



Demand of Meities for ST Status

For Prelims: [Meitei Community](#), [Scheduled Tribe](#), National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, [SC](#), [OBC](#), Any Kuki and Naga Tribes.

For Mains: Demand of Meities for ST Status. Special Provisions under 371.

Why in News?

Recently, the **All-Tribal Students' Union of Manipur (ATSUM)** has carried out a solidarity march in order to oppose the demand of [Meitei Community](#) be included in the **List of State's Scheduled Tribes (ST)**.

- The march broke into **violent clashes after an order from the Manipur High Court**, directing the State to pursue a 10-year-old recommendation to grant ST status to the **non-tribal Meitei community**.

Why does the Meitei Community want ST Status?

- The Meitei community, led by the **Scheduled Tribes Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM)**, has been demanding ST status since 2012, asking to provide them with **constitutional safeguards to preserve their culture, language, and identity**.
- The Meiteis argue that they were **recognised as a tribe before the merger of Manipur with India in 1949** but lost their identity after the merger in India.
- As a result of being left out of the ST list, the Meitei community **feels marginalized and victimized** without any constitutional protections.
 - The STDCM has stated that the Meitein/Meetei have been gradually marginalised in their ancestral land.
 - Their population, which was **59% of the total population of Manipur in 1951**, has now been reduced to **44% as per 2011 Census** data.
- They believe that **granting ST status would help preserve their ancestral land, tradition, culture, and language**, and safeguard them against outsiders.

What is the Process of Inclusion under List of STs?

- The process for including a community in the **list of ST follows a set of modalities established in 1999**.
- The respective State or Union Territory government must initiate the proposal for inclusion, which then goes to the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry and subsequently to the **Office of the Registrar General of India (ORGI)**.
- If the ORGI approves the inclusion, the proposal is then sent to the [National Commission for Scheduled Tribes](#), and if they concur, the proposal is forwarded to the Cabinet for amendment to the [Constitution \(Scheduled Tribes\) Order, 1950](#).
- In September 2022, the government approved the [inclusion of certain communities in the lists of Scheduled Tribes](#). These include:
 - **Binjhia** in Chhattisgarh

- **Narikoravan** and **Kurivikkaran** in Tamil Nadu
- **'Betta-Kuruba'** in Karnataka,
- **Hattis** from Himachal Pradesh
- **Gond** Community in Uttar Pradesh

Why are Other Tribal Groups in Manipur opposing the Demand of Meiteis?

- **Meitei's Already in Majority:** One reason for this is that the **Meitei community is already dominant in terms of population and political** representation, as most of the Assembly constituencies are in the **valley where the Meiteis live.**
 - The ST communities fear that granting ST status to the Meiteis **would result in them losing job opportunities** and other affirmative actions meant for STs.
- **Meitei Culture has Recognition:** Meitei language is already included in the **8th Schedule of the Constitution**, and some sections of the Meitei community are already classified under **Scheduled Castes (SC)** or **Other Backward Classes (OBC)**, which **gives them access to certain opportunities.**
- **More Political Influence:** They also think that the demand for ST status is a way for the dominant Meitei community from the valley area to **gain political influence and control over the hill areas of the state by** diverting attention from the political demands of **other tribal groups like the Kukis and Nagas.**
 - The Kukis are an ethnic group including multiple tribes originally inhabiting the NE states such as **Manipur, Mizoram and Assam; parts of Burma** (now Myanmar), and **Sylhet district and Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh.**
 - Wanting to dominate trade and cultural activities in these areas, **Kukis and Nagas often engaged in violent standoffs**, with villages being torched, civilians killed and so on.
- **Eviction of Tribal Groups:** One of the other reasons for the discontent has been the state government's notices since August 2022 claiming that 38 villages in the Churachandpur-Khoumum Protected Forest area are **"illegal settlements" and its residents are "encroachers".**
 - Following this, the government set out on an eviction drive which resulted in clashes.
 - Kuki groups have claimed that the **survey and eviction is a violation of Article 371C**, which confers some **administrative autonomy to the tribal-dominated hill areas of Manipur.**

What is the Ethnic Composition of Manipur?

- **About:**
 - Meiteis are the largest community in Manipur and there are **34 recognized tribes** broadly classified as **'Any Kuki Tribes' and 'Any Naga Tribes'.**
 - The Imphal valley in the state, at the centre of Manipur, accounts for **about 10% of its landmass** and is home primarily to the **Meitei and Meitei Pangals** who constitute roughly **64.6% of the state's population.**
 - The remaining 90% of the state's geographical area comprises **hills surrounding the valley**, which are home to the recognized tribes, making up about **35.4% of the state's population.**
 - While a **majority of the Meiteis are Hindus followed by Muslims (8%)**, the 33 recognised tribes, broadly classified into **'Any Naga tribes' and 'Any Kuki tribes' are largely Christians.**
 - Manipur, along with Dimapur district of Nagaland, was brought under the purview of the **ILP System** in December 2019. **ILP is a special permit obligatorily required by "outsiders" from other regions** of the country to enter the notified states.
- **Key Points of Meitei Community:**
 - The Meitei people are also known as Manipuri people.
 - Their primary language is the **Meitei language, which is also called Manipuri** and is the **only official language** of Manipur.
 - They are predominantly settled in the Imphal Valley, although a significant number **reside in other Indian states, such as Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya,** and

Mizoram.

- There is also a notable presence of **Meitei in the neighboring countries of Myanmar and Bangladesh.**
- The Meitei people are divided into clans, and members of the **same clan do not intermarry.**



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What are the Special Provisions under Article 371?

- **Article 371** of the Constitution provides “special provisions” for 11 states, including six states of the Northeast (excluding Tripura and Meghalaya).
 - Articles 369-392 (including some that have been removed) appear in Part XXI of the Constitution, titled ‘**Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions**’.
 - **Article 370** deals with ‘Temporary Provisions with respect to the State of Jammu and Kashmir’;
- Articles **371 and 371A-371J** define special provisions with regard to another state (or states).
 - **Article 371I deals with Goa**, but it does not include any provision that can be deemed ‘special’.

Article (Amendment)	For State	Provision
Article 371	Maharashtra and Gujarat	The Governor has “special responsibility” to establish “ separate development boards ” for “Vidarbha, Marathwada, and the rest of Maharashtra”, and Saurashtra and Kutch in Gujarat.
Article 371A (13 th Amendment Act, 1962)	Nagaland	Parliament cannot legislate in matters of Naga religion or social practices, Naga customary law and procedure,

		administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, and ownership and transfer of land without concurrence of the state Assembly.
Article 371B (22 nd amendment Act, 1969)	Assam	The President may provide for the constitution and functions of a committee of the Assembly consisting of members elected from the state's tribal areas.
Article 371C (27 th Amendment Act, 1971)	Manipur	The President may provide for the constitution of a committee of elected members from the Hill areas in the Assembly and entrust "special responsibility" to the Governor to ensure its proper functioning.
Article 371D (32 nd Amendment Act, 1973; Substituted by The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014)	Andhra Pradesh and Telangana	The President must ensure "equitable opportunities and facilities" in "public employment and education to people from different parts of the state". He may require the state government to organise "any class or classes of posts in a civil service of, or any class or classes of civil posts under, the State into different local cadres for different parts of the State". Article 371E is for Andhra Pradesh but not a special provision.
Article 371F (36 th Amendment Act, 1975)	Sikkim	The members of the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim shall elect the representative of Sikkim in the House of the People. To protect the rights and interests of various sections of the population of Sikkim, Parliament may provide for the number of seats in the Assembly, which may be filled only by candidates from those sections.
Article 371G (53 rd Amendment Act, 1986)	Mizoram	Parliament cannot make laws on "religious or social practices of the Mizos, Mizo customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary law, ownership and transfer of land... unless the Assembly... so decide

Article 371H (55 th Amendment Act, 1986)	Arunachal Pradesh	The Governor has a special responsibility with regard to law and order , and “he shall, after consulting the Council of Ministers, exercise his individual judgment as to the action to be taken”.
Article 371J (98 th Amendment Act, 2012)	Karnataka	There is a provision for a separate development board for the Hyderabad-Karnataka region . There shall be “ equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said region ”, and “equitable opportunities and facilities” for people of this region in government jobs and education.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ):

Prelims:

Q. The provisions in Fifth Schedule and Sixth Schedule in the Constitution of India are made in order to (2015)

- (a) protect the interests of Scheduled Tribes
- (b) determine the boundaries between States
- (c) determine the powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayats
- (d) protect the interests of all the border States

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q. What are the two major legal initiatives by the State since Independence addressing discrimination against Scheduled Tribes (STs)? (2017)

Q. Why are the tribals in India referred to as ‘the Scheduled Tribes’? Indicate the major provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India for their upliftment. (2016)

[Source: TH](#)

Criminalisation of Politics

For Prelims: [Criminalisation of Politics](#), Association for Democratic Reforms, [Corruption](#),

Why in News?

Recently, the **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)** has revealed that the number of candidates with criminal cases has increased in all major political parties in Karnataka ahead of the 2023 Assembly Elections, highlighting the Issue of [Criminalisation of Politics](#).

- The ADR has **recommended the permanent disqualification of candidates** convicted of serious criminal offenses from contesting elections. However, such disqualifications have not been implemented yet.

What is the Criminalisation of Politics?

- **About:**
 - Criminalisation of politics is defined as the **situation when criminals participate in the politics** of the government, i.e., contest elections and get elected to the Parliament and state legislatures.
 - This growing menace has become a big problem for our society, affecting the basic principles of democracy, such as fairness in elections, following the law, and being accountable.
- **Statistics:**
 - According to data from the ADR, the number of candidates with criminal charges elected to Parliament in India has been on the rise since 2004.
 - In 2004, **24% of parliamentarians had pending criminal cases**, which rose to **43% in 2019**.
 - In a petition filed in Feb 2023, it was claimed that there has been an increase of **44% in the number of MPs with declared criminal cases since 2009**.
 - In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, **159 MPs had declared serious criminal cases against them**, including those of rape, murder, attempt to murder, kidnapping, crimes against women.

What are the Causes of Criminalisation of Politics?

- **Vote Bank:**
 - Candidates and political parties **often resort to illegal means such as vote-buying** and other illegitimate practices, aided by individuals commonly referred to as "goondas".
 - This culture of political crime is often **perpetuated by the close links between politicians and their constituencies** providing a conducive environment for the misuse of power and resources for personal gain, leading to **corruption and criminal activities**.
- **Corruption:**
 - The majority of candidates contesting elections require money, funds, and donations. It is pertinent to note that [corruption](#) directly gives rise to contempt of the law.
 - There is a **direct relationship between contempt of law and criminalisation of politics**. When [contempt of law](#) combines with the criminalisation of politics, it gives birth to flourishing corruption.
- **Vested Interests:**
 - People generally vote **through a narrow prism of community interests** and neglect the criminal background of the politicians.
 - This can lead to a situation where politicians with a criminal background are elected simply because **they align with the interests of a particular community, rather than being held accountable** for their actions.
- **Muscle Power:**
 - Politicians make promises to eliminate corruption and muscle power during elections, but

rarely follow through.

- The **First Past the Post (FPTP)** system favors the candidate with the most votes. The ideology behind using muscle power is that **fear and violence can help parties win if they can't gain trust.**
 - The FPTP system is also known as the simple majority system. In this voting method, the **candidate with the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared the winner.**
- This creates a dangerous nexus between political parties and criminals.
- **Money Power:**
 - **Black money** and mafia funds contribute significantly to the criminalisation of politics. These illegal sources of money are used to buy votes and win elections, leading to a rise in criminalisation in politics.
- **Poor Governance:**
 - The poor governance of the country **also plays an important role in increasing the criminalization of politics.** There is absence of proper laws and rules for governing the procedure of the election.
 - Only the **Model Code of Conduct** is there **which is also not enforced by any statute.**

What are the Implications of Criminalisation of Politics?

- **Against the Principle of Free and Fair Elections:** It **limits the choice of voters** to elect a suitable candidate.
 - It is against the ethos of **Free and Fair Elections** which is the bedrock of a democracy.
- **Affecting Good Governance:** The major problem is that the **law-breakers become law-makers**, this affects the efficacy of the democratic process in delivering good governance.
 - These unhealthy tendencies in the democratic system reflect a poor image of the nature of India's state institutions and the quality of its elected representatives.
- **Affecting Integrity of Public Servants:** The circulation of black money makes it easier for politicians to buy votes and secure their positions, **leading to a situation where corrupt practices are normalized** and become a part of the political system.
 - This makes it difficult for honest public servants to work effectively and **can erode public trust in the government.**
- **Causes Social Disharmony:** It **introduces a culture of violence** in society and **sets a bad precedent for the youth** to follow and reduces people's faith in democracy as a system of governance.

What are the Legal Aspects of Disqualification of Criminal Candidates?

- In this regard, **Indian Constitution does not specify** as to **what disqualifies a person from contesting elections for the Parliament**, Legislative assembly or any other legislature.
- The **Representation of Peoples Act 1951** mentions the criteria for disqualifying a person for contesting an election of the legislature.
 - **Section 8 of the act** provides for **disqualification on conviction for certain offences**, according to which an **individual punished with a jail term of more than two years** cannot stand in an election for six years after **the jail term has ended.**
 - However, the law **does not bar individuals who have criminal cases pending against them from contesting elections** therefore the disqualification of candidates with criminal cases **depends on their conviction in these cases.**

What are the Initiatives/Recommendations Against Criminalisation of Politics?

- In 1983, **Vohra Committee on Criminalisation of Politics** was constituted with an objective to identify the extent of the political-criminal nexus and to recommend ways in which the criminalisation of politics can be effectively dealt with.
- The **244th report (2014)** submitted by the **Law Commission** dealt with the need to curb the trend of criminal politicians in **legislature posing serious consequences to democracy and secularism.**

- The Law Commission **recommended disqualification of people against whom charges have been framed** at least one year before the date of scrutiny of nominations for an offence punishable with a sentence of five years or more.
- In 2017, the Union government started a scheme to **establish 12 special courts for a year to fast track the trial of criminal cases against MPs and MLAs.**
 - The apex court has since then issued many directions, including asking the Centre to **set up a monitoring committee to examine reasons** for delay of investigation in these cases.

What are the SC Judgements Regarding Criminalization of Politics?

- **Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India (2002):**
 - In 2002, the SC ruled that every candidate contesting election has to declare his criminal and financial records along with educational qualifications.
- **Ramesh Dalal vs. Union of India (2005):**
 - In 2005, the SC had ruled that a sitting MP or MLA will be disqualified from contesting the election if convicted and sentenced for imprisonment for two years or more by a court of law.
- **Lily Thomas v. Union of India (2013):**
 - The SC has declared that any member of parliament or state legislative assembly who is convicted of a crime and **sentenced to a prison term of two years or more** would be disqualified from holding office.
- **Manoj Narula v. Union of India (2014):**
 - The Delhi HC held that a person **cannot be disqualified** from contesting elections merely because they have been charged **with a criminal offense.**
 - However, the court also held that political parties **must not field candidates who have a criminal background.**
- **Public Interest Foundation v. Union of India (2019):**
 - The SC has ordered political parties to **publish the criminal records of their candidates** on their websites, social media handles, and newspapers.
 - The court also directed the ECI to create a framework to ensure that the **information on candidates' criminal records was disseminated effectively.**

Way Forward

- **More Power to ECI:** Committees on electoral reforms have recommended **state funding of elections and strengthening the Election Commission to curb black money** and limit criminalisation of politics.
- **Voters' Duty:** Voters should also be **vigilant about misuse of money during elections.** The judiciary should play a proactive role by considering banning people accused with serious criminal charges from contesting elections.
- **Expeditious Judicial Processes:** Fast-tracking the judicial process **can help weed out the corrupt as well as criminal elements** in the political system. A time-bound justice delivery system, firmer steps by the ECI and a **proper strengthening of relevant laws.**
- **Amending RPA:** Increasing criminalisation in politics calls for **an amendment in the RPA 1951** to debar the persons from contesting elections against whom any serious Nature of crimes is pending.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains:

Q. It is often said that 'politics' and 'ethics' do not go together. What is your opinion in this regard? Justify your answer with illustrations. **(2013)**

[Source: TH](#)

India-Israel Relations

For Prelims: [India-Israel Relations](#), [CSIR](#), [AI](#), [Sustainable Energy](#), [FTA](#), [I4F](#), [AWACS](#), [ISA](#), Abraham Accords.

For Mains: India-Israel Relations.

Why in News?

Recently, India's [Council of Scientific and Industrial Research \(CSIR\)](#) and Israel's Defense Research and Development (DDR&D) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on **Industrial Research and Development Cooperation**.





What are the Key Highlights of the MoU?

- It aims to work together on **research and development projects in various fields** such as [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#), [Quantum](#) and [semiconductors](#), [synthetic biology](#), [Sustainable Energy](#), [Healthcare](#), and [Agriculture](#). They will focus on implementing specific projects in mutually agreeable areas.
- The collaboration will include important industrial sectors such as **aerospace, chemicals, and infrastructure**.
- The MoU will be monitored by a **Joint Steering Committee** led by the heads of the CSIR and DDR&D for taking forward mutually benefiting Industrial and technology cooperation.

How has the India-Israel Relations been So Far?

- **Diplomatic:**
 - Though India officially **recognized Israel in 1950**, both countries established full diplomatic ties only on **29th January 1992**.
 - As of December 2020, India was among **164 United Nations (UN) member states** to have diplomatic ties with Israel.
- **Economic and Commercial:**
 - Trade between India and Israel has increased from USD 5 billion before the **Covid-19 pandemic** to about USD 7.5 billion till 2023 January.

- Trade in diamonds constitutes about 50% of bilateral trade.
- India is Israel's **third-largest trade** partner in Asia and **seventh largest globally**.
 - Israeli companies have invested in India in energy, renewable energy, telecom, real estate, water technologies, and are focusing on setting up R&D centers or production units in India.
- India is also in dialogue with Israel for concluding a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.
- **Defence:**
 - India is one of the **largest importers of weapons from Israel**, contributing to about 40% of its annual arms exports.
 - The Indian armed forces have inducted a **wide array of Israeli weapon systems over the years**, which range from Phalcon **AWACS (Airborne Warning And Control Systems)** and Heron, Searcher-II and Harop drones to Barak anti-missile defence systems and Spyder quick-reaction anti-aircraft missile systems.
 - At the **15th Joint Working Group (JWG 2021)** meeting on Bilateral Defence Cooperation, countries agreed to form a Task Force to formulate a comprehensive Ten-Year Roadmap to identify new areas of cooperation.
- **Agriculture:**
 - In May 2021, **“a three-year work program agreement”** for development in agriculture cooperation, was signed.
 - The programme aims to grow existing Centres of Excellence (CoE), establish new centers, increase CoE's value chain, bring the Centres of Excellence into the self-sufficient mode, and encourage private sector companies and collaboration.
- **Science & Technology:**
 - In recent years, multiple MoUs have been signed between Israel's Start-Up National Central and Indian entrepreneurship centres like **iCreate and TiE (Technology Business Incubators)**.
 - In 2022, the two countries recently widened the scope of the **India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (I4F)** to include sectors like renewable energy and **ICT (Information and Communication Technology)** through increased participation of academia and business entities.
 - I4F is a cooperation between the two countries to promote, **facilitate and support joint industrial R&D projects** between companies from India and Israel to address the challenges in the agreed 'Focus Sectors'.
- **Others:**
 - Israel is also joining the India-led **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**, which aligns very well with the objectives of both countries to scale up their cooperation in **renewable energy** and partner in clean energy.

Way Forward

- Indians are sympathetic towards Israel and the government is balancing and recalibrating its **West Asia policy** on the premise of its own national interest.
- India and Israel need to **overcome the vulnerability of their religious extremist neighbours** and work productively on global issues like climate change, water scarcity, population explosion and food scarcity.
- A more aggressive and proactive Middle Eastern policy is the need of the hour for India to reap the maximum benefit of the geopolitical realignments gradually being brought in by the **Abraham Accords**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. The term “two-state solution” is sometimes mentioned in the news in the context of the affairs of (2018)

- (a) China
- (b) Israel
- (c) Iraq

(d) Yemen

Ans: (b)

- “Two-State Solution” is related to Israel-Palestine conflict. It aims at the resolution of this conflict via creation of two independent states – Israel and Palestine. It gained traction post Oslo Accord 1993, and is seen by many as the only viable solution to this impending crisis.
- The framework of the solution is set out in the UN resolution on the “Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine”, going back to 1974.
- **Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.**

Mains:

Q. “India’s relations with Israel have, of late, acquired a depth and diversity, which cannot be rolled back.” Discuss (2018)

Source: [PIB](#)

International Religious Freedom Report 2023

For Prelims: [USCIRE](#), International Religious Freedom Report 2023

For Mains: Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Religious Freedom in India and Relation Issues

Why in News?

The government of India **rejected the recommendations of the [US Commission on International Religious Freedom’s \(USCIRF\) 2023 report](#)**, calling it biased and motivated.

What is USCIRF?

- USCIRF is an **independent, bipartisan US federal government commission**, dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.
- It is an **advisory body to the US Congress**.
- It is **Headquartered in Washington DC**.
- **Established by the US government after the inaction of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), 1998** the recommendations of USCIRF are non-binding on the state department. IRFA provides that US policy includes condemning violations of religious freedom and assisting other governments in the promotion of this right.
 - Traditionally, **India does not recognize the view of USCIRF**.

What are the Concerns Raised About India?

- **Concerns About Certain Laws and Policies:** The report highlights concern regarding certain laws and policies in the country that have been **criticized for their potential to discriminate on the basis of religion.**
 - These include laws related to conversion, interfaith relationships, hijab, and **cow slaughter**, as well as the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019** and the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)**. All of these, it alleges, have **not impacted minorities in a favorable way.**
- **Measures Affecting Freedom of Expression:** It raises concerns about **alleged measures that may have impacted critical voices**, particularly those belonging to **religious minorities.**
 - These include surveillance, harassment, property demolition, and detention under the **Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967**. Some **Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs)** have also been subject to scrutiny under the **Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010.**
- **India as a CPC:** It has **criticized the US State Department for not having designated India as a Countries of Particular Concern (CPC)** and has called for sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials.
 - USCIRF has been **recommending India's designation as a country of particular concern since 2020** but it hasn't been accepted by the US government so far.

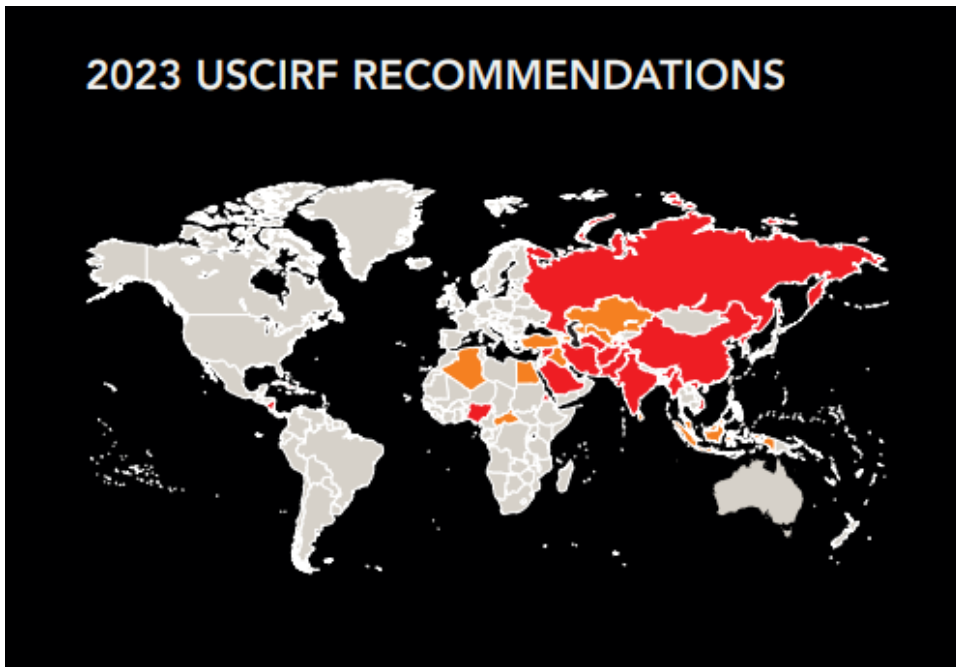
What are the Recommendations of the Report?

- For 2023, based on religious freedom conditions in 2022, **USCIRF recommends that the State Department:**
 - **Redesignate as CPCs:** Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan;
 - **Designate as Additional CPCs:** Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, Syria, and Vietnam;
 - **Maintain on the Special Watch List (SWL):** Algeria and the Central African Republic (CAR);
 - **Include on the SWL:** Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Uzbekistan;
 - **Redesignate as Entities of Particular Concern (EPCs):** Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Houthis, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP also referred to as ISIS-West Africa), and Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM).

Criteria for Designation of Countries in Different Categories

- **CPCs:** When the government of the countries engage in or tolerate “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations” of the right to freedom of religion or belief under IRFA 1998.
- **SWL:** It is based on the governments’ perpetration or toleration of severe religious freedom violations.
- **EPCs:** For systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations.

2023 USCIRF RECOMMENDATIONS



■ COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

Afghanistan	India	Pakistan	Turkmenistan
Burma	Iran	Russia	Vietnam
China	Nicaragua	Saudi Arabia	
Cuba	Nigeria	Syria	
Eritrea	North Korea	Tajikistan	

■ SPECIAL WATCH LIST COUNTRIES

Algeria	Egypt	Kazakhstan	Turkey
Azerbaijan	Indonesia	Malaysia	Uzbekistan
Central African Republic	Iraq	Sri Lanka	

What is the State of Freedom of Religion in India?

- Freedom of religion in India is a **fundamental right guaranteed by Article 25-28 of the Constitution of India.**
 - **Article 25** (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion).
 - **Article 26** (Freedom to manage religious affairs).
 - **Article 27** (Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any religion).
 - **Article 28** (Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions).
- Further, **Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution** deal with the protection of interests of minorities.

[Source: TH](#)

Anti-Competitive Practices by Big Tech Companies

For Prelims: [IAMAI](#), [Parliamentary Standing Committee](#), Systemically Important Digital Intermediaries, [Fintech](#), [Competition Amendment Bill, 2022](#), CCI.

Why in News?

Some start-ups have accused the [IAMAI \(Internet and Mobile Association of India\)](#) of favoring Big Tech companies over smaller ones, which highlights the Issue of **Anti-Competitive Practices by Big Tech Companies**.

- IAMAI is a not-for-profit industry body registered under the **Societies Act, 1896**. Its mandate is to expand and enhance the online and mobile value-added services sector.

What is Big Tech?

- The term '**Big Tech**' is used to refer to a handful of large, globally significant technology companies, such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft.
- Big Tech is better understood as a concept, rather than a static set of companies. New companies may enter this category just as existing ones may drop out of it.

What is the Background?

- The [Parliamentary Standing Committee](#) on Finance proposed **new regulations to prevent anti-competitive practices** by big tech companies.
 - These included ex-ante regulations that require companies to follow certain standards of behavior **before engaging in certain practices** and designating big tech companies as **Systemically Important Digital Intermediaries (SIDIs)**.
 - The SIDIs would be the leading **entities with the potential to negatively impact competition** in the digital ecosystem based on their revenue, market capitalization, and number of active users.
- However, the IAMAI argued that these **regulations could stifle innovation and competition**.
 - Other big tech companies like Meta, Apple, Amazon, Twitter, and Google among its members, **submitted similar comments**.
- This move has drawn criticism from some Indian startups, who accuse IAMAI of promoting views that favor foreign big tech companies and influencing the **Competitive Conduct in the Digital Ecosystem**.

What is the Role of Big Techs India's Digital Space?

- **Revenue Source:** They play a prominent role in the [fintech market](#), an attractive revenue source particularly because of **low per user ad revenues in India**.
- **Overcoming Literacy Barriers:** Voice-based and [regional language](#) interfaces are offered by Big Tech companies to reach new users and overcome literacy barriers.
- **Bridging Infrastructural and Employment Gaps:** New business verticals that bridge existing infrastructural and employment gaps by providing warehousing, delivery facilities and job opportunities are **helping India to serve Indian markets better**.
- **Social and Political Progress:** Most Indian internet users rely on one or more Big Tech platforms to access information, communicate, **and participate in political and social life**.
 - This is also democratising the exercise of the [constitutional right of free speech](#).

How does Big techs Influence the Competitive Conduct in the Digital Ecosystem?

- **Acquisitions and Mergers:**
 - Large firms buying highly **valued start-ups without being subject to merge control rules** is a problem in digital markets.
 - The Committee noted that [CCI \(Competition Commission of India\)](#) is not able to capture certain mergers and acquisitions because **they do not meet the thresholds of assets and turnover required** for combinations.
- **Self-Preferencing:**
 - Self-preferencing happens when **a company promotes its own services** or those of its subsidiaries on its platform, while also competing with other service providers on the same platform.
 - For example, a company may give **priority in rankings to its own applications** in an app store. This lack of neutrality can harm other businesses and reduce their profits.
- **Data Usage:**
 - Digital companies collect a lot of customer data **which can give them an advantage and make it hard for new companies** to compete.
 - This data can also be misused to **track and profile customers.**
- **Restricting Third-Party Applications:**
 - Some companies **restrict the use of third-party applications** on their platforms, which can limit user choice.
 - For instance, an operating system **may prevent users from utilizing services** of an application other than its own, such as Apple not allowing any third-party applications to be installed on the I-phone.
- **Adjacency:**
 - Digital firms sometimes force customers to **buy additional services linked to their main product**, which reduces competition and creates pricing asymmetry.
- **Anti-Steering:**
 - Anti-steering provisions are used by entities to **prevent business users from using other alternatives**, thereby reducing competition.
 - For example, application stores mandating the use of their own payment systems. These practices result in anti-competitive exclusionary practices.

What is India's Current Approach to Regulate Big Tech?

- **Competition Act, 2002:** In India, antitrust issues are **governed by the [Competition Act, 2002](#)**, and the CCI checks upon **monopolistic practices**.
 - In 2022, the CCI imposed a penalty of Rs 1,337.76 crore on Google for abusing its dominant position in multiple markets for 'anti-competitive practices'.
- **Competition Amendment Bill, 2022:** The government has proposed amendments to the competition law in the **Competition Amendment Bill, 2022**. The Bill receives Presidential Assent in April 2023.
 - The CCI shall frame regulations to prescribe the requirements for assessing whether an enterprise has substantial business operations in India.
 - It will strengthen the **Commission's review mechanism, particularly in the digital and infrastructure space**, a majority of which were not reported earlier, as the asset or turnover values did not meet the jurisdictional thresholds.

Way Forward

- To address the unique characteristics of digital markets **that do not have a turnover**, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance proposes a system based on the value of deals.
- They also recommend that any concentration involving entities that provide digital services or collect data should be reported to the **CCI before implementation, regardless of whether it meets the notification** threshold.
- The government needs to take adequate steps to **promote internet awareness, such as checking the authenticity of websites** before any transactions are made, and not granting access to unauthorized applications.

BizAmp-Amplifying Businesses of Northeast Region

Why in News?

Recently, an outreach program named **BizAmp** was organized by the **Ministry of MSME** in association with **NSIC Venture Capital Fund Limited (NVCFL)** under its **Self-Reliant India (SRI) Fund** at Dimapur Nagaland.

What is BizAmp?

- BizAmp is the **first outreach program** in the **Northeast Region of the country** which focused on **maximizing capital benefits through NVCFL's SRI Fund**
- The program aims to **empower [micro, small, and medium enterprises \(MSMEs\)](#) from the Northeastern States** and **amplify their businesses** utilizing benefits under the **SRI Fund**.
- The event included dedicated a platform for beneficiary MSMEs to present their **stories and inspire aspiring MSMEs**.
 - The event showcased concerted efforts of State and Central government with the presence of Industry Secretaries from various northeastern states who provided insights about various policies designed for MSMEs to assist them in their growth.

What is SRI Fund?

- **About:**
 - The fund was started as part of the government's flagship '[Atmanirbhar Bharat](#)' program to provide funding support to MSMEs in India.
- **Aim:**
 - The fund aims **to help MSMEs grow faster, become national and international champions**, and make India self-reliant by producing relevant technologies, goods, and services.
- **SRI Fund Structure:**
 - The SRI Fund is **an investment strategy that functions as a [Fund of Funds](#)**, investing in other funds rather than directly in companies. Here is how the SRI Fund is structured:
 - The fund operates through the mother-fund and daughter-fund structure.
 - The overall corpus of the SRI fund (Mother fund) is INR 10,006 crore, with the Government of India as the anchor investor.
 - The daughter funds are [Securities and Exchange Board of India \(SEBI\)](#)-registered Category I and Category II [Alternate Investment Funds \(AIFs\)](#).
 - Daughter funds are mostly venture capital and private equity funds.
 - Daughter funds invest in MSMEs covered under the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006.
- **Managing Authority:**
 - The SRI fund is being managed by **NVCFL**.
 - NVCFL is registered with the SEBI as a Category II AIF under the provisions of the SEBI (AIF) Regulations, 2012.
- **Impact on MSMEs:**
 - The SRI Fund provides growth capital to MSMEs through equity/quasi-equity/equity-like structured instruments.

What is the Importance of Empowering MSMEs in Northeast India?

- Nurturing the MSME sector is important for **the economic well-being of the nation**.

- Empowering MSMEs in Northeast India is important **for enhancing their contribution to the regional and national economy** and achieving the vision of self-reliance. MSMEs can create jobs, boost exports, foster innovation, and support rural development.
- Empowering MSMEs in the region **benefits local communities, especially women and youth.**

What are India's Initiatives in Empowering MSMEs in Northeast India?

- The **Northeast MSME Conclave** was organized in Guwahati to promote entrepreneurship and trade opportunities, with a focus on building infrastructure, providing market linkages, setting up MSME parks and tool rooms, and introducing a policy exclusively for the Northeast.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question:

Prelims:

Q.1 What is/are the recent policy initiative(s) of Government of India to promote the growth of the manufacturing sector? (2012)

1. Setting up of National Investment and Manufacturing Zones
2. Providing the benefit of 'single window clearance'
3. Establishing the Technology Acquisition and Development Fund

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Q.2. Which of the following can aid in furthering the Government's objective of inclusive growth? (2011)

1. Promoting Self-Help Groups
2. Promoting Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
3. Implementing the Right to Education Act

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

[Source: PIB](#)

Rapid Fire Current Affairs

Washington Declaration

The **Washington Declaration signed by South Korea and U.S** aims to reinforce the **strategic partnership** between the two countries against **regional aggression by North Korea**. Prompted by North Korea's successful launch of the **Hwasong-8 solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)**, the agreement outlines cooperation towards deterrence, including deploying an **American nuclear ballistic submarine** in the **Korean peninsula**, forming a **nuclear consultative group**, and providing South Korea with **intelligence regarding nuclear advancements**. However, South Korea has reaffirmed its commitment to the **non-proliferation Treaty** and would not **venture into creating its own nuclear capabilities**.

The U.S. has been reluctant to allow South Korea to develop their own nuclear arsenal due to concerns about controlling global nuclear arms production, and the assurance that the **U.S. and its nuclear weapons would protect its allies** aligns with the larger goal of non-proliferation.

China and North Korea have criticized the agreement, while the South Korean public is skeptical about U.S. support, with a majority wanting to build their own nuclear weapons as a deterrence measure.

Read more: [Non-Proliferation Treaty](#)

World Pulmonary Hypertension Day

World Pulmonary Hypertension Day is an annual event observed on **May 5th to raise awareness about pulmonary hypertension (PH) and support those living with this condition**. The day originated in Madrid, Spain in 2012, where a program and scientific symposium were held to bring together patient associations, disease organizations, and scientific societies. May 5th was chosen because it marks the **anniversary of the first child's death in Spain from pulmonary hypertension caused by toxic rapeseed oil**.

This year's **World Pulmonary Hypertension Day 2023 theme is "Together We Are Stronger,"** emphasizing the importance of coming together to raise awareness, support patients and their families, and advocate for increased access to care and treatments.

PH is a type of high blood pressure that affects the **arteries in the lungs** and the **right side of the heart**. PH can be caused by various factors, including **genetics, certain medical conditions, and exposure to toxins**. Symptoms of PH may include **shortness of breath, fatigue, chest pain, and fainting**.

Cyclone Mocha



The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** has issued a warning that a cyclonic circulation is likely to develop over the **southeast Bay of Bengal** around 6th May 2023. IMD has calculated that a **low-pressure area is expected to take shape**, which is usually a precursor to the development of a cyclone. According to IMD's preliminary analysis based on its weather models, the cyclone could potentially grow to a **'severe cyclonic storm'**. This would be the **first cyclone to form this year** and will be named **Cyclone Mocha**, proposed by Yemen after the **Yemini city Mocha (Mokha) located on the Red sea coast**. The naming of this cyclone was done as per the decree issued by the **World**

Meteorological Organisation (WMO), which states that each cyclone must be named to avoid confusion in instances where **multiple systems operate in one location**.

A cyclone is a weather phenomenon characterized by a **low-pressure center** and strong **winds circulating around it**. It can cause flooding, storm surges, and landslides, resulting in loss of life and damage to property. Cyclones can be classified as **tropical cyclones, extratropical cyclones, and polar lows, depending on the location and weather conditions**.

Read more: [Cyclone](#)

New President of World Bank

The **World Bank** has announced that **Ajay Banga** has been selected as the **new President of the organization, for a five-year term starting 2nd June 2023**. The selection process for the new President of the World Bank is transparent and merit-based, allowing any national of the Bank's membership to be proposed for the position. In addition to being the President of the World Bank Group, Banga will also serve as the Chair of the Executive Directors Board of the **International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)** and as the ex-officio Chair of the Board of Directors of the **International Development Association (IDA), International Finance Corporation (IFC), Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), and Administrative Council of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID)**.

Read more: [World Bank](#)

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