Centre's New Bill on Election Commission (EC) Members' Appointments

- A Bill that is now before Rajya Sabha has been criticised for "downgrading" the status of members of the ECI from that of a judge of the Supreme Court to that of the Cabinet Secretary.



❖ Key Highlights

- ❑ The Bill was introduced in Parliament on August 10, but was not taken up for discussion in the Monsoon Session.
- ❑ It has now been listed for consideration and passing on December 12, along with key amendments that would 'restore' the status of the members of the ECI.
- ❑ The status of the EC would be kept the same as that of a Supreme Court judge, with the same salary, dearness allowance and leave encashment rules.
- ❑ **Constitutional Provision**
  - **Article 324(2)**
    - It is stated that the Election Commission will be composed of the Chief Election Commissioner and additional Election Commissioners as determined by the President.
    - The appointment of these officials, subject to any relevant laws enacted by Parliament, is the responsibility of the President.
- ❑ However, since there was no law made by Parliament as prescribed by the Constitution, the Court stepped in to fill the **"constitutional vacuum."**
- ❑ On March 2, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that a high-power committee consisting of the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India must pick the CEC and ECs.
- ❑ The Bill now seeks to address this vacuum and set up a legislative process to make appointments to the EC.

❖ About the Bill

- ❑ The government brought The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023.
- ❑ It proposed a committee comprising the PM, Leader of Opposition and, instead of the CJI, a Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM.
- ❑ This Bill also proposed giving the CEC and ECs the same salary, perks, and allowances as that of the Cabinet Secretary.
- ❑ The Bill would replace The Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991, under which the CEC and ECs have the same salary as that of a Supreme Court judge.

❖ CEC and EC

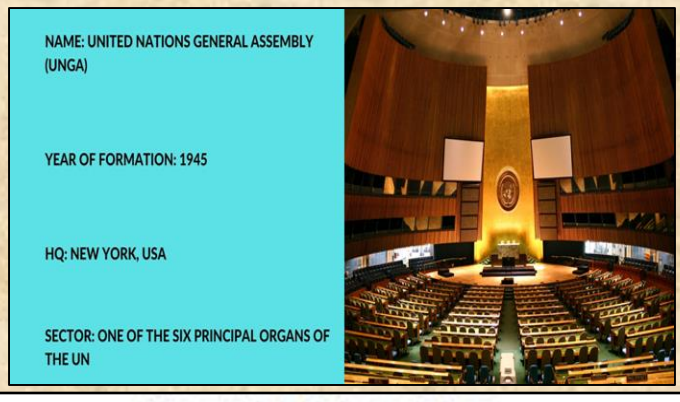
- ❑ Though the Chief Election Commissioner is the chairman of the election commission, his **powers are equal** to the other election commissioners.
- ❑ All the **matters in the commission** are **decided** by the **majority** amongst its members.
- ❑ The Chief Election Commissioner and the two other election commissioners **receive equal salary, allowances and other benefits.**
- ❑ They **enjoy the same status** and receive salary and perks as available to **Judges of the Supreme Court** of India.

❖ Removal

- ❑ The CEC can be removed from office only through a process of **removal similar to that of a Supreme Court Judge by Parliament.**
- ❑ The President of India can remove the other officers on the Chief Commissioner's recommendation.

UN General Assembly (UNGA)

- Recently, India on December 13 voted in favour of a resolution in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) that demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict and the unconditional release of all hostages.
- On October 27, India abstained in a UNGA vote on a resolution that called for an immediate humanitarian truce in the Israel-Hamas conflict.



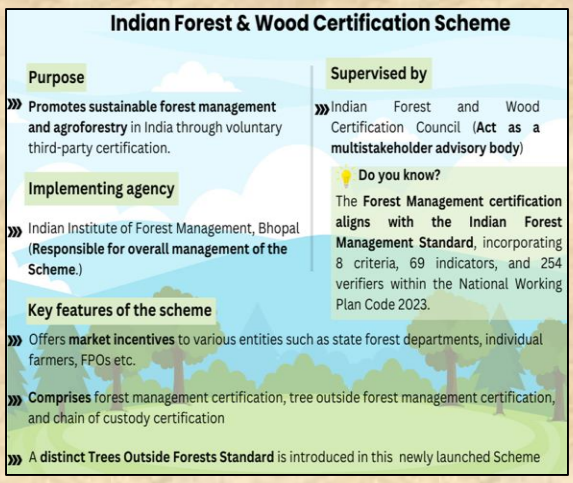
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❖ About United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

- UNGA is **one of the six major agencies** of the United Nations.
- **Established in 1945** under the Charter of the United Nations.
- It occupies a central position as the **chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations.**
- **Composition** : It has **193 members,** with the addition of the Holy See and Palestine as observer states.
- **Meetings**: The UNGA **meets from September to December each year** (main part), and thereafter, from **January to September** (resumed part) in New York
- **Functions**
  - The UNGA is empowered to make **recommendations to States on international issues within its competence.**
  - It has also initiated actions like political, economic, humanitarian, social and legal, which have benefited the lives of millions of people throughout the world.
- **Voting**
  - **Decisions on important questions,** such as those on peace and security, admission of new members and budgetary matters, require a **two-thirds majority** of the General Assembly.
  - **Decisions on other questions** are taken by simple majority.
- **Presidential Election** : The President of the General Assembly is elected each year by assembly to serve a one-year term of office.

Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme



➢ Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change launched the 'Indian Forest & Wood Certification' Scheme.

❖ About the Scheme

- It offers voluntary third-party certification designed to promote sustainable forest management and agroforestry in the country.
- The scheme includes forest management certification, tree outside forest management certification, and chain of custody certification.
- The Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme can provide market incentives to various entities that adhere to responsible forest management and agroforestry practices in their operations.
- This includes state forest departments, individual farmers, or farmer-producer organisations engaged in agroforestry and farm forestry, as well as other wood-based industries in the value chain.
- **Implementation**
  - The scheme will be overseen by the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Council, which will act as a multistakeholder advisory body.
  - Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal will act as the scheme operating agency and will be responsible for overall management of the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme.
  - The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies under the Quality Council of India will accredit the certification bodies which will carry out independent audits and assess adherence of various entities on the standards prescribed under the scheme.

AMRIT Technology

➢ Recently, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras developed a technology 'AMRIT' (Arsenic and Metal Removal by Indian Technology) for the removal of Arsenic and Metal ions from water.

❖ About the Technology

- "AMRIT" is used for the removal of Arsenic and Metal ions from water.
- The technology uses nano-scale iron oxy-hydroxide, which selectively removes arsenic when water is passed through it. It achieves Iron and turbidity removal by physical filtration & Arsenic removal by adsorption.
- This water purifier has been developed for both domestic as well as community levels.
- AMRIT composition is composed of nanoscale iron oxyhydroxide, prepared with a particle size less than 3 nm.
- Nanotechnology helps these compounds pick up a lot of arsenic due to their small size.



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- Smaller particles have more surface atoms, which means they can capture more arsenic.
- It can handle arsenic levels up to 5 ppm and reduce it to less than 1 ppb, which is very low.
- It is 5-6 times more efficient than other adsorbents available.
- This reduces treatment costs, makes filtration units smaller, and makes them easy to operate and maintain.

❖ About Arsenic

- Arsenic is a chemical element (symbol: As) that occurs naturally in the Earth's crust.
- Arsenic can be found in various forms, including inorganic and organic compounds.
- Inorganic arsenic is often considered toxic and can pose serious health risks to humans when present in drinking water, leading to issues like arsenic poisoning.

Bab al-Mandab

➢ Yemen's Houthis have been targeting vessels in the southern Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab strait in attacks the Iran-aligned group says aim to support the Palestinians as Israel and Hamas wage war.



❖ About Bab al-Mandab Strait

- **Geographical Location**
  - Bab al-Mandab is situated between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula to the north and Djibouti and Eritrea on the Horn of Africa to the south. The strait is only about 20 miles wide at its narrowest point, making it a crucial passage for maritime traffic.
- **Significance**
  - Bab al-Mandab serves as a critical link between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean.
  - It is a key passage for international shipping, providing access to the Suez Canal in the north and the lucrative markets of Asia in the east.
  - The strait is a vital route for the transportation of goods, including oil and natural gas, making it of global economic importance.

Adopt a Heritage 2.0 Program

➢ Recently, the deadline for Submission of Applications for "Adopt a Heritage 2.0" Program has been decided as December 31, 2023.



❖ About Adopt a Heritage 2.0 Program

- In September, 2023 the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) launched the "Adopt a Heritage 2.0" programme under which corporates are invited to fund amenities at monuments from their corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds.
- The stakeholders can apply for adopting a monument or specific amenities at a monument through a dedicated web portal that contains details of monuments sought for adoption.
- The aim of "Adopt a Heritage 2.0" programme is to enhance the visitor experience at centrally protected monuments, improve amenities, and bolster the culture and heritage value of the country.

❖ Adopt a Heritage Scheme

- The **'Adopt a Heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan'** scheme is an initiative of the **Ministry of Tourism,** in collaboration with the **Ministry of Culture and the Archaeological Survey of India.**
- It was **launched in September 2017** on World Tourism Day.
- The government invites entities, including public sector companies, private sector firms as well as individuals, to develop selected monuments and heritage and tourist sites across India.
- Development of these tourist sites calls for providing and maintaining basic amenities, including drinking water, ease of access for the differently abled and senior citizens, standardised signage, cleanliness etc.
- The sites/monument are selected on the basis of tourist footfall and visibility and can be adopted by private and public sector companies and individuals — known as Monument Mitras — for an initial period of five years.
- The government has signed 27 Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with 12 public/private groups for 25 key heritage sites throughout the nation.

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