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Witness Protection Scheme

What does it aims?

Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 provides for protection of witnesses based on the threat assessment and protection measures inter alia include protection/change of identity of witnesses, their relocation, installation of security devices at the residence of witnesses, usage of specially designed Court rooms, etc.

Details:

- The Scheme provides for three categories of witness as per threat perception:

Category 'A': Where the threat extends to life of witness or his family members, during investigation/trial or thereafter.

Category 'B': Where the threat extends to safety, reputation or property of the witness or his family members, during the investigation/trial or thereafter.

Category 'C': Where the threat is moderate and extends to harassment or intimidation of the witness or his family member's, reputation or property, during the investigation/trial or thereafter.

- The Scheme provides for a State Witness Protection Fund for meeting the expenses of the scheme.

This fund shall be operated by the Department/Ministry of Home under State/UT Government and shall comprise of the following:

- i. Budgetary allocation made in the Annual Budget by the State Government;
- ii. Receipt of amount of costs imposed/ ordered to be deposited by the courts/tribunals in the Witness Protection Fund;
- iii. Donations/ contributions from Philanthropist/ Charitable Institutions/ Organizations and individuals permitted by the Government.



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iv. Funds contributed under Corporate Social Responsibility.

Background:

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in its Judgment dated 05.12.2018 in Writ Petition (Criminal) No. 156 of 2016 has endorsed the Scheme. As per Article 141/142 of the Constitution, the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 endorsed in the said Judgment of the Supreme Court is binding on all Courts within the territory of India and enforceable in all States and Union Territories.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the proposal to introduce The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019. The Bill will be introduced in the ensuing Session of Parliament.

The Bill provides a mechanism for their social, economic and educational empowerment.

Impact

- The Bill will benefit a large number of transgender persons, mitigate the stigma, discrimination and abuse against this marginalized section and bring them into the mainstream of society.
- This will lead to inclusiveness and will make the transgender persons productive members of the society.

Background



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- Transgender community is among one of the most marginalized communities in the country because they don't fit into the stereotypical categories of gender of 'men' or 'women'.
- Consequently, they face problems ranging from social exclusion to discrimination, lack of education facilities, unemployment, lack of medical facilities.

Salient features of the Bill:

- The Clauses 21 and 22 of Chapter V aim to [reserve](#) 2% of seats in primary, secondary and higher education institutions funded by the government, and in government jobs.
- The Clause 24 for Chapter V mandates formation of special [employment exchanges](#) for transgender people.
- The Chapter VII details the formation of national and state-levels commission for transgender people.
- The Chapter VIII details the formation of special transgender rights courts.
- The Clause 11 of Chapter II specifies the right of a transgender child to a home and imposes conditions for [foster care](#).
- The Chapter IX details the offenses and penalties. The maximum penalty for [hate speech](#) against transgender people in 1 year imprisonment with fine

The Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet has approved the Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2019 that will help adjudicate disputes relating to waters of inter-State rivers and river valleys. A version of this bill was first introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2017 but subsequently lapsed.

Salient features of the Bill:

- The Bill seeks to amend the Inter State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 to streamline the adjudication of inter-state river water disputes.
- A key feature of the bill is the constitution of a single tribunal with different Benches, and the setting of strict timelines for adjudication.
- There are about a dozen tribunals that now exist to resolve disputes among States on sharing water from rivers common to them.



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- The standalone tribunal so envisaged will have a permanent establishment and permanent office space and infrastructure so as to obviate with the need to set up a separate Tribunal for each water dispute, a time consuming process.
- The Bill also proposes a *Dispute Resolution Committee* set up by the Central Government for amicably resolving inter-State water disputes within 18 months. Any dispute that cannot be settled by negotiations would be referred to the tribunal for its adjudication.
- The dispute so referred to the tribunal shall be assigned by the chairperson of the tribunal to a Bench of the tribunal for adjudication.

The Bill can also affect the composition of the members of various tribunals, and has a provision to have a technical expert as the head of the tribunal. Currently all tribunals are staffed by members of the judiciary, nominated by the Chief Justice.

Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meet

Why in News?

India has called upon the Commonwealth to speed up the process of readmission of [Maldives](#) as a member country.

Background:

- Maldives withdrew from the Commonwealth during the tenure of previous President Abdullah Yameen in 2016 after the Commonwealth expressed serious concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.
- The new government of President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was elected after a democratic wave that fought the rule of President Yameen.

About Commonwealth:

- The **Commonwealth of Nations**, normally known as **the Commonwealth**, is a political association of [53 member states](#), nearly all of them former [territories](#) of the [British Empire](#).
- The chief institutions of the organisation are the [Commonwealth Secretariat](#), which focuses on intergovernmental aspects, and the



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[Commonwealth Foundation](#), which focuses on non-governmental relations between member states.

- The Commonwealth dates back to the first half of the 20th century with the [decolonisation](#) of the British Empire through increased [self-governance](#) of its territories. It was originally created as the *British Commonwealth of Nations* through the [Balfour Declaration](#) at the [1926 Imperial Conference](#), and formalised by the [United Kingdom](#) through the [Statute of Westminster](#) in 1931.
- The current Commonwealth of Nations was formally constituted by the [London Declaration](#) in 1949, which modernised the community, and established the member states as "free and equal".

The human symbol of this free association is the [Head of the Commonwealth](#), currently [Queen Elizabeth II](#), and the [2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#) appointed [Charles, Prince of Wales](#) to be her designated successor, although the position is not technically hereditary.

The Queen is the [head of state](#) of 16 member states, known as the [Commonwealth realms](#), while 32 other members are [republics](#) and five others have different monarchs.

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Steps Taken to Stop Terror Financing:

Why in News?

The Government has taken various steps to combat terror financing in the country, which inter alia, include:-

- i) Strengthening of the provisions in the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967** to combat terror financing.
- ii) A **Terror Funding and Fake Currency Cell (TFFC)** has been constituted in National Investigation Agency (NIA) to conduct focused investigation of terror funding and fake currency cases.



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iii) Since **Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN)** network is one of the channels of terror financing in India, FICN Coordination Group (FCORD) is been formed by the MHA to share intelligence/information among security agencies of the states/centre to counter the problem of circulation of fake currency notes.

iv) The **withdrawal of legal tender status** of Specified Bank Notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 denomination led to instant extinguishment of high quality fake Indian currency notes of these denominations.

V) Since illegally held cash forms a large chunk of terrorist funding, most of the cash held with the terrorists turned worthless.

What is terror financing?

- The **financing of terrorism** involves providing finance or financial support to individual [terrorists](#) or [non-state actors](#).
- Some countries maintain a list of terrorist organizations and have [money laundering](#) laws, which are also used to combat providing finance for those organizations.
- The [FATF Blacklist](#) (the NCCT list) mechanism was used to coerce countries to bring about change.
- A 2008 FATF report on terrorism financing noted the importance of links between financial tools and wider counter-terrorist activity to combat terrorist financing.

Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2019

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2019.

It will replace the banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Ordinance, 2019.

The banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Bill, 2019 will replace the Ordinance promulgated on 21st February, 2019, which will otherwise cease to operate after six weeks after reassembly of Parliament.



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Impact

- The Bill will help tackle the menace of illicit deposit taking activities in the country, which at present are exploiting regulatory gaps and lack of strict administrative measures to dupe poor and gullible people of their hard-earned savings.

Background

- The banning of Unregulated Deposit Scheme Bill, 2018 was considered by the Lok Sabha in its sitting held on 13th February, 2019 and after discussion, the same was passed, as amended through the proposed official amendments, as the banning of Unregulated Deposit Scheme Bill, 2019.
- However, before the same could be considered and passed in the Rajya Sabha, the Rajya Sabha was adjourned sine die on the same day.

About the Bill:

The Bill provides for a mechanism to ban unregulated deposit schemes and protect the interests of depositors.

It also seeks to amend three laws, including the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 and the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992.

· **Unregulated deposit scheme:** A deposit-taking scheme is defined as unregulated if it is not registered with the regulators listed in the Bill.

· **Competent Authority:** The Bill provides for the appointment of one or more government officers, not below the rank of Secretary to the state or central government, as the Competent Authority.

The Competent Authority may: (i) provisionally attach the property of the deposit taker, as well as all deposits received, (ii) summon and examine any person it considers necessary for the purpose of obtaining evidence, and (iii) order the production of records and evidence. The Competent Authority will have powers similar to those vested in a civil court.



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· **Designated Courts:** The Bill provides for the constitution of one or more Designated Courts in specified areas. This Court will be headed by a judge not below the rank of a district and sessions judge, or additional district and sessions judge.

Offences and penalties: The Bill defines three types of offences, and penalties related to them.

These offences are: (i) running (advertising, promoting, operating or accepting money for) unregulated deposit schemes,

(ii) fraudulently defaulting on regulated deposit schemes, and

(iii) wrongfully inducing depositors to invest in unregulated deposit schemes by willingly falsifying facts.

Repeated offenders under the Bill will be punishable with imprisonment between five to 10 years, along with a fine ranging from 10 lakh to five crore rupees.



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Plastic Pollution:

Why in News?

More than 300 women will join a round-the-world voyage launching in October to highlight the devastating impact of plastic pollution in the oceans and conduct scientific research into the escalating crisis.

Why is it needed?

- Millions of tonnes of plastic, from food packaging to fishing gear enters the sea each year, leading some marine experts to warn that there could be more plastic than fish in our oceans by 2050.

About the voyage:

- The two-year all-female voyage comprises scientists, teachers, filmmakers, product designers, photographers and athletes.
- It is organised by eXXpedition, a non-profit focusing on marine pollution - will collect samples from some of the planet's most important and diverse marine environments to build a picture of the state of the seas.
- The 38,000 nautical mile trip will cover the Arctic, the Galapagos Islands, the South Pacific islands and central ocean areas where plastic accumulates because of circulating currents.

Need of the hour:

- There's a misconception that there are islands of plastic out there that you can see, but it's more like a soup.
- It's fine fragments and the solution was to "turn off the tap" on land and stop the plastic entering the sea in the first place.
- The research will focus on identifying the types of plastic and finding tailored solutions.
- "There's not one silver bullet solution. We need to be working from every sector, from every angle. "We need design of new materials, we need policy change, we need education, we need the arts to be shifting mindsets, we need engineers.
- The only way we are going to solve it is by all working together.



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