of the working of the safeguards for minorities** provided in the Constitution and in laws enacted by Parliament and the state legislatures.
- Ensures that the **Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities** is implemented and the programmes for minority communities are actually functioning.
- **Making recommendations** for the effective implementation of safeguards for the protection of the interests of minorities by the central or state governments.
- **Looking into specific complaints** regarding deprivation of rights and safeguards of minorities and taking up such matters with the appropriate authorities.
- Investigates **matters of communal conflict and riots**.
For example, the 2011 Bharatpur communal riots, as well as the 2012 Bodo-Muslim clashes in Assam, were investigated by the commission and their findings were submitted to the government.
- Observes the **Minorities Rights Day** every year on **18th December** which marks the adoption of the "Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities" by the **United Nations** in **1992**.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions Related to Minorities

- The **NCM Act** defines a minority as "**a community notified as such by the Central government.**"

The Government of India has declared **six religions** namely, **Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists** and **Parsis** (Zoroastrian) and **Jain** as religious minorities in India.

- **National Commission for Minority Education Institution (NCMEI) Act, 2004:**

It gives the minority status to the educational institutions on the basis of six religious communities notified by the government.

- The term "**minority**" is not defined in the Indian Constitution. However, the Constitution **recognises religious and linguistic minorities**.

- **Article 15 and 16:**

- Prohibition of discrimination against citizens on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- Citizens' right to 'equality of opportunity' in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State, and prohibition in this regard of any discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

- **Article 25 (1), 26 and 28:**
 - People’s freedom of conscience and right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion.
 - Right of every religious denomination or any section to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, manage its own religious affairs, and own and acquire property and administer it.
 - People’s freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in educational institutions wholly maintained, recognized, or aided by the State.
- **Article 29:**
 - It provides that any section of the citizens residing in any part of India having a distinct language, script or culture of its own, shall have the right to conserve the same.
 - It **grants protection to both religious minorities as well as linguistic minorities.**
 - However, the **Supreme Court** held that the scope of this article is not necessarily restricted to minorities only, as use of the word ‘section of citizens’ in the Article includes minorities as well as the majority.
- **Article 30:**
 - All minorities shall have the **right to establish and administer educational institutions** of their choice.
 - The protection under Article 30 is **confined only to minorities** (religious or linguistic) and does not extend to any section of citizens (as under Article 29).
- **Article 350-B:**
 - The **7th Constitutional (Amendment) Act 1956** inserted this article which provides for a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities appointed by the President of India.
 - It would be the duty of the Special Officer to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under the Constitution.

Source: TH

Exercise VARUNA 2021

Why in News

The **19th edition of the Indian and French Navy bilateral exercise ‘VARUNA-2021’** is being conducted **in the Arabian Sea.**

Earlier this year, the Indian Navy took part for the first time in the France-led naval exercise **“La Pérouse”** with the navies of the US, Australia and Japan.



Key Points

- **About the Exercise:**

- **Background:**

- The Indian and French Navies have been conducting bilateral maritime **exercises since 1993. Since 2001**, these exercises have been called 'VARUNA'.
- These interactions further underscore the shared values as partner navies, in **ensuring freedom of seas and commitment to an open, inclusive Indo-Pacific and a rules-based international order.**

- **2021 Exercise:**

- This is the **first time that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is participating** in the Varuna maritime exercise.
- The 'Varuna' joint exercise is **part of the French carrier strike group's 'CLEMENCEAU 21' deployment**, which the French Navy is conducting in the **eastern Mediterranean, the Gulf and the Indian Ocean (Arabian Sea).**
 - Its goal is **to contribute to the stabilization of these strategic zones** and strengthening cooperation with the navies of partner countries, in particular India for the Indian Ocean component.
 - As part of this deployment, the **Carrier Strike Group is also taking part in anti-ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) operations.**
- The exercise will see **high tempo-naval operations at sea**, including **advanced air defence and anti-submarine exercises**, tactical manoeuvres, underway replenishment and other maritime security operations.

- **Other Indo-French Joint Exercises:**

- **Desert Knight-21** and **Garuda** (Air exercise)
- **Varuna** (Naval exercise)
- **Shakti** (Army exercise)

Major Indian Bilateral Maritime Exercises

Name of the Exercise	Name of the Country
<u>SLINEX</u>	Sri Lanka
<u>Bongosagar and IN-BN CORPAT</u>	Bangladesh
<u>JIMEX</u>	Japan
Naseem-Al-Bahr	Oman
<u>Indra</u>	Russia
<u>Za'ir-Al-Bahr</u>	Qatar
<u>Samudra Shakti</u>	Indonesia
<u>Indo-Thai CORPAT</u>	Thailand
IMCOR	Malaysia
<u>SIMBEX</u>	Singapore
AUSINDEX	Australia

Source: PIB
