

1. Foreigners Tribunals

Topic: Polity and Governance



In News: Foreigners Tribunals across Assam couldn't function effectively due to the lack of infrastructure.

More on the Topic:

- They are established under the provisions of the Foreigners Act 1946 and Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964.
- **They are quasi-judicial bodies;** their main function is to determine whether a person staying illegally is a “foreigner” or not. Only Foreigners’ Tribunals can declare a person as a foreigner.
- Any Person, whose name is not in the final published list of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), can represent their case in Foreigners Tribunals (FT).
- Each Foreigners Tribunal Member is appointed as per the guidelines issued by the government.
- **Composition:** Advocates not below the age of 35 years of age with at least 7 years of practice (or) Retired Judicial Officers from the Assam Judicial Service (or) Retired IAS of ACS Officers (not below the rank of Secretary/Addl. Secretary) having experience in quasi-judicial works.
- **Who can set up a Foreign Tribunal:** The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, and has empowered district magistrates in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals (quasi-judicial bodies) to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.
- Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre.
- **The amended order (Foreigners (Tribunal) Order, 2019) also empowers individuals to approach the Tribunals.**

- Earlier, only the State administration could move the Tribunal against a suspect.
Source: Indian Express
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2. Soil mapping

Topic: Environment and Ecology



In News: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is digitally mapping soil nutrients in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and central America to increase efficiency in using fertilisers.

More on the Topic:

- The project would foster **the creation of national soil databases and soil information systems** as public goods to be used by policymakers.
- Further, the private sector, and especially farmers can generate **long-term benefits from it.**
- It will also improve **short-term flexibility to adapt to trends in fertilizer markets and climate dynamics without compromising output.**

About Soil Mapping:

- Soil Mapping is the process of **delineating natural bodies of soils, classifying and grouping the delineated soils into map units, and capturing soil property information** for interpreting and depicting soil spatial distribution on a map.
- Soil mapping is a technique which has become usual within the precision farming, which uses the most advanced technology to obtain the most accurate information about the condition of the soil, the weather and the crops.

Significance of Soil Mapping for Africa:

- Sub Saharan Africa presently has challenges such as unsustainable agricultural practices, a lack of resources and capacity development, and nutrient underuse.
- These has resulted in significant soil nutrient depletion, low crop yields, and poverty, leaving many farm families in a scenario of vulnerability and food insecurity.
- Many African countries lack policies regulating soil as well as the capacity, knowledge and experience to plan and implement sustainable soil management programmes.

Source: Down To Earth

3. India's DISCOM Challenges

Topic: Economy

Improving discoms' revenue recovery

- Performance-linked incentive for discom staff and effective monitoring systems
- Introduce incentives for online and timely bill payments²
- Create safety nets for low consumption consumers who cannot afford to pay their bills²
- Enhancing staff capacity for improved billing and collection
- Investing in bill collection infrastructure and community engagement to address non-payment

DBT and additional fiscal headroom through subsidy reduction

- Taking lessons from the existing DBT models in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, etc.
- Developing framework for targeting of subsidies to domestic and agriculture consumers

Amortising state government dues to address discoms' liquidity crisis

- Time-bound planning (sort of a monthly/quarterly EMI) to clear pending dues and arrears
- Mandate No Dues Certificates for state depts. from electricity dept. to avoid dues build up

Tariff hikes and addressing regulatory asset

- Issue bonds through securitisation of receivables against regulatory assets as done in Rajasthan
- Inflation adjusted tariff hikes (similar to a Delhi discoms' proposal for FY 2022)

Reducing the operating cost for discoms

- Power procurement from the markets as done in Andhra Pradesh
- Accelerating the implementation of the market-based economic dispatch

In News: Central government is planning to give a renewed Push to DISCOMs.

More on the Topic:

- In India, DISCOMs (Power Distribution Companies) have been **accumulating losses and are under outstanding debt**, as these utilities are supplying electricity at tariffs that are far below cost.
- These financially-stressed DISCOMs are not able to supply adequate power at affordable rates; this hampers the quality of life and overall economic growth and development.

The Reasons for DISCOMs Challenges:

- **High AT&C losses:** The precarious financial position of DISCOMs is due to the high level of aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses, the levy of inadequate or lesser tariffs when compared to the cost of power supply, and insufficient subsidy support from state governments.

- **Inefficiencies in power distribution**, such as large transmission and distribution losses on power, have further strained finances of DISCOMs, who have been heavily borrowing from banks to operate themselves.
- **There are frequent delays in the tariff determination** process. This affects cost recovery as well as payments on time.
- **Minimizing the AT&C losses is critical** to improve the operational efficiency of Discoms. However, even six years after UDAY was launched, various levels in the distribution chain (the feeder, the distribution transformer (DT) and the consumer) have not been fully metered. As a result, it difficult to isolate and identify loss-making areas and take corrective action.
- **There is cross Subsidy existing in India's power distribution policy.** Higher tariff is charged from commercial and industrial consumers to cross-subsidize agricultural and low-income households. However, high-tariff paying consumers are migrating to alternative sources of energy like solar.
- **Power Subsidy:** A common feature of the power distribution policies of the States is to provide free or heavily subsidized supply to agriculture. The connections for the farm sector are unmetered. It's a burden on Government and public.

About DISCOMS:

- Distribution is done by the Distribution Companies (DISCOMs) which connect power producers to the households. They are the interface between utilities and the consumers.
- Under the Indian Constitution, power is a concurrent subject and the responsibility for distribution and supply of power to rural and urban consumers rests with the states.
- Hence, DISCOMs are predominantly owned by the state governments. Private DISCOMs are also operational in India but are limited to a few cities like Delhi and Mumbai. Government of India provides assistance to states through various Central Sector / centrally sponsored schemes for improving the distribution sector.

Way Ahead:

- Segregation of feeders has been suggested as an option to arrive at the accurate consumption of the farm sector to reduce subsidy burden. Gujarat is cited as a success story in this regard.
- DISCOM restructuring via good Corporate Governance and higher private participation in distribution hold out the possibility of greater efficiency.
- **Depoliticisation of DISCOMs** is a must. The state governments should promote **autonomy, competence and transparency of the State Electricity Regulatory Commission (SERC).**
- The creation of a national power distribution company to ensure procurement of electricity at competitive prices will be a game changer.
- 5 point reforms mentioned in the above infographic should be utilised.

Source: Hindu

4. Portulaca oleracea

Topic: Environment and Ecology



In News: Portulaca oleracea, commonly known as purslane is considered as common weed. It offers important clues about creating drought-tolerant crops associated with climate change.

More on the Topic:

- Purslane has the evolutionary adaptations that help it to be both highly productive and drought tolerant.
- Plants have independently evolved various mechanisms to improve photosynthesis. Purslanes adaptation to photosynthesis at difficult environment is unique.
- For instance, **corn and sugarcane evolved C4 photosynthesis, which allows the plant to remain productive under high temperatures.**
- Succulents such as cacti and agaves possess another type called CAM photosynthesis, which helps them **survive in deserts and other areas with little water.**
- Both C4 and CAM serve different functions but recruit the same biochemical pathway to act as 'add-ons' to regular photosynthesis.
- Puslane has combination of both.
- Portulaca oleracea has been used as a folk medicine in many countries, acting as a febrifuge, antiseptic, and vermifuge.

Source: Indian Express

5. MGNREGA Scheme

Topic: Government Schemes



In News: MGNREGA workers from across the country organised a 3 days protest at the national capital’s Jantar Mantar, and they claimed that they hadn’t been paid for months.

More on the Topic:

- Work demand is dropping at a steep rate as the scheme has failed the promise to pay wages within the stipulated time in many parts of the country.
- The central government cited discrepancies in several state districts and did not allocate any funds during the budget in 2022-23.
- Glitches in the digital attendance system had worsened the situation for them.

The Cause of Distress:

- Recently the central government has introduced the mandatory implementation of **national mobile monitoring system for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)**.
- The National mobile monitoring system was initiated to capture the attendance through the mobile system at worksites with more than 20 workers.
- **The new system has resulted in the delay of wage payments to workers.** The new system was launched without addressing various technical issues such as inability to upload attendance data.
- After the implementation of the **Public Financial Management System**, it is necessary to release funds through a single account for the State MGNREGA, this has also complicated matters.



About MGNREGA:

- National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 or NREGA, later renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or MGNREGA in 2009, is an **Indian labour law and social security measure** that aims to guarantee the 'right to work'. This act was passed in 2005.
- It aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by **providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year** to at least one member of every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- Women are guaranteed one third of the jobs made available under the MGNREGA.
- Another aim of MGNREGA is to **create durable assets** (such as roads, canals, ponds and wells).
- Employment is to be provided within 5 km of an applicant's residence, and minimum wages are to be paid. If work is not provided within 15 days of applying, applicants are entitled to an unemployment allowance.
- Employment under MGNREGA is a legal entitlement.

Source: Business Standard

6. Cabinet Secretary

Topic: Polity and Governance

In News: The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) headed by the Prime Minister has extended the tenure of present Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba for one year.

More on the Topic:

- The Cabinet Secretary is under the direct charge of the Prime Minister.
- The Cabinet Secretary is the top-most executive official and senior-most civil servant of the Government of India.
- The Cabinet Secretary is the ex-officio head of the Civil Services Board.
- The administrative head of the Cabinet Secretariat.
- Works under the direct charge of the Prime Minister.
- He is responsible for the administration of the Transaction and Business rules and Allocation of business rules.
- He ensures that the President, Vice President and Ministries are kept informed of the major activities of all Ministries/Departments by means of a monthly Summary of their Activities.
- Manage the major crises in the country and Coordinate activities of various Ministries in such a situation.

Source: Hindu
