

## UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 20-02-2024

### National Council for Transgender Persons

Recently, the National Council for Transgender Persons (NCTP) convened its pivotal meeting under the Chairmanship of Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.



#### About National Council for Transgender Persons

It is a statutory body constituted under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 to safeguard the rights of transgender persons in India.

It is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the provisions of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 and making recommendations to the government on measures to promote and protect the rights of transgender persons.

#### Aims

To focus on livelihood issues as well as to raise awareness about the trans community for achieving the goal of social justice so that transpersons are accepted within families and in the larger society.



To ensure to set up of transgender welfare boards in all states and also ensure that essential needs of the transgender community, like housing, food, healthcare, and education are met.

### **Composition**

The Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment is the Chairperson (ex-officio).

The Union Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment is the Vice-Chairperson (ex-officio) of the council.

The other members of the Council include representatives of various Ministries/Departments

Five representatives of the transgender community.

Representatives of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the National Commission for Women (NCW), representatives of State Governments and UTs, and experts representing NGOs.

Functions:

It advises the Central Government on the formulation of policies, programmes, legislation and projects with respect to transgender persons.

It Monitors and evaluates the impact of policies and programmes designed for achieving equality and full participation of transgender persons.

It reviews and coordinates the activities of all the departments of Government and other Governmental and non-Governmental Organisations which are dealing with matters relating to transgender persons.

It redresses the grievances of transgender persons.

Performs such other functions as may be prescribed by the Central Government.

### **Transgender**

A person as one whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth. It includes trans-men and trans-women, persons with intersex variations, gender-queers, and persons with socio-cultural identities, such as kinnar and hijra.



## Quasar

An international team of astronomers said the recently discovered quasar named J0529-4351 was the brightest and fastest-growing quasar discovered so far and had a supermassive black hole about 17 billion times the mass of the Sun.

### About Quasar

A quasar is an extremely active and luminous type of active galactic nucleus (AGN).

An AGN is nothing more than a supermassive black hole that is active and feeding at the center of a galaxy.

All quasars are AGNs, but not all AGNs are quasars.

Quasars are thought to form in regions of the universe where the large-scale density of matter is much higher than average.

They are among the most luminous, powerful, and vibrant objects known in the universe.

An active galaxy is one in which the central supermassive black hole is consuming large amounts of matter.

The infall of matter into the black hole is so great that all the material can't enter the black hole at the same time, so it forms a queue as a spiraling accretion disk.

The matter—in the form of huge clouds—falls into the disk, with the inner parts of the cloud closer to the black hole orbiting faster than the outer parts (just like planets closer to the sun orbit faster than those farther away).

This creates a shear force that twists the clouds, causing them to bump into their neighbors as they move around the black hole at velocities ranging from 10% of the speed of light up to over 80%.

This friction from fast-moving gas clouds generates heat, and the disk becomes so hot—millions of degrees—that it shines brightly.

Some of the material in the disk is also funneled away from the black hole in a highly luminous, magnetically collimated jet.

The hot accretion disk and the jet combine to make the nucleus of the active galaxy shine so brightly that it can be seen far across the universe.

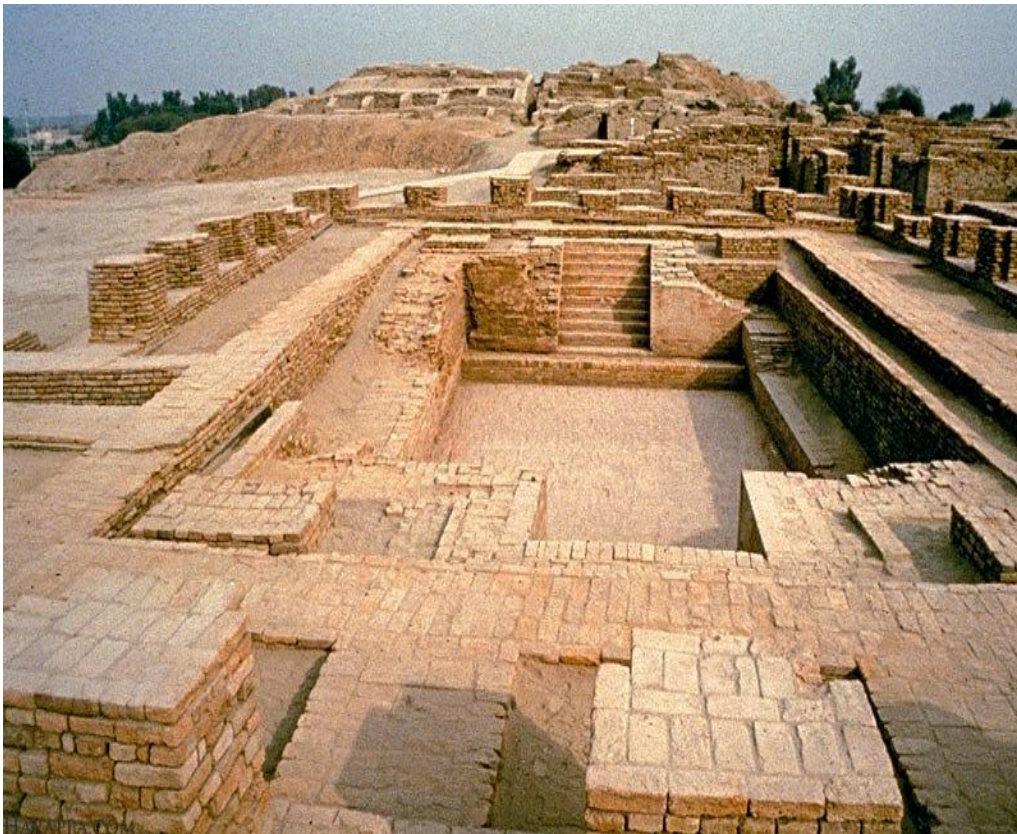
The brightest quasars can outshine all of the stars in the galaxies in which they reside, which makes them visible even at distances of billions of light-years.

Most quasars have been found billions of light-years away.

## Black Hole

A black hole is a region in space where the gravitational pull is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape from it once it crosses a certain boundary called the event horizon. As a result, black holes are invisible to the naked eye and can only be detected indirectly by their effect on nearby matter and radiation.

## Morodharo



Archaeologists recently discovered a Harappan-era fortified settlement named Morodharo.

### About Morodharo

- It is a fortified settlement dating back to the Harappan-era.
- Location: Kutch District, Gujarat



### Features:

- The settlement looks mature (2,600-1,900BCE) to late (1,900-1,300 BCE) Harappan.
- The fortification measures 102 m east to the west and 58 m north to the south.
- The thickness of the wall is an average of 3.3 m.
- It has a 10x10 m platform on the south-west side and a well on the north-east.
- Burial cairns, which are mounds of stones to demarcate a boundary, are also found here.
- Harappan pottery with perforated jar sherds, reserved slipware, and terracotta cakes were unearthed. All these items have a striking resemblance to those found in Dholavira.

### Key Facts about Harappan Civilization

- The Indus Valley/Harappan civilisation was the first urban civilisation in South Asia, coexisting with Mesopotamia and Egypt.
- The Harappan civilisation occupied the largest area (approximately 8,00,000 sq km) among the three civilisations.
- Harappa (Punjab, Pakistan), Mohenjo-Daro (Sindh, Pakistan), Dholavira, Lothal, and Surkotada (Gujarat, India), Kalibangan and Banawali (Rajasthan, India), and Rakhigarhi (Haryana, India) are the major cities in the Harappan period.

### The features of town planning of Harappan civilisation included:

- Rectangular grid pattern: The Harappan cities were designed on a grid pattern, with streets running in a north-south and east-west direction, forming a well-organized layout. Streets and lanes were cutting across one another almost at right angles, thus dividing the city into several rectangular blocks.
- Planned streets and alleyways: The streets and alleyways of Harappan cities were planned and constructed with precision. They were wide enough to



allow the movement of carts and pedestrians, and some streets had covered drains running alongside them.

- **Fortification:** The cities were surrounded by fortified walls made of mud bricks, providing protection against robbers, cattle raiders, and floods.
- **Division of cities:** The city was divided into two parts: an upraised citadel and the lower part of the city.
- **Upper part:** An upraised citadel in the western part was used for constructing buildings of large dimensions, such as granaries, administrative buildings, pillared halls, and courtyards.
- **Lower part:** Below the citadel in each city lay a lower town containing brick houses, which were inhabited by the common people.
- **Material used:** They used burnt bricks on a large scale in almost all kinds of constructions, and there was the absence of stone buildings during Harappan culture.
- **Residential areas:** The cities were divided into distinct residential areas. Houses were made of baked bricks, often with multiple stories, indicating a well-developed urban society. The houses were generally built around courtyards, and some had private wells and properly ventilated bathrooms. No window faced the streets, and the houses had tiled bathrooms.
- **Sophisticated drainage systems:** The drainage system of the Harappans was elaborate and well laid out. Every house had drains, which opened into the street drains. Drains were made of mortar, lime, and gypsum.
- **Granaries and storage facilities:** The cities had well-planned granaries and storage facilities to store surplus agricultural produce.

## Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia (from the Greek, meaning 'between two rivers') was an ancient region located in the eastern Mediterranean bounded in the northeast by the Zagros Mountains and in the southeast by the Arabian Plateau, corresponding to modern-day Iraq and parts of Iran, Syria, Kuwait, and Turkey and known as the Fertile Crescent and the cradle of civilization.

## Court Vacations



Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud recently addressed the ongoing criticism regarding the number of vacation days awarded to Indian judges.

This issue has been a subject of debate due to concerns about its impact on the judicial system's efficiency and the timely disposal of cases.

Chief Justice Chandrachud's comments shed light on the rationale behind court vacations, the handling of important cases during recesses, the criticism against extended vacations, and the arguments in favor of maintaining the current system.

### Overview of Court Vacations:

The Supreme Court of India operates for 193 working days in a year, while High Courts function for approximately 210 days, and trial courts for 245 days.

These working days are structured according to the service rules, with High Courts having the authority to manage their calendars.

The Supreme Court observes an annual summer vacation of seven weeks, starting from the end of May and reopening in July. Additionally, the court takes week-long breaks for Dussehra and Diwali, as well as two weeks at the end of December.

Despite its historical origins in colonial practices, the current judicial schedule has faced criticism for its impact on the timely resolution of cases.



## Handling of Important Cases During Vacations:

During court vacations, a limited number of judges, known as "vacation benches," are available to hear urgent cases that cannot wait for the court to reconvene.

These benches prioritize cases such as bail and eviction matters. Notably, some significant cases have been heard during vacation periods, demonstrating the court's commitment to addressing pressing legal issues.

## Criticism of Court Vacations:

Critics argue that extended and frequent vacations are detrimental to the efficient functioning of the judicial system, particularly considering the increasing backlog of cases and the slow pace of judicial proceedings.

The colonial origins of the practice, which began due to European judges' discomfort with Indian summers, have also been highlighted as outdated and in need of reform.

## Efforts to Reform Vacation Cycles:

Various committees and commissions, including the **Justice Malimath Committee and the Law Commission of India**, have recommended reducing the duration of court vacations to address the long pendency of cases.

However, previous attempts by Chief Justices of India to reform the vacation cycles, such as keeping courts open round the year or extending working hours, have not been implemented.

## Arguments in Favor of Court Vacations:

Proponents of the current vacation system argue that breaks are essential for judges to rejuvenate and maintain their intellectual rigor, given the demanding nature of their work.

Judges typically work over 10 hours daily, including preparation time for the next day's proceedings. Moreover, judges do not take leave when the court is in session, except for rare instances such as family tragedies or health reasons.

## Comparison with Other Countries:

In comparison to apex courts in other countries, the Indian Supreme Court has the highest caseload and delivers the most judgments. For example, the US





Supreme Court hears approximately 100-150 cases annually and sits for oral arguments for five days a month. Similarly, UK courts sit for 185-190 days a year, with the Supreme Court sitting in four sessions totaling roughly 250 days

## Way Ahead

The way ahead regarding court vacations in India involves a balanced approach that addresses the concerns of efficiency and the well-being of judges. Here are some potential steps that could be taken:

**Reviewing Vacation Duration:** Conduct a detailed analysis of the impact of court vacations on case pendency and judicial efficiency. Consider reducing the duration of vacations, especially the summer break, based on the findings.

**Implementing Structured Vacation Plans:** Develop a structured vacation schedule that includes periodic short breaks throughout the year. Ensure that these breaks do not disrupt the regular functioning of the courts.

**Utilizing Technology for Remote Proceedings:** Enhance the use of technology for conducting remote hearings, especially during vacation periods. Implement virtual courtrooms and digital case management systems to facilitate urgent hearings.

**Prioritizing Urgent Cases:** Establish specialized vacation benches to handle urgent matters that cannot wait for regular court sessions. Prioritize cases based on their urgency and impact on justice delivery.

**Enhancing Judicial Infrastructure:** Invest in upgrading court infrastructure to support increased workload and efficiency. Improve courtroom facilities, expand digital resources, and provide training for staff on new technologies.

**Streamlining Administrative Processes:** Review and simplify administrative procedures to reduce delays and improve efficiency. Implement digital filing systems, case tracking mechanisms, and performance metrics for judges.

**Increasing Judicial Manpower:** Assess the need for additional judges to handle the increasing caseload. Recruit and appoint qualified judicial officers to reduce backlog and improve case disposal rates.

**Engaging Stakeholders for Reform:** Consult with judges, legal professionals, and other stakeholders to gather feedback and suggestions for improving the judicial system. Encourage collaboration and feedback to drive meaningful reforms.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a mechanism to monitor the impact of reforms on case disposal rates, backlog reduction, and overall judicial efficiency. Use data analytics to identify areas for further improvement.

**Promoting Transparency and Accountability:** Ensure transparency in the allocation of cases, vacation schedules, and judicial decisions. Implement measures to hold judges and court staff accountable for their performance.

### U.S.-India Defense Accelerator Ecosystem (INDUS-X)?



Overview:

The defence ministry said the 'INDUS-X' summit in Delhi marks a "significant milestone" in the collaborative efforts between the two countries.

#### About U.S.-India Defense Accelerator Ecosystem (INDUS-X)

- It was launched in June 2023 during the state visit of the Prime Minister of India to the US.



- Objective: To expand strategic technology partnerships and defense industrial cooperation between governments, businesses, and academic institutions in India and the US.
- INDUS X will be a defence innovation bridge, which will inter-alia, include Joint Challenges, Joint Innovation Fund, Academia engagement, Industry-startup connect, investment by private entities in defence projects, mentoring by experts and niche technology projects etc.
- It will focus on advancing high-tech cooperation and fostering joint research, development, and production opportunities in the defence sector.
- The initiative aims to explore possibilities for co-producing jet engines, long-range artillery, and infantry vehicles.
- India's Innovations for Defense Excellence (iDEX) and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), US, are leading INDUS-X activities.

### **What is Innovations for Defense Excellence (iDEX)?**

- It is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Defence, Govt of India, launched in 2018.
- The objective of the scheme is to cultivate an innovation ecosystem in the Defence and Aerospace sector by collaborating with startups, innovators, MSMEs, incubators, and academia.
- iDEX offers grants and support for R&D with significant potential for future adoption in Indian defence and aerospace.
- It is currently engaged with around 400+ Startups and MSMEs.
- It is recognized as a game-changer in the defence ecosystem, iDEX has received the PM Award for Innovation in the defence sector.
- Funding: It will be funded and managed by a 'Defence Innovation Organization (DIO)' which has been formed as a 'not for profit' company as per the Companies Act 2013 for this purpose, by the two founder members i.e., Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs): HAL and BEL.

iDEX will function as the executive arm of DIO, carrying out all the required activities, while DIO will provide high level policy guidance to iDEX.



## Technology Development Fund (TDF) Scheme

TDF Scheme has been established to promote self-reliance in defense technology as a part of the 'Make in India' initiative. It is a programme of MoD (Ministry of Defence) executed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) meeting the requirements of Tri-Services, Defence Production and DRDO. The scheme encourages participation of public/private industries especially MSMEs to create an ecosystem for enhancing cutting edge technology capability for defence application. It supports indigenous development of components, products, systems and technologies by MSMEs and start-ups.