

ENVIRONMENT

PRE-CONTEXT

SACRED GROVES

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 4.

News: "Tribal families stage protest, say sacred groves in Simlipal turned into enclosure for tigress"

About Sacred Groves:

- Sacred groves are **patches of trees traditionally protected by local communities for their religious and cultural significance** also contribute to local biodiversity conservation.
- India has over 13,000 documented Sacred Groves.
- **These sites are repositories of various herbal medicines and gathering points for local healers**, as much as they are biodiversity hotspots.
 - **Extraction of any resources in any form is prohibited, except for custodians to access medicinal plants.**
- These are found in **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, Rajasthan etc.**
- Currently, **boundaries of sacred groves are not clearly demarcated.**
- Centre has usually maintained that the management of wildlife while its **habitat is primarily the responsibility of the States.**
 - **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972:**
 - **Empowered States to declare any private or community land, as a community reserve**, for protecting fauna, flora and traditional or cultural conservation values and practices.

Recent Developments

Supreme Court of India directed Forest Dept of Rajasthan to declare Sacred groves as 'forests' and notify them as 'community reserves' under the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) 1972.

Community Reserve:

- Community reserves are **notified over community or private land** where locals have volunteered to conserve habitats to protect "fauna, flora, and traditional or cultural conservation values and practises".
- It falls under jurisdiction of **Chief Wildlife Warden.**
- **Land-use pattern within a community reserve cannot be changed** without the approval of the **Community reserve management committee and the State government.**

Community Forest Resource under FRA provisions:

- According to the FRA, a community forest resource is the **"customary common forest land within the traditional or customary boundaries of the village...**including reserved forests, protected forests and protected areas such as sanctuaries and national parks to which the community had traditional access".
 - Here, **gram sabhas are the statutory authority** to protect, regenerate, conserve or manage community forest resources, along with the wildlife, flora, and biodiversity within
- **All sacred groves 'in forest areas'** are currently subsets of community forest resources, **fall under the jurisdiction of gram sabhas**, and **not the Forest or the Wildlife department.**

Sacred Groves of Rajasthan: orans', 'malvan', 'deo ghat', and 'baugh'.



CROPS

PRE-CONTEXT

SPICES BOARD

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 12.

News: "Working with FSSAI, other bodies to regulate industry: Spices Board"

About Spices Board:

- The Spices Board is a statutory body established in 1987 under the **Spices Board Act, 1986.**
- **Head quarters:** Kochi, Kerala.
- It operates under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry.**
- Its primary mandate is the development and worldwide promotion of Indian spices.
- **Recent developments:**
 - **"SPICED" scheme** (Sustainability in Spice Sector through Progressive, Innovative and Collaborative Interventions for Export Development).
 - Issues related to **Ethylene Oxide (ETO) contamination** in spice exports and the boards work with **international standards organizations like CODEX.**



EDUCATION

PRE-CONTEXT

UNIVERSITY GRANT COMMISSION

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 7.

News: "The UGC's mandate is to elevate, not strangulate."

Context:

- UGC has sought to amend Regulation 2010 that relates to the selection and appointment of vice chancellors by widening the area of selection.
- Under the existing regulations, a vice chancellor can be selected only from among academicians who have a minimum experience of 10 years as professor.
- Through this amendment, the UGC declares that professionals with 10-plus years of experience in industry, public administration or public policy, shall also be considered.
- The draft evoked protests.

Education falls under Concurrent List.

About University Grant Commission:

- Established under **UGC Act, 1956**. Works under **Ministry of Education**.
- **Objective:** co-ordination and determination of standards in Universities (Higher Education).
- **Act, mandates the UGC to take all steps as it thinks fit for:**
 - **The promotion and the coordination** of university education.
 - **Determination and maintenance of standards** of teaching, examination, research in universities.
 - **Provides grants** to eligible universities and colleges.
 - **Power to recognise or de-recognise** universities.
 - **Categorizing universities** as Central, State, Deemed, or Private universities.
 - **Accreditation and Monitoring:** UGC collaborates with the Statutory bodies likes National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Bar Council of India, AICTE for quality assurance.
- **UGC regulations are advisory, not mandatory.** Universities can choose whether or not to follow them.
 - **In case of non compliance UGC can withhold grants** under Section 14 of the UGC Act, 1956.
- **Chairman of UGC is appointed by the Central Govt.**
- **Major initiatives:**
 - **NET Exam** for recruitment of **Assistant Professors** and **Junior Research Fellows**.
 - **SWAYAM portal:** Promotes online learning through the government's SWAYAM platform.
- **Recent Developments:**
 - The **UGC is proposed to be replaced by the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)** under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

State Universities:

- Established under **respective State legislative Acts**.
- **Governor** is the **Ex-officio Chancellor of 'State' Universities**, he **appoints the vice chancellor**.
 - The governor **acts independently of the council of ministers** when acting as chancellor.
- **UGC regulates State Universities in India that receive central assistance.**
 - However, some Supreme Court judgments have ruled that **UGC regulations are not mandatory for State Universities unless adopted by the state.**

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National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC):

- Accreditation body.
- **Not a statutory body**, it was established by UGC in 1994.
- **Objective:** Assesses and **accredits higher education institutions (HEIs) in India** to ensure quality standards in education.
- NAAC evaluates them on specific criteria and assigns a grade (e.g., A++, A+, B).

All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE):

- **Regulatory Body.**
- **Statutory body** established under **AICTE Act 1987**.
- **Objective:** Regulates and ensures quality in **technical education** (engineering, management, architecture, etc.) in India.
- Approves new technical institutions, courses, and programs.

Bar Council of India:

- **Statutory body**, established under the **Advocates Act, 1961**.
- **Objective:** **Regulates legal education** and the profession of law in India.
- **Sets standards for law colleges and universities.**
- Conducts the All India Bar Examination (AIBE) for practicing lawyers.
- Frames the code of conduct for legal practitioners.

National Medical Commission (NMC):

- Statutory body est. under **National Medical Commission Act, 2019**.
- **Objective:** **Regulates medical education and professional practice** in India.
- **Role:** Approves medical colleges, monitors the curriculum, and ensures the quality of medical education.

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POLITY

PRE-CONTEXT

INTERNET SHUTDOWN

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 10.

News: "Internet shutdowns highest in 2024 globally, India tops in govt-ordered curbs."

The Internet is a source of information, entertainment, health care, education, livelihood and a platform for the members of Indian society to interact with each other and the world at large.

Internet Shutdown:

- **Anuradha Bhasin case 2020:** Internet shutdown violates fundamental right under **Art. 19 (Speech & Trade)**
- Power to shut down with **Home Secretary of Union, State Govts.** for maximum 15 days.
- **Legal backing:**
 - **Indian Telegraph Act 1885.**
 - **Section 69(A) IT Act:** Govt. can ban only particular websites not entire internet.
- India's Internet restrictions also **accounted for more than 70% of the total loss** to the global economy in 2020.
- In 2020, the **Indian economy lost \$2.8 billion due to 129 Internet suspensions** that affected 10.3 million people.

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GS IV

SYLLABUS: PROBITY IN GOVERNANCE: RIGHT TO INFORMATION.

RTI

THE HINDU, PG.NO: 10.

News: "The RTI is now the 'right to deny information.'"

"Every year, some 6 million information applications are filed in India. This shows that RTI law has initiated the vital task of redistributing power in a democratic framework and transforming the relationship between the government and citizens. An erosion of this fundamental right is an erosion of democracy."

"Failure to fill vacancies in Information Commissions across India is leading to a situation where RTI becomes a dead letter."—**Supreme Court 2023.**

RTI Implementation challenges:

- **Vacancies:**
 - Since 2015, despite repeated directions by the Supreme Court, **eight out of 11 posts are vacant in the CIC.**
 - **SICs are not continued functions without chiefs.** Eg. Jharkhand has no SIC since 2020 and Tripura since 2021.
 - **Non-adequate staff:** Maharashtra (2024), with a backlog of **more than 1 lakh pending cases**, six out of 11 posts of commissioners are lying vacant.
- **Pending cases:** more than 4 lakh cases pending as of 2024 with CIC.
- **RTI Amendment Act 2019:** Discretion with govt. w.r.t tenure & service conditions etc.
- **The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 vs RTI Act 2005**
 - **Section 8(1)(j) of RTI Act of 2005:** provides for protection of the privacy of individuals and disclosure only in public interest.
 - **DPDP Act 2023:** included an explicit provision to amend the RTI law, to exempt all personal information from disclosure.
 - **i.e Blanket Ban** on disclosure of personal information in any case.
 - This **limits the RTI's power to expose corruption, misconduct or inefficiency of public officers.**
- **Public Information Officer:** Position found confounding & non cooperative Eg: serious RTI queries that requires the intervention of higher officials are attended by PIOs.
- **Nexus with Govt.:** Appointment of some SICs is biased. They are reluctant to act against **violations of transparency.**
- **Non imposition of penalties:** in almost 95% of the cases, this **destroys the basic framework of incentives and disincentives** built into the RTI Act.
- **Failure of Whistleblower protection Act 2014:** 100 people have been killed for using RTI Act and thousands have been assaulted, threatened— **Transparency international.**
- **Judicial Stays:** stay orders on CIC decisions affecting autonomy.
- **February 2019 apex court judgment highlighting** the need to appoint people from all walks of life but still limited to milieu of bureaucracy.

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PYQs

GS IV 2018: "The Right to Information Act is not all about empowerment alone, it essentially redefines the concept of accountability. Discuss.

Thank you!