

TODAY'S NEWS

Curated Insights from 'The Hindu' Newspaper

Preface

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Team BPSC POINT

Dedicated to your exam success.

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Middle path

The modified pension scheme overcomes some shortcomings of NPS

The Centre has restored guaranteed pensions for its employees, meeting their demand halfway, and wearily trying to hold on to principles of fiscal prudence. Pension schemes around the world, whether contributory and market linked or underwritten by the exchequer, are facing a crisis, due to multiple factors, including demographic reasons. According to the Reserve Bank of India, the total Budget estimates of various States and Union Territories for pension in 2023-24 was ₹52,02,644 crore, which is between 6% and 20% of their total revenue receipts. Pensioners argue that it is their deferred wages. It can also be argued that pensions from the exchequer are at the cost of future generations. Governments are outsourcing jobs through contracts, and resorting to innovations such as Agribusiness – a short service scheme for the military services – and the halving of pension bills is among the reasons that drive such measures. Governments are also leaving posts unfilled. All such measures are leading to two things. First, it negatively affects state capacity, and second, it reduces avenues for government and public sector jobs for India's expanding number of young job seekers. The New Pension Scheme (NPS), which was market linked and managed by an autonomous entity, was introduced during the stock market boom. Two decades later, when people began retiring under the NPS – those who joined after January 1, 2004 – it turned out that they were receiving much less than what they would have got under the old scheme.

With the Congress making the restoration of the old scheme a central piece of its politics, the BJP was pushed to the corner. A committee led by former Finance Secretary and Cabinet Secretary-designate T.V. Somanathan devised a middle path that involves employer contribution and enhanced share from the Centre. The Unified Pension Scheme (UPS), approved by the Cabinet, promises a pension of 50% of the average basic pay of the last 12 months before retirement and a minimum pension of ₹10,000 for those who worked for at least 10 years. The Centre's share towards the scheme was increased from 14% under the NPS to 18.5%, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said will ensure government employees dignity and financial security. The BJP and the government should note that no reform can be sustainable without broad political consensus. Social security for older people must cover the widest segment of the population. Government employees are an organised pressure group, and having managed to get their guaranteed pension, they should wholeheartedly welcome the UPS, rather than protest against employer contribution.

The Indian government has reinstated guaranteed pensions for its employees, addressing their demands while maintaining some fiscal discipline. The new **Unified Pension Scheme (UPS)** offers a pension based on 50% of the average basic pay from the last year of service and a minimum of ₹10,000 for those with at least 10 years of service. The Centre's contribution has increased from 14% under the New Pension Scheme (NPS) to 18.5%.

This move aims to **balance financial security for employees** with the **need for fiscal prudence**. However, the broader issue of pension sustainability and the impact on future generations remains.

The UPS is a compromise between the old guaranteed scheme and market-linked pensions, reflecting a shift in the political landscape with Congress advocating for pension restoration and BJP adopting a middle path.

Catalyst for change

The Hema Committee report should help reform the film industry

At different points of time, come events that have the potential to shape the future. Whether these catalysts fulfil that potential to the fullest extent or not is in the hands of the people in their vortex. The Justice K. Hema Committee report that studied the issues faced by women in cinema, could well be one such catalyst. The three-member committee was constituted in 2017, based on a petition submitted by the Kerala-based Women in Cinema Collective, and submitted its report two years later. It was released last week, several paragraphs redacted, and contains unsurprising and yet disturbing revelations about the state of affairs in the film industry – discrimination, exploitation and sexual harassment of women. The term 'casting couch', hatched in Hollywood, has become regrettably accepted as a necessary evil in the industry. The report deals with other inequities that disadvantage women in the industry, including the lack of essential facilities such as toilets, changing rooms, safe transportation, and accommodation at the shooting spot which are violative of the right to privacy and discrimination in remuneration, and a lack of binding contractual agreements. These affect the range of women across the industry – actors, technicians, make-up artists, dancers, support staff, and particularly so, women lower in the pecking order.

The way ahead is not as murky as the haze that the film industry, here Malayalam, seems to find itself in. The government has decided to constitute a special investigation team to go into the accusations of harassment. While the government would do well to ignore the committee's recommendation on doing away with internal complaints committees for each film project, it must act on suggestions that call for provision of essential facilities and for structural reforms within the film industry, including professionalising it. Nothing will change unless the state gets involved meaningfully in creating an equitable work space for men and women, in an industry dominated by people with great power and money, who have so far deflected the existence of such a power cartel or have remained silent. Each of the issues raised must be taken cognizance of, and acted upon. As with the MeToo movement, Justice Hema's report has the potential of being a catalyst to enable scores of women to speak up. It behooves the state to ensure that their complaints are not ignored, or worse still, used against them.

The **Justice K. Hema Committee report**, released recently, highlights severe issues faced by women in the Malayalam film industry, including discrimination, exploitation, and sexual harassment.

Constituted in 2017 based on a petition by the **Women in Cinema Collective**, the report reveals troubling practices such as the normalization of the 'casting couch' and inadequate facilities for women.

The government plans to form a special investigation team to address these issues.

The report's recommendations include improving essential facilities and structural reforms within the industry.

Effective state intervention is crucial to creating an equitable workspace and addressing the problems highlighted in the report.

New-age gateway devices, the latest health threat

What happens when a potential gateway device is used as a gateway to a new age of gateway devices?

It is a question that is being asked by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The WHO has issued a warning that the use of gateway devices, such as e-cigarettes and vaping pens, could lead to a new wave of gateway devices, such as e-cigarettes and vaping pens, which could lead to a new wave of gateway devices, such as e-cigarettes and vaping pens.

The ICMR has also issued a warning that the use of gateway devices, such as e-cigarettes and vaping pens, could lead to a new wave of gateway devices, such as e-cigarettes and vaping pens.

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New-age tobacco products like e-cigarettes and vaping pens, initially marketed as healthier alternatives to smoking, have instead worsened public health. These devices have become highly popular among youth, leading to increased nicotine addiction.

Targeted marketing and appealing flavors are drawing children into vaping, which is linked to both physical issues like lung damage and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

The efficient nicotine delivery in modern e-cigarettes has heightened addiction risks, creating a significant health crisis among young people.

Investing in persons with disabilities

A recent Hindi movie, *Shikham*, starring Rishabh Shrivastava, narrates the story of the author's father, who was a person with a disability. The movie highlights the challenges of visual impairment. In the film, the people of Shikham's father's village ask the family not to invest in the son's education or life in general. Many parents of children with some form of disability are similarly made to believe that their offspring are not worthy of investment. Persons with disabilities (PwDs) face social stigma, marginalisation in all sectors, and discrimination in education and employment. Most importantly, they struggle for dignity. Educational institutions lack the necessary infrastructure and support mechanisms and workplaces lack robust diversity policies that would give proper representation to PwDs.



Rajesh Bhatnagar, a person with a disability, who writes on public law, rights, and public engagement of Government

Status of education and jobs
The 2023 report by Nifty 50 constituent companies reveals that only five out of the 50 companies have more than 1% of PwDs on their rolls, with four of them being public sector companies. Similarly, data from the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People reveals that less than 1% of India's educational institutions are disabled friendly, less than 40% of school buildings have ramps, and approximately 1% have accessible restrooms. A report of the Sarbajit Educational Trust titled 'Accessibility and Inclusion in Higher Education in India' states that reservation is provided under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, in government jobs, and incentives in non-government jobs, but there is a dearth of implementation. The lack of infrastructure and workplaces combined with the lack of inclusive policies hinders the full participation of PwDs in society. Thus, it is imperative that both public and private institutions invest in the uplift of PwDs. The Indian education system

Educational institutions lack the necessary infrastructure and workplaces combined with the lack of inclusive policies hinders the full participation of PwDs in society. Thus, it is imperative that both public and private institutions invest in the uplift of PwDs.

needs an inclusive framework to promote PwDs. For instance, Harvard University in the U.S. has Local Disability Coordinators who are specialised in helping PwDs find accommodation in the city. Similarly, Stanford University in the U.S. has a robust institutional structure which includes providing support in housing and devices to PwDs. It also has a comprehensive resource centre that supports students with disabilities. Few Indian universities provide such impressive models. In 2023, Shiv Nadar University enumerated a disability support policy, which includes providing personalised support to students on a case-by-case basis, depending on the student's health condition every semester. Based on the nature and severity of the disability, the Dean of Academics decides measures for academic accommodation and the Dean of Students for other aspects.

However, these measures are not institutionalised. Hence, they are not uniform, leaving a vast number of students from diverse backgrounds outside the walls of universities. Despite the University Grants Commission's draft accessibility and inclusion guidelines for higher education institutions to ensure that admission announcements and advertisements are circulated in accessible formats, the presence of PwDs is not very encouraging. In terms of employment, despite the legislative mandate of providing reservation for PwDs, and of drafting an equal opportunity policy detailing the measures proposed by the establishment to ensure an inclusive work environment and prohibit discrimination at the workplace, employers have failed to do these. For the effective implementation of these rules, States should come forward and develop a compliance mechanism. For instance, a model from Brazil can be emulated, where companies with more than 100 employees must have PwDs

comprise 2% of the total workforce. In cases of non-compliance, the company may be subject to fines based on criteria such as its size and the number of times offences were repeated. Some countries have also developed incentive mechanisms. Japan, for instance, has developed a system of subsidies for employers who have some form of disability.

Striving for dignity
The British artist, David Hovey, once remarked that "the history of the portrayal of disabled people is the history of oppression and negative representation. This has meant that disabled people have been presented as socially feared, able-bodied people, not as disabled people with their own identities". The identity of PwDs is created in several ways. PwDs are considered by many as pitiful or helpless. Many believe that PwDs can only be in relationships with one another. Disability in addition to belonging to a "lower" caste or a particular gender creates a double burden on people. Sociologist Colin Barnes has argued that PwDs are "portrayed as objects of pity, violence, curiosity and ridicule, as barriers on society, sexually abnormal, and overall, as people incapable of community participation". This portrayal forms the basis of the social attitude towards PwDs. Recently, these former cricketers mocked PwDs in a video that went viral after India won the World Championship of Legends. Everyday struggles and the stigmatisation and mockery of PwDs reveals the inability of so-called "able-bodied people" to treat them equally with dignity. Athletes' success in this book, *The Grammar of My Body*, writes, "My friends say disabled people can be negative. I agree. We are so negative that sometimes the able-bodied mind never reaches us. That distance is too far... it is those who are crossing the distance (who) should bridge the gap."

The article **discusses** the **challenges faced by persons with disabilities (PwDs)** in India, particularly in education and employment, and highlights societal stigmas.

Education and Employment Challenges:

- **Education:** PwDs face a **lack of accessible infrastructure** in schools and universities. Less than 1% of educational institutions are disability-friendly, with inadequate facilities like ramps and accessible restrooms. While some universities like Shiv Nadar University have made efforts to support PwDs, these measures are not consistent across institutions.

- **Employment:** Despite legal mandates for **reservation and equal opportunity** policies for PwDs, implementation is poor. Only a few companies have significant PwD representation. There is a need for a compliance mechanism, similar to Brazil's model, and incentive systems like those in Japan.

Societal Stigma:

- PwDs face social stigma and discrimination, often being portrayed negatively. They are seen as objects of pity or ridicule, and societal attitudes frequently undermine their dignity and ability to participate fully in society. Recent incidents, like former cricketers mocking PwDs, reflect ongoing prejudices.

Call to Action:

- To improve the situation, both public and private sectors need to invest in inclusive practices and infrastructure. Societal attitudes towards PwDs also need to change to ensure their full integration and respect.

| Aspect | Brazil Model | Incentives in Japan |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Legal Requirement | Companies with >100 employees must have 2%-5% PwD workforce. | Employment quotas for PwDs must be met. |
| Compliance and Penalties | Non-compliance results in fines based on company size and violations. | Penalties for failing to meet employment quotas. |
| Objective | Ensure PwD representation in the workforce. | Encourage employment of PwDs through financial support. |
| Supportive Measures | N/A | Subsidies for employers to cover accommodation costs. |

What did the 2013 panel say on death penalty for rape?

What were the recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee? What about marital rape?

Salient Data

The story so far

After the brutal rape and murder of a doctor on duty at Kolkata's S.C. Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 7, there has been a clamour of voices seeking the death penalty for the accused. The Justice J.S. Verma Committee recommendations, which led to the amendment of criminal law in 2013, had specifically said it was not inclined to recommend the death penalty for rape even for the rarest of rare cases. "...seeking of life death penalty would be a regressive step in the field of sentencing and reformation," the committee pointed out.

What did the Union Cabinet decide?

The Union Cabinet did not take the recommendation on the death penalty when it cleared an ordinance on sexual assault in 2013, and signed the criminal amendments into law. The committee to amend criminal law was set up after the

gang rape of a paramedic student in Delhi on December 16, 2012. Led by Justice J.S. Verma (retired), the committee submitted its recommendations on January 23, 2013. One of its key suggestions, that the death penalty does not necessarily act as a deterrent against such crimes, was overlooked.

Key amendments were brought in to provide the death penalty for rape that led to the death of the victim or reduced her to a permanent vegetative state (Section 376A of the Indian Penal Code) and anyone found guilty of rape more than once (Section 376B). In 2018, further changes introduced death as the maximum punishment for every participant in a gang rape where the victim is less than 12 years old (Section 376D), and life-long imprisonment if the victim is less than 16 (Section 376DA). Under the new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, punishment for rape is laid down in several Sections including 44, 45 and 70(2), which notes the punishment for gang rape of a woman under the age of 18

is the death penalty.

What did the committee recommend?

The Justice Verma Committee provided for enhanced sentences for rape, increasing it from "years to 10 years, 20 years, and life, but 'short of death'". "Wherever causes the person to be in a permanent vegetative state, that term which shall not be less than twenty years, but shall be for life, which shall mean the rest of that person's natural life," it noted. The committee pointed out that "there is considerable evidence that there is a different effect of death penalty on serious crimes is a reality. A myth."

According to the Working Group on Human Rights, the murder rate has declined consistently in India over the last 20 years despite the slowdown in the execution of death sentences since 1984.

What was its stance on marital rape?

The Verma Committee recommended that the exception to marital rape be removed, pointing out that "a marital or other relationship between the perpetrator or victim is not a valid defence against the crimes of rape or sexual violence." Concerning with the judgment of the European Commission of Human Rights in *L.C. v. S.A.*, the Verma Committee endorsed the conclusion that a rapist remains a rapist regardless of his relationship with the victim. The Union government did not go by this recommendation and refused to criminalise marital rape.

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What about gender rights?

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The Verma Committee pointed out that "the effect of empowerment of women does not limit itself to political equality, but also extends, in terms of social, educational, and economic equality, if true empowerment of women were to mean anything, it is necessary that law, as well as public policy, must be capable of engaging substantially with women's rights, opportunities, acquisition of skills, the ability to generate self-confidence and insist on total equality in relationships, both with society and the state."

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The correction of social mindsets of its gender bias depends more on social norms. It observed, noting that "the deficiency has to be overcome by leaders in society aided by the necessary systemic changes in education and societal behaviour."

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The article discusses the aftermath of the brutal rape and murder of a doctor in Kolkata, highlighting the debate over the death penalty for rape.

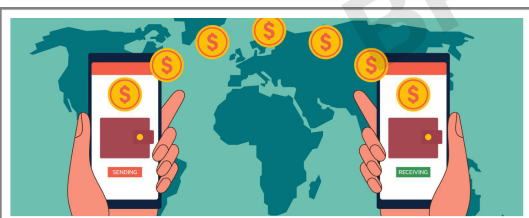
The Justice **J.S. Verma Committee**, formed after the 2012 Delhi gang rape, had **recommended against the death penalty** for rape, arguing it doesn't effectively deter such crimes and is a regressive step in sentencing and reformation.

and reformation.

Despite this, the Union Cabinet included the death penalty in certain cases of rape in the 2013 criminal law amendments, and further expanded its scope in 2018 and under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The Verma Committee recommended enhanced sentences for rape, with life imprisonment as the maximum, and also advocated for the removal of the marital rape exception. However, the government did not implement the marital rape recommendation.

The committee emphasized the need for societal changes in gender bias and the true empowerment of women through legal and policy measures, along with changes in social norms and education.



Tackling the frictions in cross-border payments: a call for innovative solutions

As new technologies emerge and the demand for improved cross-border payment systems grow, various bilateral and multilateral initiatives are being undertaken to enhance cross-border payment capabilities

Santhia Chaurasia

The global cross-border payments market was valued at \$819.9 trillion in 2022, and is projected to reach \$106.2 trillion by 2032, growing at a CAGR of 7.3% from 2023 to 2032. Historically, cross-border payments were initiated through manual processes, often involving letters of credit, checks, and extensive documentation. They have evolved significantly throughout history, closely intertwined with the development of trade, currency exchange, and industrialisation. With the onset of industrialisation and wire transfers, banks began to facilitate cross-border fund transfers. However, despite technological advances, cross-border payments remain riddled with inefficiencies that hinder businesses and individuals and pose a significant barrier to financial inclusion and economic growth. Business and economic growth depend on the efficiency of cross-border payments to a large extent.

The Financial Stability Board (FSB) has issued numerous recommendations to gather insights and drive improvements. The FSB has identified particularly four challenges associated with cross-border payments – high costs, low speed, limited access, and insufficient transparency.

The old and the new

The Bank of England and the Bank for International Settlements classify real cross-border payment arrangements into four models: correspondent banking, closed loop or the single-system model, interlinking of payment infrastructures, and peer-to-peer.

Correspondent banking uses intermediary banks, increasing the complexity of payment and costs. This model is declining due to regulatory costs and inefficiencies. The single-system model relies on single payment service providers, being interoperable and regulatory issues. Interlinking payment infrastructures involve connecting countries' systems for seamless transactions but has technical

and regulatory challenges. Peer-to-peer allows direct payments using technologies like distributed ledgers. The FSB has identified issues such as high costs and low speeds in these systems, proposing solutions and leveraging technologies such as blockchain and digital wallets to enhance cross-border payments.

As new technologies emerge and the demand for improved cross-border payment systems grows, various bilateral and multilateral initiatives are being undertaken to enhance cross-border payment capabilities.

These new-age models represent a significant shift from traditional cross-border payment methods, reflecting the ongoing evolution of the global financial landscape. Most of these new-age cross-border payment projects fall into three primary categories: Linking Fast Payment Systems (FPS) or Instant Payment Systems (IPS), Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) projects, and distributed ledger technologies (DLT) based cross-border payment projects. Notably, most of these initiatives are driven by CBDCs. Innovative pilot projects aim to build interoperable cross-border lanes, more cost-effective, and more secure, offering improved financial inclusion and efficiency for businesses and individuals worldwide.

The PayNow PromptPay (P2P) or Instant Payment System (IPS), Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) projects, and distributed ledger technologies (DLT) based cross-border payment projects are being undertaken to enhance cross-border payment capabilities. These new-age models represent a significant shift from traditional cross-border payment methods, reflecting the ongoing evolution of the global financial landscape. Most of these new-age cross-border payment projects fall into three primary categories: Linking Fast Payment Systems (FPS) or Instant Payment Systems (IPS), Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) projects, and distributed ledger technologies (DLT) based cross-border payment projects. Notably, most of these initiatives are driven by CBDCs. Innovative pilot projects aim to build interoperable cross-border lanes, more cost-effective, and more secure, offering improved financial inclusion and efficiency for businesses and individuals worldwide.

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Attacking Hezbollah, Israel fighter jets launch strikes across Lebanon

Military calls it pre-emptive strike as the Iran-backed militant group launches attack across the border to avenge the killing of one of its top commanders; heavy exchange of fire has not escalated the situation but the region remains tense

Associated Press
JERUSALEM

Israel launched a wave of air strikes across southern Lebanon early on Sunday in what it said was a pre-emptive strike to avert a large Hezbollah attack. The militant group responded that it had launched hundreds of rockets and drones to avenge the killing of one of its top commanders last month.



An attack: Smoke billows from the site of an Israeli air strike on (clockwise from top) Lebanon on Sunday.

The heavy exchange of fire does not appear to have ignited a long-festering war, but the situation remains tense. Egypt was meanwhile hosting high-level talks aimed at brokering a ceasefire in the 10-month-old Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, which diplomats hope will damp down regional tensions.

The Israeli military said it struck because Hezbollah was planning to launch a heavy barrage of rockets and missiles. Soon after, Hezbollah said it had launched an attack on Israeli military positions as an initial response to the killing of Fouad Shukr in an Israeli air strike. By mid-morning, it appeared that the exchange had ended, with both sides saying they had only aimed at military targets. While at least three fighters were killed in the strikes on Lebanon, the Israeli military said one soldier with its navy was killed.

Israel's Home Front Command raised the alert level across northern Israel before later lifting restrictions in most areas. Hezbollah said its attack involved more than 200 Katyusha rockets aimed at multiple sites in Israel and a "large number" of drones. It said the operation targeted "a qualitative Israeli military target that will be announced later" as well as "enemy sites and barracks and even some (missile defence) platforms".

Hezbollah said the strikes would allow it to launch more attacks deeper into Israel, but a later statement said "military operations for today have been completed". It dismissed Israel's claim to have downed a stronger attack, without providing evidence for its own claims. U.S. President Joe Biden was "closely monitoring events in Israel and Lebanon," according to Sean Saville, a spokesperson for the National Security Council.

'Determined to defend'
"We are determined to do everything to defend our

country, to return the residents of the north securely to their homes and to continue upholding a simple rule: whoever harms us, we will harm them," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

Israel conducted airstrikes in southern **Lebanon** to prevent a perceived large-scale attack by **Hezbollah**, which retaliated with rocket and drone strikes following the killing of one of its commanders. The exchange, while intense, has not escalated into a broader conflict, though regional tensions remain high. **Egypt** is holding ceasefire talks related to the **Israel-Hamas**



conflict in Gaza. Casualties include three Hezbollah fighters and one Israeli soldier. The situation led to temporary disruptions in northern Israel, with the U.S. closely monitoring events.

| Aspect | Hezbollah | Hamas |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Origin | Early 1980s, Lebanon | 1987, during the First Intifada in Palestine |
| Ideology | Shia Islamist, aligned with Iran | Sunni Islamist, roots in the Muslim Brotherhood |
| Goals | Resist Israeli occupation, promote Shia Islam, establish a Shia state in Lebanon | Establish an Islamic state in historic Palestine, replace Israel |
| Primary Area of Influence | Lebanon | Palestinian territories, primarily Gaza |
| Activities | Political party and militant group; conflicts with Israel, including 2006 Lebanon War | Governs Gaza Strip, armed resistance against Israel, frequent rocket attacks |
| International Designation | Designated as a terrorist organization by the US, EU, and others | Designated as a terrorist organization by the US, EU, and others |

Murugan conference is also about Tamil culture, says Udhayanidhi Stalin



The **Muthamizh Murugan International Conference** is an academic event focused on **Tamil language, literature, and culture**. It serves as a platform for scholars, researchers, and enthusiasts to present papers, engage in discussions, and exchange ideas about various aspects of Tamil studies.

Adoption rate of children with special needs remains low

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Of the 18,179 adoptions recorded since 2019, only 1,404 involved children with special needs even as the absolute numbers of adoptions saw an increase over the next five years, according to official data. Though the number of children with special needs for adoption has risen, the adoption rate is still significantly low, activists pointed out. Children with special needs require additional support due to physical,

developmental, behavioural or emotional challenges.

RTI query
In 2019-20, India saw a total of 3,745 adoptions, 3,351 in-country and 394 international. Of the total number, only 56 boys and 110 girls with special needs were adopted, the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) said in its response to an RTI query. As of July 5, 2024, 420 children with special needs were waiting for adoption in childcare institutions across India, CARA said.

Since 2019, India recorded 18,179 adoptions, but only 1,404 were for **children with special needs**. Despite an overall increase in adoptions, the rate for children with special needs remains low.

NGT overturns memo from TNPCB offering leniency to brick kilns

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The southern bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has overturned a memo from the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) that potentially offered leniency to brick kilns operating without proper authorisation.

A 2022 notification by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) had established stringent siting criteria for brick kilns. These regulations required new brick kilns to be located at least 800 metres from residential areas and fruit orchards, and one kilometre away from other brick kilns to prevent clustering. The guidelines were part of broader efforts to mitigate environmental and health impacts associated with brick kiln operations.

On February 14, 2023, TNPCB issued a memo interpreting the new siting criteria as applicable solely to new brick kilns, excluding those that had been in operation prior to the notification.

This interpretation was challenged before the Bench, comprising Justice Pooja Satyanarayana and expert member Satyapal Koriapuri, by resident M. Manickaraj, who argued that the memo gave an unfair advantage to existing brick kilns, including those operating illegally in Thadagam Valley, Coimbatore. The valley, already plagued by environmental degradation due to unreg-



New brick kilns were required to be located at least 800 metres away.

ulated brick kiln activity, faced severe pollution and disruption to local ecosystems.

Further, the applicant said if there were any existing units operating without consent or any of the approvals required, they cannot be treated as existing units.

Critiquing TNPCB's memo for potentially allowing illegal brick kilns to bypass necessary regulatory checks, the bench found that the memo's interpretation contradicted the intent of the MoEF&CC's guidelines, which aimed to enforce uniform standards across all brick kilns, regardless of their operational status.

The Bench stated that the interpretation of TNPCB that siting criteria applied only to new or proposed units and not to existing ones was incorrect and, if allowed, would enable illegal brick kilns to continue unchecked. It then ordered the TNPCB to issue directions to its officers in the State to follow the MoEF&CC notification in its intended manner.

The southern bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has overturned a Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) memo that had potentially exempted existing brick kilns from new siting regulations.

In 2022, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) established stringent siting criteria for brick kilns, **requiring new kilns to be located at least 800 meters from residential areas and fruit orchards**, and **one kilometer from other kilns**. However, a February 2023 TNPCB memo interpreted these regulations as applicable only to **new kilns**, not those already in operation.

This interpretation was challenged by resident M. Manickaraj, who argued it unfairly favored existing kilns, including illegal ones in Thadagam Valley, Coimbatore, which faced severe pollution. The NGT bench found TNPCB's memo **contradicted MoEF&CC's intent** to enforce uniform standards. The bench ordered TNPCB to align with the original guidelines, ensuring all brick kilns, regardless of their operational status, comply with the siting criteria.

Rajnath visits U.S. submarine testing facility as India eyes similar centre

Bhaskar Patel
NEW DELHI

In a reflection of the growing cooperation in undersea domain and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) between India and the U.S., also a priority area between the Quad partners, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, during his ongoing tour of the U.S., visited the William B. Morgan Large Cavitation Channel (LCC) in the Naval Surface Warfare Centre at Memphis, Tennessee, as India also plans to set up a similar facility.

The LCC is one of the world's largest and most technically advanced water tunnel facilities for testing submarines, torpedoes, naval surface ships and propellers. The Raksha Mantri was briefed at the facility, and he witnessed an actual tunnel experiment, the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

"The discussions also intend to support the ongoing proposal for establishment of similar facility for indigenous design and development in India."

After maritime domain awareness, undersea domain awareness has



Rajnath Singh visits the William B. Morgan Large Cavitation Channel in the Naval Surface Warfare Centre, in Memphis on Sunday.

emerged as a key focus area for India and among the Quad as China rapidly expands its maritime presence in the Indian Ocean and larger Indo-Pacific.

In addition, during the ongoing visit, the two sides took steps on an earlier understanding of having more Indian military liaison officers at key U.S. military commands. A memorandum of agreement was signed between India and the U.S. regarding the deployment of liaison officers. India will be accorded deploying the first liaison officer to the Headquarters Special Operations Command in Florida, U.S., the Ministry said.

The Security of Supply Agreement (SoSA) signed on Friday is one of the two broad-based defence industrial cooperation agreements currently under discussion between the two countries as cooperation between defence industries deepens, and comes following the conclusion of all four foundational agreements.

Supply chain stability In June 2022, during a visit of U.S. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin to India, he and Mr. Singh agreed to initiate negotiations for a SoSA and a reciprocal defence Procurement (DDP) agreement which will promote long-term supply chain stability.

Through this SoSA, the U.S. and India agree to pro-

vide reciprocal priority support for goods and services that promote national defence. The arrangement will enable both countries to acquire the industrial resources they need from one another to resolve unanticipated supply chain disruptions to meet national security needs, a statement from the U.S. Department of Defence (DoD) said.

Both Ministers appreciated the progress made in operationalising the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), a Quad initiative, and lauded the ongoing efforts by India to enhance the Maritime Domain Awareness for the partners in the Indian Ocean Region. They also welcomed the ongoing Indian participation in the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and noted that India will deploy its Navy personnel in CMF's Combined Task Force 150 headquarters in 2025.

The IPMDA announced by the Quad comprising of India, Australia, Japan, and the U.S. aims to establish a comprehensive system for monitoring and securing maritime activities in the Indo-Pacific.

During his visit to the U.S., Defence Minister Rajnath Singh explored the **William B. Morgan Large Cavitation Channel** at the Naval Surface Warfare Centre in Memphis, Tennessee. This facility, a **key asset for testing submarines and naval equipment**, **serves as a model** for a similar facility India plans to establish.

The visit highlighted increased cooperation in undersea domain and anti-submarine warfare between India and the U.S., in line with Quad priorities. The two nations also signed a **memorandum of agreement** to deploy more Indian military liaison officers to U.S. commands, starting with one to the Headquarters Special Operations Command in Florida.

Additionally, India and the U.S. signed a **Security of Supply Agreement (SoSA)** to ensure reciprocal support for **defense-related goods and services**, enhancing supply chain stability. This agreement is part of broader defense industrial cooperation discussions and follows the completion of **key foundational agreements**.

Both countries reviewed progress on the **Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative** and noted India's planned participation in the **Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)**, with Indian Navy personnel set to join CMF's Combined Task Force 150 in 2025.

Key Foundational Agreements Between India and the U.S. for Enhanced Defense Cooperation

The key foundational agreements between India and the U.S. are a set of crucial defense and strategic agreements designed to enhance military cooperation and interoperability. These agreements include:

Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)

Signed in 2016, it facilitates the reciprocal provision of logistical support, supplies, and services between the armed forces of both countries.

Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)

Signed in 2018, it ensures secure communications between the U.S. and Indian military equipment and systems.

Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence (BECA)

Signed in 2020, it allows the sharing of geospatial intelligence for enhancing the accuracy of navigational and targeting systems.

Foundational Agreement for Defense Cooperation

This includes agreements that establish a framework for defense cooperation, including supply chain support and defense industrial collaboration.

These agreements are designed to improve strategic partnership, operational coordination, and defense collaboration between the two nations.

RDSO report flags challenges faced by train controllers

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

A study by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO), which functions under the Railway Ministry, has found that train controllers face multiple challenges at work, including an "inadequate" pay scale, huge stress due to vacancies leading to health concerns, and a lack of basic amenities.

The report, which was submitted to the Railway Board recently, said Section Controllers perform high-strain jobs, their task made more difficult by the around 15-20% vacancy, medically-decategorised officers posted in the department and the absence of appropriate reward either in terms of money, or esteem and career growth.

Titled 'The challenges faced by Section Controllers in carrying out their duties effectively', the report aims at exploring improvements in the selection procedure, training, and infrastructure for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of train operations.

The Indian Railways is one of the largest networks in the world with thousands of trains traversing various sections of almost 1,05,555 km of tracks daily, the report states. "This mammoth activity is controlled by 68 operation centres over the IR network called the Divisional Control Office," the Divisional Control Office, situated at divisional headquarters, plays a vital role in the entire operation of the railway network, it says.

The rail network in a division is subdivided into sections consisting of several stations. "The trains running over these sections are controlled and monitored by the Section Controllers working round the clock in shift duties on the Control Board."

The RDSO team collected data from various divisional control offices and found that there are vacancies ranging from 15% to 24%. "High vacancy in the cadre ultimately affects the working condition of the staff on roll. Under strenuous conditions, the quality of work also suffers," the report says.

A study by the **Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO)** reveals **significant challenges for train controllers** in Indian Railways. The report, '**The Challenges Faced by Section Controllers in Carrying Out Their Duties Effectively**', identifies issues such as:

- **High Vacancy Rates:** 15-24%, causing stress and poor work conditions.
- **Health Concerns:** Due to the demanding work environment.
- **Lack of Rewards:** Insufficient pay and career incentives.

The study calls for better selection, training, and infrastructure improvements to enhance the efficiency and conditions of Section Controllers.



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| Words | Meaning | Examples |
|-------------|---|---|
| Sweet tooth | A strong liking for sweet-tasting foods. | "Everyone in this building knows that I have a sweet tooth." |
| Sour | Having a sharp, unpleasant taste; also means a relationship has become bad. | "Unripe mangoes can be very sour." "The difference of opinion soured relations." |
| Sit about | To waste time by not doing anything useful. | "When you sit about the house, you're not doing anything useful." |
| Sit around | Same as 'sit about'; to waste time. | "He'll just sit around and watch TV all day." |

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Background

In Ajmer, a notorious case of kidnapping, rape, and blackmail from 1992 has seen new developments with six out of eighteen accused receiving life sentences. The case involved influential individuals who **exploited and blackmailed young women using coercion and compromising photographs**.

Legal Proceedings

The initial convictions in 1998 faced multiple reductions and overturns over the years. Legal battles were prolonged by the denial of the accused, complex judicial processes, and difficulties such as lost evidence and hostile testimonies.

Political and Social Impact

The case was heavily influenced by political and social turmoil, with delays and issues exacerbated by the involvement of high-profile figures. The trial highlighted **systemic challenges in delivering justice**, including the destruction of evidence and the difficulties faced by survivors in seeking justice.

Current Status

Recent convictions have renewed attention to the case, emphasizing ongoing issues in the legal and political systems. Despite the progress, the case **underscores the persistent challenges in achieving justice for survivors and addressing underlying systemic problems**.





The rise and rise of red sanders mafia

Seshachalam Hills, one of India's richest biospheres, has become the hot spot of red sanders smuggling and allied crimes costing many police, forest officials and mafia members their lives apart from threatening the survival of the endangered tree species. Over the years, despite changes in the governments and people in power, the smuggling of the precious wood continues unabated, indicating that the problem is of a socio-economic political nature, writes **K. Umashankar**

Seshachalam Hills, one of India's richest biogenomes which form the tip of the Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh is considered a floristic hotspot for it houses many endemic and rare species including five species of reptiles, 2 species of birds and 22 species of snakes.

[illegible]

"For a ton of logs, the price would be around ₹2,000. For each trip, I used to save around ₹2,000 plus at the rate of four trips a month. Like here, there were about a dozen people all over the Seshachalam hills," he adds.

Upto 22 crore a tonne
Today, the statistics of the red sanders logs are sold at anywhere between 15 crore to 22 crore per tonne, based on the quality, in the international market. Spread over 6,000 square kilometres across Kadapa, Anantapur, Chittoor and Chikmagalur districts, bushes covering substantial forest cover in Nellore district in the State, the Seshachalam Hills is the first bigsource area in Andhra Pradesh for the red sanders logs, which are an easy task.

The rich growth of wild sandans here, however, began only after 1985 when the Forest Department started enforcing the sandan ban. The ban was aimed at curbing the rampant trade of wild sandans from the NE states and other parts of India. Sandans are also grown in the region. But sandans seldom grow in preparation for the market. Most sandans sold in the market are the Haplophyton genus through the locusts. However, the local population has been using the tree for the best weaving in the hot and dry conditions which made it ideal climate for the tree to grow.

From the 1980s onwards, the red sander started attracting the international market, with major players coming from China.

A retired forest ranger recalled the different phases of red sander smuggling: "What began as a cottage industry is now a multi-crore global business. A few individuals used to sell the red sanders logs in small quantities to erstwhile blacksmen, forest guards and forest officials. They used to follow forest paths to collect the material and transport



When there was a massive market for forest brigand Vornpappan in the thick forests of Tani

Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala between 1990-2000, a large number of woodcutters who worked under him were left with no alternative source of livelihood. Now, those 'masteries' (or gumbars) from the north-western districts of Tamil Nadu lived the jobless youth to raid the forest acharan targets. The precious trees, which were exclusively pine, were ruthlessly cut down and

Blood shed over red wood

On December 15, 2010, two forest officials of Tirupati Wildlife Circle- Deputy Range Officer Srihar and Assistant Range Officer David Kumar- were shot dead by a red wood smuggler in the forest inside the Subashchakra forests close to Tumbara Theertham watershed on the Chikkaru Kadapa border. The duo was brutally done to death with stones and axes, while another forest official

Following this, the Andhra Pradesh government initiated a crackdown against the AP forest guards in the Srikalahasti forest. The CRPFASTI gave protection to forest officials while on patrol in the forests. It was this Srikalahasti Gang, which played a crucial role in nabbing Solan Gang finally, who faced allegations of red sanders smuggling and was one of the accused in the Nilgiris forest guard case.

In recent years the locals of various villages of Rayalaseema districts have turned into *seemantins*.

into smuggling operations, says a retired police officer from Tirupati

Task Force 2004-2010, had detected that Gangi Reddy had two big prospects.

Kanika Rao said that during his tenure, hundreds of red sanders smuggling operations were nabbed and remanded. "About half a dozen special teams were formed to conduct patrolling not only in Tirupati but also in the surrounding areas," he said.

During the last five years, there was not a single meeting of the Inter State police and forest officials to tackle the red sanders issue," observed a retired police officer in the red sanders zone.

Poaching rampant

When *Mittu Jagannatha Prasad: The Aar* was released in December 2020, after the Covid pandemic, it was a real maul on the theatres. The he-

but all over the *Ukrainian* districts, *Nedice* and *Prodanov*. In 2005, the *Tank Force* made a *staple* *bread* *throughout* *when* *a* *team* *rushed* *to* *be* *replenished* *with* *the* *best* *products* *of* *local* *industries* *and* *factories* *of* *the* *region*. *The* *goods* *were* *branded* *close* *to* *Tirane*. *We* *had* *also* *made* *the* *information* *about* *our* *soldiers* *public* *in* *the* *media* *and* *we* *had* *many* *times* *were* *left* *the* *forest*. *The* *day*.

On April 7, 2005, at nearly 20 *volunteers* *from* *Tirane* *and* *highly* *many* *from* *the* *West* *and* *in* *Kosovo*, *was* *reportedly* *quashed* *down* *by* *the* *authorities* *of* *the* *country*.

the Task Force at Sachinaji Bandh doozily treat

which went viral on social media.

In this context, the recent observation of Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan (who also holds the portfolio of Forests) that "Around 40 years ago, a hero was someone who safeguards the forest. And now, the hero is someone who cuts away the forest and in a struggle," has raised many an eyebrow.

On a forest glide in Sembachalur Hills in Rajapet division

The **Seshachalam Hills** in Andhra Pradesh, a key **biosphere reserve**, face severe illegal logging due to the high value of red sanders (*Pterocarpus santalinus*), leading to major smuggling issues.

Economic Value and Smuggling

- **Market Evolution:** Red sanders logs, initially low in value, now fetch ₹1 crore to ₹2 crore per tonne internationally, driving a massive smuggling industry that began in the 1990s with high demand from China.
- **Smuggling Dynamics:** Tamil Nadu's **Malai tribesmen** are key to smuggling operations due to their expertise in navigating the hills. Smuggling methods have evolved, involving trucks and warehouses in Bengaluru.

Government and Enforcement Response

- **Violence and Enforcement:** Smuggling has led to violent incidents, including the 2013 killing of forest

officials. The Andhra Pradesh government created the Anti-Smuggling Task Force (APRSASTF) to address these issues, though its effectiveness has been questioned.

- **Recent Challenges:** Despite operations, smuggling persists, exacerbated by political and enforcement challenges.

Cultural Impact

- **Film Influence:** The film *Pushpa - The Rise* has glamorized smuggling, influencing some youths to engage in red sanders trafficking, highlighting the need for a more effective response.

Conclusion

Addressing the red sanders smuggling crisis in Seshachalam Hills requires a comprehensive strategy combining enforcement, socio-economic solutions, and environmental protection.

"News Highlights: Key Updates in Brief"

- **Brazilian Foreign Minister** Mauro Vieira's visit to India may address the plight of stranded Indian immigrants in Brazil amid broader discussions on G-20 and bilateral cooperation.
- **INS Mumbai** will make its first visit to Colombo for three days, delivering spares and technical support for Sri Lankan Airforce Dornier aircraft and marking the eighth port call by Indian ships this year.
- On August 24, 2024, **ONGC** began production from its fifth oil well in the KG-DWN-98/2 block in the **Krishna Godavari basin**, enhancing crude oil and natural gas output. The firm also commissioned its gas export line from the offshore-to-onshore terminal.
- Special centres for the promotion of Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia, designated as classical languages, are requesting autonomy to improve their operations. These centres currently operate under the **Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)** and face issues such as delayed financial approvals and vacant positions.
- On August 22, a new volcano erupted near Grindavik on Iceland's **Reykjanes Peninsula**, releasing lava and smoke. This marks the sixth eruption in the region since December 2023, following a series of earthquakes, according to Iceland's State Police.
- **China** has expressed strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to new U.S. sanctions targeting Chinese companies over their involvement in Russia's war in Ukraine. The U.S. imposed broad sanctions on nearly 400 individuals and companies, including Chinese firms, for aiding Russia. China has urged the U.S. to cease these actions and announced it will take measures to protect the interests of its companies.
- **NASA** has delayed the return of astronauts Barry Wilmore and Sunita Williams from the ISS due to technical issues with Boeing's Starliner capsule. They will return in February 2025 via SpaceX. The decision follows thruster failures and helium leaks, emphasizing NASA's focus on safety.



Practice Mains Question

- With the rising popularity of vaping pens among youth, there are concerns regarding their health impacts and societal implications. Analyze the potential health risks associated with the use of vaping pens. Discuss the measures that can be implemented by the government and educational institutions to mitigate these risks and prevent the onset of nicotine addiction among adolescents. (Answer in 250 words)
- Discuss the challenges faced by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in India with respect to education and employment. How can public and private institutions work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for PwDs? Suggest measures to improve their dignity and participation in society. (Answer in 250 words)
- The deployment of civic police volunteers has become a contentious issue due to concerns over their recruitment, training, and accountability. Critically analyze the role of civic police in India, highlighting the challenges and implications for law and order in the country. Suggest measures to address these issues.
- Analyze the Justice J.S. Verma Committee's recommendations on the death penalty for rape and its stance on marital rape. Evaluate the Union Cabinet's legislative response and its implications for India's legal framework on sexual violence and gender rights.

Practice Prelims Question

1. The Seshachalam Hills in Andhra Pradesh are known for their significant biodiversity and the presence of red sanders. Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding the red sanders and the Seshachalam Hills?

1. Red sanders are valued for their use in making furniture and are primarily smuggled to Southeast Asian countries.
2. The smuggling of red sanders began gaining momentum in the 1980s due to its increasing demand in international markets.
3. The Andhra Pradesh Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (APRSASTF) was formed to tackle the illegal logging and smuggling issues in the region.
4. The film *Pushpa - The Rise* has had no impact on the smuggling activities related to red sanders.

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 1, 2, and 3 only
- C) 2 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, 3, and 4

Answer: B) 1, 2, and 3 only

Explanation:

1. **Correct** - Red sanders are highly valued for their use in making furniture and are primarily smuggled to Southeast Asian countries. This is due to their quality and rarity, which makes them highly sought after in international markets.
2. **Correct** - The smuggling of red sanders began gaining momentum in the 1980s, coinciding with increased international demand, particularly from China and Southeast Asia.
3. **Correct** - The Andhra Pradesh Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (APRSASTF) was indeed formed to tackle the illegal logging and smuggling issues in the Seshachalam Hills, reflecting the severity of the problem and the efforts to address it.
4. **Incorrect** - The film *Pushpa - The Rise* actually had an impact on smuggling activities. It led to increased interest in the red sanders trade among youth, reflecting a negative influence rather than having no impact.

2. In the context of the Seshachalam Hills and the associated red sanders smuggling, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The Seshachalam Hills is designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
2. The Malai hill tribes from Tamil Nadu are primarily involved in the illegal smuggling of red sanders.
3. The red sanders smuggling has led to the decline of the tribal communities' traditional practices and livelihoods.
4. The Seshachalam Hills is home to endemic species such as five gecko species and 22 species of snakes.

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1, 2, and 4 only
- D) 1, 2, 3, and 4

Answer: C) 1, 2, and 4 only

Explanation:

1. **Correct** - The Seshachalam Hills is indeed designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, in 2010, which highlights its ecological significance and rich biodiversity.
2. **Correct** - The Malai hill tribes from Tamil Nadu have been involved in the illegal smuggling of red sanders due to their knowledge of the terrain and adaptability to the region.
3. **Incorrect** - While the smuggling of red sanders has impacted the forest environment and possibly the local economy, the specific decline of tribal practices and livelihoods is not true.
4. **Correct** - The Seshachalam Hills is home to various endemic species, including five gecko species and 22 species of snakes, making it a significant ecological zone.

3. Which of the following factors has contributed to the rise in illegal smuggling activities of red sanders in the Seshachalam Hills?

1. The high international market value of red sanders wood.

2. Afforestation programs that increased the growth of red sanders in the region.
3. The presence of endemic species attracting conservation efforts.

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

- A) 1 only
B) 2 only
C) 1 and 2 only
D) 2 and 3 only

Answer: C) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Correct** - The high international market value of red sanders wood, reaching up to ₹2 crore per tonne, has significantly incentivized illegal smuggling.
2. **Correct** - The afforestation programs initiated in the 1980s greatly increased the growth of red sanders in the region, making it a prime target for smugglers.
3. **Incorrect** - While the presence of endemic species is a conservation concern, it is not a direct factor contributing to the rise in smuggling activities. The smuggling is primarily driven by the high value of red sanders wood and its increased availability due to afforestation.

4. With reference to the World Bank's report "Migrants, Refugees and Societies," consider the following statements:

1. Low-skilled Indian migrants to the U.S. experience an average income rise of over 400%.
2. Indian migrants in Gulf countries, such as the UAE, see a greater percentage increase in income than those who migrate to the U.S.
3. Approximately 40% of migrants eventually return to their home country, with high-skilled returnees often receiving a wage premium.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A) 1 and 3 only
B) 2 and 3 only
C) 1 and 2 only
D) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: A) 1 and 3 only

Explanation:

1. **Correct** - The report highlights that low-skilled Indian migrants to the U.S. experience a 493% increase in income, which is over 400%.
2. **Incorrect** - Indian migrants in Gulf countries like the UAE experience a 298% increase in income, which is lower than the 493% increase experienced by those migrating to the U.S.
3. **Correct** - The report states that around 40% of migrants return to their home country, and high-skilled returnees often benefit from a wage premium.

5. Who releases the report titled "Migrants, Refugees and Societies"?

- A) International Labour Organization (ILO)
B) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
C) World Bank
D) International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Answer: C) World Bank

6. Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding the Justice J.S. Verma Committee?

1. The committee was formed in response to the 2012 Delhi gang rape incident.
2. It recommended the death penalty as the maximum punishment for rape.
3. The committee advocated for the removal of the marital rape exception.

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

- A) 1 and 2 only
B) 1 and 3 only
C) 2 and 3 only
D) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: B) 1 and 3 only

Explanation:

- Statement 1 is correct: The Justice J.S. Verma Committee was indeed formed in response to the 2012 Delhi gang rape incident.
- Statement 2 is incorrect: The committee recommended against the death penalty for rape.
- Statement 3 is correct: The committee advocated for the removal of the marital rape exception.

7. Which of the following is/are key foundational agreements between India and the United States?

1. Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)
2. Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)
3. Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)
4. General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

- A) 1, 2, and 3 only
B) 1, 3, and 4 only
C) 2 and 4 only
D) 1, 2, 3, and 4

Answer: D) 1, 2, 3, and 4

Explanation: The key foundational agreements between India and the U.S. include:

1. **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** - Signed in 2016, it allows the militaries

of India and the U.S. to access each other's facilities for refueling and replenishment.

2. **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** - Signed in 2018, it facilitates the exchange of secure and encrypted communications between the two militaries.
3. **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)** - Signed in 2020, it enables the sharing of geospatial intelligence and information between the two countries.
4. **General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)** - Signed in 2002, it ensures the protection of classified military information exchanged between the two countries.

All four agreements are critical components of the defense relationship between India and the U.S., making the correct answer D) 1, 2, 3, and 4.

End of Summary

This marks the end of today's summary from *The Hindu*. We trust this has added value to your exam preparation. Keep engaging with current affairs to sharpen your insights and strengthen your knowledge. We'll be back tomorrow with more updates to guide you on your path to success.

Thank you for reading. Stay focused and dedicated!

Understanding current affairs is crucial for **UPSC/State PSC preparation**, as it bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, ensuring that candidates are well-informed, relevant, and capable of making insightful analyses on contemporary issues.