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1. Ram Nath Kovind inaugurates centennial year celebration of the PAC (Dec. 5, 2021)

- President Ram Nath Kovind on Saturday inaugurated the centennial year celebration of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in the Central Hall of Parliament on Saturday. The PAC is one of the most powerful financial committees of Parliament.
- Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, and Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee of Parliament of India, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, along with Union Ministers, MPs and presiding officers of the State legislative bodies, were present in the House.

Public Accounts Committee

- The Committee on Public Accounts is the oldest Parliamentary Committee and was first constituted in 1921.
- Members of the Committee
- The members of the committee are elected by the Parliament every year.
- The Committee consists of 22 Members, 15 Members are elected by Lok Sabha and 7 Members of the Rajya Sabha are associated with it.
- The Chairman of the Committee is appointed by the Lok Sabha Speaker amongst its Members.

Function of the Committee

- The Public Accounts Committee examine the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General report to see that :
- The Government of India has spent the money for the purpose which was mentioned in the union budget.
- Whether there was any excess expenditure by the government.
- It also examines the accounts of the Government Corporations and Companies.

Note

Normally an opposition party member is chosen as the chairman of the PAC.

Currently Congress Party leader Adhir Ranjan Chaudhary is the chairman.

2. Indian Government brings bills to extend the tenure of ED and CBI (Dec. 4, 2021)

The Government of India has introduced two bills, the **Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill 2021** and **Delhi Special Establishment (Amendment) Bill 2021** in the Lok Sabha which seek to replace the **The Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021** and **The Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021** promulgated on 14 November 2021.

- The bill was introduced by the Minister **of State for Personnel and Training Dr. Jitendra Singh.**

Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill 2021

- It amends the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003.
- The 2003 Act provides for the constitution of a Central Vigilance Commission to conduct inquiries into offences committed under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.
- Under the 2003 Act, the Director of Enforcement is appointed by the Central government, on the recommendation of a committee.
- This Committee is chaired by the Central Vigilance Commissioner, and includes the Secretaries from the Ministries of Home affairs, and Personnel, and the Revenue Department.
- The Director of Enforcement has a tenure of minimum two years.
- The bill provides that the tenure of the Director may be extended by up to one year at a time, till the completion of five years from the initial appointment. Such extensions may be granted in public interest, on the recommendation of the Committee.

Delhi Special Establishment (Amendment) Bill 2021

- It amends the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.
- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was set up under this act .
- The Act provides for the appointment of the Director of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (Central Bureau of Investigation).
- The Director is appointed by the Central government on recommendation of a Committee consisting of the: (i) Prime Minister (Chairperson), (ii) Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, and (iii) Chief Justice of India (CJI) or a judge of the Supreme Court nominated by the CJI
- Under the Act, the Director has a tenure of **minimum two years**.
- **The bill permits extension of the tenure by up to one year at a time, till the completion of five years from the initial date of appointment.**

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)

The CBI (the premier investigating agency of the Central Government) was set up in 1963 by a resolution of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

- Now, this department comes under the administrative control of the **Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.**
- The **Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption (1962-1964)** recommended the establishment of the CBI.
- Headed by a Director, CBI:
 - provides assistance to the Central Vigilance Commission and Lokpal.
 - coordinates investigations on behalf of Interpol Member countries.
- The CBI has jurisdiction to investigate offences pertaining to 69 Central laws, 18 State Acts and 231 offences in the IPC.
- **CBI** is one of the 26 Indian Government Organisations which are exempted from the provisions of **Section 24 of the Right to Information Act.**
- Headquarters: **CGO Complex, New Delhi**
- Motto: **Industry, Impartiality, Integrity**
- Director-General: **Subodh Kumar Jaiswal**

Enforcement Directorate

- The **Directorate of Enforcement (ED)** is a law enforcement agency and economic intelligence agency **(under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance)** responsible for enforcing economic laws and fighting economic crime in India.
- On 1st May 1956, an 'Enforcement Unit' was formed, in the Department of Economic Affairs, for handling Exchange Control Laws violations under Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947. In the year 1957, this Unit was renamed as 'Enforcement Directorate'.
- The **prime objective** of the Enforcement Directorate is the **enforcement of two key Acts** of the Government of India
 - The Foreign Exchange Management Act 1999 (FEMA) and
 - The Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002 (PMLA)

3. 6 Lakh Indians renounced citizenship in last 5 years (Dec. 4, 2021)

- More than Six lakh Indians renounced citizenship in the past five years, as per the data shared by the Ministry of Home Affairs to Lok Sabha.
- About 40% of the citizenship renunciation requests come from the United States, followed by Australia and Canada, which amount to a chunk of around 30% of such requests.
- According to information available with the Ministry of External Affairs, a total of 1,33,83,718 Indian nationals are living in foreign countries as on date.
- Regarding granting Indian citizenship, MHA replied that a total of 10,645 people had applied for Indian citizenship in the same period out of which 4177 was granted.
- Of this, the maximum are from Pakistan (7,782), followed by Afghanistan (795), the US (227), Sri Lanka (205), Bangladesh (184), Nepal (167) and Kenya (185).

4. Government seeks Rs 25,000 crore for MGNREGS from Parliament (Dec. 4, 2021)

Central Government has put before the parliament a supplementary demand of grant in the amount of Rs 25000 Crore for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme

The demand-driven rural jobs scheme ran out of funds midway through the current fiscal year, leading to pending payments for wages and materials.

Initial budgetary allocation for MGNREGA in the financial year 2021-22 was Rs 73000 Crore

Continuing economic distress in rural India due to the effects of Covid, has led to increased demand for jobs under the scheme

Last year, with the COVID19 pandemic forcing lockdowns and widespread unemployment, MGNREGA, with a revised budget of Rs1.1 lakh crore, acted as a lifeline for India's rural population.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme

- NREGA Act was passed by the Indian Parliament on 23rd August 2005 but it came into force on February 6, 2006. On 2nd October 2009 an amendment was made in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, to change the nomenclature of the Act from NREGA to MGNREGA
- The mandate of the MGNREGA is to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Currently the pay rate is about Rs 210 per day.
- It is now operational in all the rural District of India
- The scheme is under the administrative control of the Union Ministry of Rural Development.

Union Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Minister: Giriraj Singh.

5. Government seeks 62000 Crore for Air India (Dec. 4, 2021)

- The Government has sought Parliament's nod to infuse ₹62,000 crore as **supplementary grant** to Air India Assets Holding Limited (created for **disinvestment** of Air India and its subsidiaries), for debt and other liabilities of Air India.
- Air India Assets Holding Limited is a Government Owned **special purpose vehicle (SPV)**. This company holds Air India's debt, liabilities and some non-core assets such as land and buildings (worth 14718 Crore). This company was set up to clean the airline's balance sheet ahead of its privatisation.
- Out of this 62000 Crore, 28844 Crore is the net liability on government after privatisation whereas the rest 33105 Crore includes interest liabilities toward working capital and aircraft loans, lease rentals, owings to oil companies and to the Airports Authority of India. This is what the Government has provided for in the supplementary demand for grants

Air India Disinvestment

On 25 October 2021 ,Government of India signed an agreement with Tata Group for selling off its entire 100% share in Air India to Talace Pvt Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Tata Sons Pvt.Tata Group .

The deal was of Rs 18,000 crore of which Tata will pay Rs 2,700 crore to the government and Tata will take over the Rs 15,300 crore of the Air India debt .

The Government of India was to clear the rest of the debt of Air India.

To meet these requirements the government of India is seeking Rs 63,000 from Lok Sabha .

Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)

- A special purpose vehicle (SPV) is a legal entity created by a parent company but managed as a separate organization. It is designed to isolate the financial risk of certain assets or ventures of the parent company. Companies create SPVs to securitize assets, **make it easier to transfer assets (in case of Air India disinvestment)**, spread the risk of assets or new ventures, or protect assets from risks associated with the parent company.
- Its legal status as a separate company makes its obligations secure even if the parent company goes bankrupt.

Supplementary Grant

- Supplementary grant is the amount needed when the amount authorised by the Parliament through the **appropriation act** for a particular service for the current financial year is found to be insufficient for that year.
- **These grants are presented and passed by the Parliament before the end of the financial year** (1st April to 31st March)
- Constitutional Provision: **Article 115 pertains to supplementary, additional or excess grants.**

Appropriation Act -

- Through this act, the **government gets the power to withdraw funds from the Consolidated Fund of India for meeting the expenditure during the financial year.**
- As per **article 114 of the Constitution**, the government can withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund only after receiving approval from Parliament.
- The Appropriation Bill is introduced in the Lok Sabha after discussions on Budget proposals and Voting on Demand for Grants.
- **The defeat of an Appropriation Bill in a parliamentary vote would lead to the resignation of a government or a general election.**
- Both the **Finance bill and Appropriation bill are classified as Money bills** but while the Finance Bill contains provisions on financing the expenditure of the government, an Appropriation Bill specifies the quantum and purpose for withdrawing money.

6. Barbados becomes a Republic (Dec. 1, 2021)

The Caribbean island nation of **Barbados declared itself a republic on 30 November**, a move that coincides with the 55th anniversary of its independence from Britain.

The country of some 3,00,000 citizens is no longer a constitutional monarchy and will not pledge allegiance to the Queen of Britain.

On November 29, Barbados, once known as Little England, swore in its **first President, Sandra Mason.**

However, it will remain a part of the Commonwealth.

Barbados capital Bridgetown

Currency: Barbados Dollar

Prime Minister: Mia Mottley

Commonwealth of Nations or Commonwealth

- Commonwealth of Nations is an association of countries that were once ruled by Britain. The current Commonwealth of Nations was formally constituted by the London Declaration in 1949.
- The head of the Commonwealth is Britain's, Queen Elizabeth II.
- At present, there are 54 members Including India

Headquarters: **London , England**

7. UAPA Trials cannot be held indefinitely - Supreme Court (Dec. 3, 2021)

Hearing a petition of an undertrial arrested under UAPA(Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), the Supreme Court gave a landmark judgment on the right of the undertrials.

- The Supreme Court said that putting a person accused under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act behind bars for an unduly long time with no progress in the trial or appeal process is a violation of his or her fundamental right and a threat to public confidence in the administration of justice,
- **The Court held that timely delivery of justice is part of human rights.**
- The court held that if a timely trial is not possible and the accused has already suffered a significant period of incarceration, the courts have an obligation to release the accused on bail.
- It also held that cases investigated by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) should be tried on a day-to-day basis and have priority over other cases.

The supreme court observed this while hearing an appeal by 74-year-old Ashim who was in jail for over 10 years under UAPA and was awaiting his trial.

Article 21 of the Indian constitution

Protection of life and personal liberty.—No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

Uttarakhand High court in Lalit Kumar v. Union of India, 2018, observed that access to speedy justice is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967

It is a preventive detention act aimed at preventing activities that are directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India. It was enacted by the Parliament in 1967.

The act has been amended four times in 1969,2004,2012,2019

Important Points of UAPA Act 1967

- With the recent 2019 amendment, the act meets commitments made at the **Financial Action Task Force** (an intergovernmental organization to combat money laundering and terrorism financing).
- As per the **2019 amendment, the government is now allowed to designate an individual as a terrorist without trial. The previous versions of the Bill allowed for only groups to be designated as terrorists.**
- The **burden of proof of innocence is on the accused.**
- Under the UAPA, this pre-chargesheet time is extended to 180 days.
- Police normally have 60 to 90 days to investigate a case and submit a chargesheet failing which the accused may obtain default bail.
- **In a ruling passed on 1 February 2021, the Supreme Court of India ruled that bail could be granted to accused if the right to a speedy trial was violated.**

National Investigation Agency (NIA)

After the deadly 26/11 attacks in Mumbai, the government decided to setup a specific body to deal with terror-related activities in India, thereby establishing the NIA in 2008.

Key Points regarding NIA-

- At present NIA is functioning as the **Central Counter-Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency** in India.
- Though **as per the constitution of India, law and order is a state subject** but NIA has the power to investigate specific cases under concurrent jurisdiction framework across any state of India.
- NIA is prepared to deal with cases involving complex inter-state and international linkages related to terrorist attacks in insurgency or militancy affected areas, areas of left-wing extremism, hinterland terrorist attacks, smuggling of arms and drugs, circulation of fake Indian currency, infiltration from across the borders, hijacking of aircraft and ships and attacks on nuclear installations.
- The 2019 amendment empowers the NIA to probe terror **attacks targeting Indians and Indian interests abroad** and also offences like **human trafficking; manufacture and sale of prohibited arms; and cyber-terrorism.**
- Trial of NIA Cases are held at special courts as notified by the central government as per NIA Act.
- Judges are appointed by the Central Government on the recommendation of the Chief Justice of the High Court with jurisdiction in that region.
- The Supreme Court of India has also been empowered to transfer the cases from one special court to any other special court within or outside the state, in the interest of justice. Based on the prevailing circumstances in any particular state.
- **The NIA Special Courts are empowered with all powers of the court of sessions under code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 for trial of any offense.**
- Special Court in New Delhi has jurisdiction of all NIA investigation cases abroad in accordance with international treaties and domestic laws of other countries.

8. INDIA Joins G20 Troika (Dec. 2, 2021)

Highlights-

- Indonesia is currently holding the G20 presidency
- The 2022 Bali Summit will be held on October 30-31, 2022. Theme - "Recover Together, Recover Stronger"
- India will assume the G20 Presidency on December 1, 2022 from Indonesia.
- India will convene the G20 leaders' summit for the first time in India in 2023
- Italy held the last presidency and hosted the summit on Oct 30-31, 2021 at Rome.
- PM Modi participated in the G20 Summit 2021 and raised the issue of Afghanistan's future after Taliban takeover.

G20 Troika

It refers to the top grouping within the G20 consisting of the current, immediate past and the incoming presidencies. Currently the troika is made of Italy, Indonesia and India.

About G20

- G20 or Group of 20 is an intergovernmental forum.
- Member Countries - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.
- Permanent invitees are African Union, ASEAN, FAO, ILO, IMF, Spain, OECD, UN, World Bank, WHO and WTO.
- Members comprises both industrialized and developing countries and accounts to two-third of world population, 75-80% world trade and 90% of Gross World Product (GWP - Gross National Income of all countries)
- The G20 Summit is often formally known as the “Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy”
- G20 was founded in 1999 as a response to the severe Asian Economic Crisis of 1997-98, when it was acknowledged that the participation of major emerging market countries was necessary for a discussion on the international financial system. Thus from 1999, G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting started on major economic and monetary policy issues amongst major countries in the global financial system targeting stable and sustainable global economic growth
- Since 2008 it is upgraded to head of the state level and from 2011 are held annually.
- They work on addressing major issues related to the global economy, such as international financial stability, climate change mitigation, trade, energy, counter-terrorism, migration, refugees and sustainable development.

9. Elephants Death (Dec. 2, 2021)

A whopping 1,160 elephants were killed in the country due to reasons other than natural causes in the past 10 years up to December 31, 2020, according to the **Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.

- This came to light after Tenkasi based **RTI activist R Pandiraja** had filed an RTI query over the deaths of wild elephants before the **Ministry of Environment and Forests' 'Project elephant' division** this year.

Key Highlights

Figures provided by the Union Environ Ministry over the death of Elephants across the country:

- Electrocution claimed the lives of 741 elephants.
- Train hits led to the death of 186 pachyderms, followed by poaching - 169, and poisoning - 64.
- Karnataka and Odisha lost 133 elephants each due to electrocution and Assam reported 129 deaths.
- Among elephant casualties due to train hits, Assam stood first with 62 deaths, followed by West Bengal at 57.
- A total of 169 elephants were killed by poachers in the last 10 years and Odisha reported the highest - 49 deaths, followed by Kerala 23.

10. No International flights from India (Dec. 2, 2021)

The Government cited concerns over the **Omicron variant** of the coronavirus and **indefinitely postponed the full resumption** of scheduled **international flights from December 15**.

- The international flights will continue to operate on a smaller scale and only with the countries with which India has air bubble agreements.

Move by Maharashtra Government:

The Maharashtra government has issued strict guidelines for international **passengers**, requiring all those **arriving from “at-risk”** countries from **December 3 to undergo mandatory institutional quarantine for one week**.

Air Transport Bubble

“Transport Bubbles” or **“Air Travel Arrangements”** are temporary arrangements between two countries aimed at restarting commercial passenger services when regular international flights are suspended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. **They are reciprocal in nature, meaning airlines from both countries enjoy similar benefits.**

Countries with which India Has Air Bubble agreements

Afghanistan	Bahrain	Bangladesh	Bhutan	Canada
Ethiopia	Finland	France	Germany	Iraq
Japan	Kenya	Kuwait	Maldives	Mauritius
Nepal	Netherlands	Nigeria	Oman	Qatar
Russia	Rwanda	Seychelles	Singapore	Sri Lanka

Tanzania	Ukraine	UAE	UK	USA
Uzbekistan	-	-	-	-