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**Atal Innovation Mission**

Context: Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) launches Atal Community Innovation Centre (ACIC) Program.

**About ACIC Program:**

**Aim:**

- The programme aims at spurring community Innovation in underserved and unserved areas of the country.

**Significance:**

- ACIC can serve as the bridge between the knowledge base existing in communities and the advanced technical ecosystem prevalent in the market base, addressing the needs of society.

**Features of the program:**

- ACIC is a new initiative of Atal Innovation Mission to support community innovation drive in the country.
- The program is directed to encourage the spirit of innovation through solution driven design thinking to serve the society.
- It will focus on underserved/ unserved regions of the country which at present lack a vibrant start-up and innovation ecosystem.
- ACIC will be established either in PPP mode or with support of PSUs and other agencies.
- The maximum grant-in-aid support from AIM will be up to 2.5 crores subject following compliance to ACIC guidelines and contributing matching from the host institutions and their funding partner(s).

**About Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):**



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- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) including Self-Employment and Talent Utilization (SETU) is Government of India's endeavour to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Its objective is to serve as a platform for promotion of world-class Innovation Hubs, Grand Challenges, Start-up businesses and other self-employment activities, particularly in technology driven areas.

#### **Increase in SC judges.**

##### **Context:**

Cabinet approves increasing strength of Supreme Court judges from 31 to 34.

At present, the sanctioned strength of the apex court is 31.

##### **Why is it needed?**

- 59,331 cases are pending in the top court. Due to paucity of judges, the required number of Constitution Benches to decide important cases involving questions of law are not being formed.
- Therefore, increase in strength is needed so that the SC can function more efficiently and effectively as it will go a long way to attain the ultimate goal of rendering timely justice to the litigant public.



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### **Background:**

- The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 originally provided for a maximum of 10 judges (excluding the CJI). This number was increased to 13 by the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Act, 1960, and to 17 in 1977.
- In 1988, the judge strength of the SC was increased to 26, and then again after two decades in 2009, it was increased to 31, including the CJI, to expedite disposal of cases to keep pace with the rate of institution.

### **Who appoints judges to the SC?**

- In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution of India, the appointments are made by the President of India.
- The names are recommended by the Collegium.

### **Eligibility to become a Supreme Court judge:**



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- The norms relating to the eligibility has been envisaged in the Article 124 of the Indian Constitution.
- To become a judge of the Supreme court, an individual should be an Indian citizen.
- In terms of age, a person should not exceed 65 years of age.
- The person should serve as a judge of one high court or more (continuously), for at least five years or the person should be an advocate in the High court for at least 10 years or a distinguished jurist

### **Inter state river water dispute**

#### **Why in news?**

ON WEDNESDAY, Lok Sabha gave its approval to a proposal to set up a permanent tribunal to adjudicate on inter-state disputes over sharing of river waters.

The Bill cleared by Lok Sabha seeks to make amendments to the Inter-State River Waters Disputes Act of 1956 that provides for setting up of a separate tribunal every time a dispute arises. Once it becomes law, the amendment will ensure the transfer of all existing water disputes to the new tribunal. All five existing tribunals under the 1956 Act would cease to exist.

#### **Why the change**

- The main purpose is to make the process of dispute settlement more efficient and effective. Under the 1956 Act, nine tribunals have so far been set up. Only four of them have given their awards.
- One of these disputes, over Cauvery waters between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, took 28 years to settle.
- The Ravi and Beas Waters Tribunal was set up in April 1986 and it is still to give the final award. The minimum a tribunal has taken to settle a dispute is seven years, by the first Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal in 1976.
- The amendment is bringing a time limit for adjudicating the disputes. All disputes would now have to be resolved within a maximum of four-and-a-half years.



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- The multiplicity of tribunals has led to an increase in bureaucracy, delays, and possible duplication of work.
- The replacement of five existing tribunals with a permanent tribunal is likely to result in a 25 per cent reduction in staff strength, from the current 107 to 80, and a saving of Rs 4.27 crore per year.
  
- The current system of dispute resolution would give way to a new two-tier approach. The states concerned would be encouraged to come to a negotiated settlement through a Disputes Resolution Committee (DRC).
- Only if the DRC fails to resolve the dispute will the matter be referred to the tribunal.

#### **How it will work**

- In the existing mechanism, when states raise a dispute, the central government constitutes a tribunal.
- Under the current law, the tribunal has to give its award within three years, which can be extended by another two years. In practice, tribunals have taken much longer to give their decisions.
  
- Under the new system, the Centre would set up a DRC once states raise a dispute.
- The DRC would be headed by a serving or retired secretary-rank officer with experience in the water sector and would have other expert members and a representative of each state government concerned.
- The DRC would try to resolve the dispute through negotiations within a year and submit a report to the Centre. This period can be extended by a maximum of six months.



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- If the DRC fails to settle the dispute, it would be referred to the permanent tribunal, which will have a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and a maximum of six members — three judicial and three expert members.
- The chairperson would then constitute a three-member bench that would consider the DRC report before investigating on its own.
- It would have to finalise its decision within two years, a period that can be extended by a maximum of one more year — adding up to a maximum of four-and-a-half years.
  
- The decision of the tribunal would carry the weight of an order of the Supreme Court. There is no provision for appeal. However, the Supreme Court, while hearing a civil suit in the Cauvery dispute, had said the decision of that tribunal could be challenged before it through a Special Leave Petition under Article 136 of the Constitution

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#### **US fed rate cut**

Late Wednesday evening India time, the United States Federal Reserve announced a quarter-percentage-point cut in interest rates — the first rate cut in 11 years.

What makes this rate-cut action — the first since the global financial crisis broke in 2008 — more significant is that barely six months previously, the US Fed was on a hawkish rate-hike trajectory, moving in the direction of bolstering the debt-laden American economy.

#### **Why the rate cut by the Fed?**

- The Fed has cited concerns about the global economy and muted US inflation among the key reasons for the decision to cut rates, and signalled a readiness to lower borrowing costs further if needed.
- At the same time, the central bank has underlined that the US economy grew “at a healthy pace” over the first six months of the year.
- Financial markets had expected the quarter-percentage-point rate cut, which lowered the US central bank’s benchmark overnight lending rate to a target range of 2%-2.25%.

#### **Does the cut indicate a shift in policy?**



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- The cut in policy rates follows months of pressure from US President Donald Trump, who has been pushing the American central bank for a cut in rates to stoke growth.
- “Information received since the Federal Open Market Committee met in June indicates that the labour market remains strong and that economic activity has been rising at a moderate rate,” the Fed said in its statement. “Job gains have been solid, on average, in recent months, and the unemployment rate has remained low.”
- The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) is a panel within the Fed that is responsible for setting policy rates.
- The ambiguity in the Fed was reflected somewhat in the vote on the decision, with two members of the 10-member FOMC opposing the decision to cut rates.

#### **What will be the impact on emerging market economies, including India?**

- Theoretically, a rate cut in the US should be positive for emerging market economies (EMEs), especially from a debt market perspective. Emerging economies such as India tend to have higher inflation and, thereby, higher interest rates than those in developed countries such as the US and Europe.
- As a result, FII's would want to borrow money in the US at low interest rates in dollar terms, and then invest that money in bonds of emerging countries such as India in rupee terms to earn a higher rate of interest.
- When the US Fed cuts its interest rates, the difference between the interest rates of the two countries increases, thus making India more attractive for the currency carry trade.
- A rate cut by the Fed would also mean a greater impetus to growth in the US, which could be positive news for global growth.
- But this could also translate into more equity investments in the US, which could temper investor enthusiasm for emerging market economies in a proportionate manner.

#### **How did the stock markets react; why?**

- Indian stocks tanked on Thursday. While domestic factors such as dismal July car sales data and slower GDP growth projections played a role in the selloff, one of the major factors was Powell's



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characterisation of the rate cut as a mid-cycle adjustment. Markets have taken this as a sign that sharp further cuts were not imminent.

- Thursday's sell-off dragged benchmark indices to fresh five-month lows, with the BSE Sensex slipping below the 37,000 mark.
- The broader Nifty50, too, breached the 11,000 mark in the intra-day trade. Bonds in India too, fell as investors trimmed bets on aggressive interest-rate cuts in high-yield markets after the signal from the US Fed.
- According to analysts, there are also concerns that if Asian emerging market currencies such as the rupee continue to weaken sharply against the dollar, that may result in central banks such as the RBI turning more cautious about cutting the policy rate too aggressively.
- The surveys have been conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation and the Periodic Labour Force Survey.

### **Employment-Unemployment survey**

#### **Why in news?**

Union Minister for Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi presented in Lok Sabha data on the rates of unemployment across major religious groups over the last three unemployment surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

The three sets of data correspond to the Employment and Unemployment Surveys conducted over the 66th Round (between July 2009-June 2010) and 68th Round (between July 2011-June 2012) by the NSSO as well as the PLFS (between July 2017-June 2018).



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**UNEMPLOYMENT IN USUAL STATUS AMONG MALES  
 ACROSS MAJOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS**

RELIGIOUS GROUP	66TH ROUND (2009-10)		68TH ROUND (2011-12)		PLFS (2017-18)	
	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN
Hinduism	1.5	2.9	1.7	2.8	5.7	6.9
Islam	1.9	2.5	2.2	3.8	6.7	7.5
Christianity	2.6	2.2	3.4	4.4	6.9	8.9
Sikhism	2.7	5.6	1.3	3.5	6.4	7.2

**UNEMPLOYMENT IN USUAL STATUS AMONG FEMALES  
 ACROSS MAJOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS**

RELIGIOUS GROUP	66TH ROUND (2009-10)		68TH ROUND (2011-12)		PLFS (2017-18)	
	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN
Hinduism	1.4	5.8	1.4	5.2	3.5	10.0
Islam	2.0	6.8	3.9	4.4	5.7	14.5
Christianity	6.0	4.6	6.4	8.8	8.8	15.6
Sikhism	1.7	8.3	1.3	5.5	5.7	16.9

Source: Minority Affairs Ministry

**Details**

Source: Minority Affairs Ministry

- The unemployment rates have been disaggregated for males and females as well as urban and rural areas.



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- Workers in the “usual status” category include (a) persons who worked for a relatively large part of the 365 days preceding the date of the survey, and (b) persons from among the remaining population who had worked for at least 30 days during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of the survey.
- Category (a) refers to “principal status” and the category (b) to “subsidiary status” and the “usual status” definition includes both. As such, usual status is a more relaxed measure of unemployment.
- For instance, some of the unemployed under “principal status” might be working in a subsidiary capacity.

#### **Tarballs**

##### **Why in news?**

On Thursday, Girgaum chowpatty, a famous tourist spot in South Mumbai, saw big, black oil-emanating balls lying on its sandy beach. On July 5 and 6, Juhu beach in suburban Mumbai too had these strewn on its shore. A week later at the Marine Drive promenade, visitors complained about the smell of diesel.

##### **What are these sticky black "tarballs", and why have they appeared on Mumbai's beaches?**

##### **What are tarballs?**

Tarballs are dark-coloured, sticky balls of oil that form when crude oil floats on the ocean surface.

Tarballs are formed by weathering of crude oil in marine environments.

They are transported from the open sea to the shores by sea currents and waves, according to the research paper Diversity of bacteria and fungi associated with tarballs:

Tarballs are usually coin-sized and are found strewn on the beaches. However, over the years, they have become as big as basketballs and can weigh as high as 6-7 kgs.



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**Do tarballs indicate an oil spill?**

- Most of the times, the presence of several tarballs indicate an oil spill.
- However, its annual occurrence on the west coast during the monsoon has led marine biologists and experts to demand an investigation in the matter.
- Experts have urged authorities to take stricter vigil and check if ships are dumping burnt oil waste off the western coast of India.
- A study published by NIO in 2013 stated that "oil-well blowouts, accidental and deliberate release of bilge and ballast water from ships, river runoff, discharges through municipal sewage and industrial effluents" also leads to the formation of tarballs.

**Are tarballs harmful?**

- Dismissed as annual occurrence by the Maharashtra Pollution control board, tarballs that travel towards the coast can get stuck to the fishing nets installed in the sea, making it difficult for fishermen to clean.
- In addition, it could affect marine life, especially filter feeders like clams and oysters.
- Tarball pollution is a major concern to global marine ecosystem. Microbes such as bacteria and fungi are known to be associated with tarballs.
- They presumably play an important role in tarball degradation and some are potential human and animal pathogens.
- NIO is currently fingerprinting the oil to determine its source and study the impact.

**Tarball cases in the past**

- Tarballs are difficult to break down, and can therefore travel for hundreds of miles in the sea.
- Noted cases of tarball occurrences have been witnessed at Goa beaches since 2010, in South Gujarat, Mangaluru and at Los Angeles beaches.
- There has never been a case of a beach closing down due to tarballs in India



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