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1. Sustainable Cultivation of Kutki in Himachal Pradesh

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Conservation breakthrough:** Farmers in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district have pioneered sustainable cultivation of Kutki (*Picrorhiza kurroa*), shifting from destructive wild uprooting to scientific farming.
- **Innovative harvesting method:** Instead of plucking the entire plant which kills it, cultivators harvest only the side **stolons**, leaving the mother plant intact for continuous perennial production.
- **Research backing:** The Himalayan Research Group (HRG) under the Department of Science and Technology spent over a decade developing this alternative technique, which now spans nearly 180 farmers across Mandi.
- **Economic empowerment:** The initiative has transformed into the largest private land cultivation cluster for this endangered species, providing rural mountain communities with a reliable additional source of income.

- **Global trade alignment:** Sustainable production allows farmers to legally sell dried herbs through regulated channels, securing international compliance and fair market returns.

Essential Definitions

- **Kutki (*Picrorhiza kurroa*):** A high-value perennial alpine and sub-alpine medicinal herb native to the Himalayas (2,700–4,500 metres), widely used in traditional Ayurvedic formulations for its hepatoprotective and digestive properties.
- **Stolon:** A horizontal branch or creeping stem that grows along the soil surface, possessing nodes from which roots and new plants sprout, enabling vegetative propagation without destroying the parent organism.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **IUCN Red List Status:** Classified as **Endangered** due to decades of overexploitation, destructive wild harvesting, habitat loss, and restricted geographic ranges.
- **CITES Listing:** Included in **Appendix II** of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, which regulates international trade through permits to prevent survival threats.
- **Constitutional Provisions:** Promotes the directive principles of state policy under **Article 48A**, which mandates the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife, alongside **Article 51A(g)** outlining citizens' fundamental duty to protect natural ecosystems.



Conclusion

The transition from wild uprooting to scientific stolon-based cultivation of Kutki models a symbiotic pathway between biodiversity conservation and rural economic development. Scaling such location-specific agricultural interventions is crucial for safeguarding fragile Himalayan ecosystems while securing sustainable livelihoods for mountain communities.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is highly relevant for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper III (Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment)** and **Biodiversity Management**, as well as Prelims questions regarding flora conservation status, CITES appendices, and sustainable development goals in mountainous regions.

2. Odisha State Policy to Curb Human Trafficking

Key Highlights & Summary

- **New state policy initiative:** Odisha has proposed a new state policy titled **Nutana Sakala** (New Dawn) to tackle human trafficking through comprehensive measures spanning community-level prevention and asset confiscation.

- **Administrative formulation:** The draft policy is being prepared by the Women and Child Development Department and has been circulated among top police leadership including the Director General of Police and Crime Branch wings.
- **Grave statistical reality:** According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, Odisha recorded 1,475 victims in 2021, 1,120 in 2022, 1,305 in 2023, and 1,039 in 2024, highlighting a persistent crisis.
- **Judicial and conviction gaps:** Despite identifying hundreds of survivors and arresting traffickers, systemic gaps remain, underscored by a historical record of zero convictions in certain evaluation cycles and lower chargesheeting rates.
- **Best practices integration:** The proposed policy draws upon successful prevention, protection, and prosecution models adapted from other Indian states and international frameworks.
- **Asset confiscation strategy:** A radical core feature of the policy includes targeting financial networks through the legal seizure of assets linked to human trafficking syndicates.

Essential Definitions

- **Human Trafficking:** The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, or abuse of power for the purpose of exploitation.
- **Nutana Sakala:** The proposed Odisha state policy framework designed to systematically suppress human trafficking networks through multi-sectoral convergence, community vigilance, and rigorous asset confiscation.



Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Constitutional Safeguards:** Article 23 of the Constitution of India prohibits human trafficking and forced labour (*begar*), declaring them punishable offenses, while Article 24 forbids the employment of children below fourteen years in hazardous factories or mines.
- **Legislative Provisions:** Section 370 and Section 370A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) / Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) comprehensively criminalize human trafficking, aggravated trafficking, and the exploitation of trafficked persons.
- **Specialized Statutes:** The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act provide robust legal backing for prosecuting offenses related to commercial sexual exploitation and child trafficking.

Conclusion

The introduction of the Nutana Sakala policy reflects a crucial administrative acknowledgment of systemic gaps in combating human trafficking in Odisha. Effective implementation will require seamless coordination between law enforcement agencies, rigorous investigative chargesheeting, and community-driven rehabilitation ecosystems to dismantle criminal syndicates permanently.

UPSC Relevance

This topic holds high relevance for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper II (Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections, mechanisms for protection of these sections)**

and **General Studies Paper III (Internal Security, Organized Crime, Role of State and Non-State Actors in creating challenges to Internal Security).**

3. India's Stance on Zero Tolerance for Terrorism and Maritime Security

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Zero tolerance doctrine:** External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar firmly reiterated India's policy of zero tolerance toward terrorism at the 33rd ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Ministerial Meeting in Manila, emphasizing that acts of terror will face direct consequences.
- **Choking financial networks:** The address underscored the critical need to disrupt and dismantle financial ecosystems and funding channels that sustain terrorist networks globally.
- **Multilateral counter-terrorism leadership:** India highlighted its proactive role as co-chair of the Experts' Working Group on counter-terrorism under the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+) framework alongside Malaysia, driving the compilation of international best practices.
- **Maritime domain awareness:** India's security initiatives, including the Information Fusion Centre (IFC) and the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness framework, were highlighted for countering piracy, trafficking, and securing international shipping lanes.
- **Freedom of navigation:** Expressing deep concern over attacks on commercial merchant vessels and civilian infrastructure in conflict zones, India advocated for safe, unimpeded commerce through global waterways and compliance with international law.
- **South China Sea adherence:** India voiced support for a substantive, effective, and legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea that remains fully compliant with the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).



Essential Definitions

- **Zero Tolerance for Terrorism:** A hardline national security posture advocating absolute rejection of any form of terrorism, eliminating distinctions between perpetrators and state sponsors, and ensuring decisive punitive actions against terror acts.
- **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA):** Effective understanding of anything associated with the global maritime domain that could impact security, safety, economy, or environment through intelligence fusion and information sharing.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **UNCLOS 1982:** The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, environment, and management of marine natural resources.

- **International Counter-Terrorism Obligations:** Grounded in global counter-terrorism conventions, UN Security Council Resolutions targeting terror financing, and multilateral regional frameworks like the ADMM-Plus.

Conclusion

India's assertive diplomatic messaging at the ARF reiterates its uncompromising security posture against cross-border terrorism while projecting proactive stewardship in Indo-Pacific maritime security. Institutionalizing cooperative intelligence-sharing mechanisms remains pivotal to mitigating asymmetric threats and preserving open global trade routes.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is highly significant for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper II (Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India)** and **General Studies Paper III (Internal Security challenges, role of external state and non-state actors, security challenges and their management in border areas)**.

4. Parliamentary Panel Recommendation on Virtual Digital Assets

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Regulatory vacuum identification:** The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance has called for a comprehensive examination and a robust regulatory framework for Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs) such as cryptocurrencies under the Securities Market Code.
- **Interim self-regulation mechanism:** Pending a formal comprehensive legislation, the committee recommended introducing an interim framework via recognized Self-Regulatory Organizations (SROs) operating under designated regulatory oversight.
- **Massive retail participation:** Citing blockchain analytics data from Chainalysis, the report noted that nearly 12 crore Indians are actively participating in the domestic VDA ecosystem.
- **Investor protection and risk mitigation:** The panel warned that current exclusions and regulatory uncertainties expose investors to heightened risks of fraud, market manipulation, misrepresentation, and regulatory arbitrage.
- **Current taxation coverage:** While explicit civil securities legislation is absent, the sector is presently subjected to limited regulatory oversight purely for anti-money laundering compliance and taxation purposes.
- **Cross-border coordination:** The committee emphasized that any effective domestic framework for crypto-assets requires significant international cooperation and inter-agency domestic coordination.



Essential Definitions

- **Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs):** Digital representations of value issued through cryptographic means, functioning as a medium of exchange, unit of account, or store of value, excluding Indian legal tender and foreign currencies.

- **Self-Regulatory Organizations (SROs):** Non-governmental organizations authorized to set, apply, and enforce rules and standards of practice within an industry to maintain market discipline and ethical conduct.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Legislative Competence:** Under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, regulation of currency, coinage, legal tender, foreign exchange, and capital markets falls under the Union List (List I), giving Parliament exclusive jurisdiction.
- **Statutory Compliance:** Existing regulatory enforcement is anchored through provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and the Income Tax Act amendments mandating tax deduction at source on VDA transactions.

Conclusion

The Parliamentary Committee recommendation highlights an urgent policy imperative to bridge the regulatory grey area surrounding virtual digital assets. Establishing a balanced framework balancing innovation with consumer protection is vital for safeguarding financial stability and upholding market integrity.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is vital for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper III (Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and internal security challenges via cyber networks and financial fraud).**

5. Bombay HC Lawyers Condemn Prohibitory Orders and Police Action

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Legal community condemnation:** Over 140 lawyers practicing before the Bombay High Court, including senior advocates, issued a strong statement deprecating prohibitory orders restricting public movement and assemblies.
- **Circumvention of statutory limits:** The statement noted that successive prohibitory orders (July 7 to 21 and July 23 to August 6) with only a 24-hour respite appear intentionally designed to bypass the 15-day legal ceiling requiring state government sanction.
- **Call for withdrawal:** Lawyers demanded that the Mumbai Police Commissioner immediately withdraw the ban, arguing it curtails lawful citizen protests without adequate justification or accountability.
- **Mass detentions criticized:** The resolution expressed deep concern over mass detentions and arrests under the Maharashtra Police Act, 1951, pointing out that restrictions failed to demonstrate the least restrictive measures.
- **Police use of force:** The Bombay Bar Association also condemned reports of students being subjected to lathicharge and tear gas, emphasizing that democratic dissent is vital.

Essential Definitions



- **Prohibitory Orders:** Official administrative directions issued under statutory police powers (such as Section 144 of CrPC or respective police acts) to restrict assembly of a specified number of persons to prevent public disorder.
- **Right to Peaceful Assembly:** A fundamental democratic liberty enabling individuals to gather collectively in public spaces to express views, deliberate, and demonstrate peacefully.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Constitutional Freedoms:** Article 19(1)(a) guarantees the freedom of speech and expression, while Article 19(1)(b) guarantees the right to assemble peaceably and without arms, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(3) in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India or public order.
- **Statutory Limitations:** Under applicable police frameworks, prolonged prohibitory restrictions normally require explicit state government sanction beyond standard statutory time limits like 15 days to prevent arbitrary executive overreach.

Conclusion

The strong pushback by senior members of the legal fraternity against prohibitory orders underscores the delicate balance required between maintaining public order and upholding constitutional civil liberties. Executive actions restricting public assembly must strictly adhere to statutory time limits, necessity, and proportionality.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is highly relevant for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper II (Indian Constitution-historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure; Fundamental Rights)** and **Governance (Role of civil society, organs of state, and protection of democratic rights)**.

6. Rajasthan Amendment Allowing Political Workers in Community Liaison Groups

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Policy amendment:** The Rajasthan government has amended the Rajasthan Police Rules, 2008, via a July 19 notification, deleting the explicit clause that barred members of political parties or their affiliates from joining Community Liaison Groups (CLGs).
- **Massive state network:** Government data reveals there are 75,265 active CLG members distributed across various police ranges in the state, such as Ajmer, Udaipur, and Bikaner ranges, acting as a bridge between citizens and law enforcement.
- **Core functions:** CLGs assist police in gathering intelligence, tracking criminals, preventing crime, defusing social unrest, and improving overall police-community relationships at panchayat, beat, and ward levels.
- **Ineligibility criteria:** Despite removing political affiliation bars, other strict rules still render individuals ineligible, including court convictions, ongoing criminal trials, suspected criminal associations, or involvement in property disputes.

- **Political polarization debate:** The move has drawn sharp political criticism from opposition parties alleging partisan institutional packing, while proponents defend it as a step toward integrating grassroots community leadership into local security governance.

Essential Definitions

- **Community Liaison Group (CLG):** An institutionalized voluntary forum comprising local citizens, community representatives, and civil stakeholders designed to assist police forces in intelligence gathering, trust-building, and maintaining local public order.
- **Policing Governance:** The administrative mechanism through which law enforcement agencies maintain public safety, law enforcement compliance, and social harmony in partnership with community stakeholders.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Statutory Police Powers:** Governed by state-specific police acts and rules (such as the Rajasthan Police Rules, 2008), framed under the broader ambit of police administration as a state subject under **List II (State List) of the Seventh Schedule** of the Constitution of India.
- **Constitutional Principles:** Aligned with democratic governance principles under **Article 21** and directive values promoting cooperative and participatory community welfare.

Conclusion

The inclusion of political workers within Rajasthan's Community Liaison Groups presents a dual challenge of expanding grassroots participation while preserving institutional neutrality. Ensuring strict adherence to moral character checks and transparency will determine whether CLGs remain effective public safety partners or face political capture.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is highly relevant for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper II (Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors, issues arising out of design and implementation of policies)** and **General Studies Paper III (Internal Security - Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites, basics of cyber security; security challenges and their management in border areas)**.

7. DRDO Flight Test of Project Kusha Long Range SAM System

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Maiden flight test success:** The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted the first flight test of the indigenous **Kusha** Long-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (LR-SAM) system from APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha.
- **Target interception:** The test was conducted against an electronic target simulating a high-speed, high-altitude aerial threat, which the missile system successfully intercepted at targets up to 400km away.

- **Indigenous defense capability:** Project Kusha aims to develop an indigenous long-range SAM system to protect strategic military and civilian infrastructure from diverse aerial threats, including fighter jets, missiles, UAVs, and large enemy aircraft.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat impact:** Defense Minister Rajnath Singh hailed the test as a crucial milestone that will significantly eliminate India's import dependency for advanced high-altitude air defense systems like the Russian S-400.
- **Component synergy:** All weapon system elements, including missiles, advanced radars, and command-and-control centers, have been collaboratively developed by DRDO laboratories and domestic industry partners.
- **Mission Sudarshan Chakra integration:** Project Kusha and the Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) form core pillars toward building a homegrown nationwide multi-domain security shield under Mission Sudarshan Chakra over the next decade.

Essential Definitions

- **Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM):** A missile designed to be launched from the ground or sea to destroy aircraft, drones, or incoming missiles in flight.
- **Project Kusha:** An ambitious indigenous DRDO initiative to develop a multi-layered, long-range air defense system capable of detecting and destroying diverse high-altitude aerial threats at extended ranges up to 400km.



DRDO conducted the maiden flight test of Long-Range SAM 'Kusha' from the APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha. ॥

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Atmanirbhar Bharat & Defense Procurement:** Aligned with national policy frameworks prioritizing indigenous defense manufacturing, technology self-reliance, and strategic autonomy under the Defense Acquisition Procedure (DAP).
- **Constitutional Mandate:** Reflects the realization of security imperatives under the directive principles of state policy and national security sovereign duties.

Conclusion

The successful maiden flight test of Project Kusha marks a monumental leap in India's quest for complete technological self-reliance in multi-layered air defense architecture. By bridging critical strategic capability gaps domestically, India moves significantly closer to realizing an impenetrable national aerospace shield.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is extremely vital for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper III (Indigenization of technology and developing new technology, security challenges and their management, role of external and internal actors in national security)** and Prelims regarding defense technology acronyms and missile systems.

8. Due Process and Police Use of Force During Protests

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Student protests at Jantar Mantar:** Young protesters have thronged Jantar Mantar in the national capital following a heavy police crackdown, remaining aggrieved despite official government assurances.
- **Judicial commentary controversy:** Chief Justice of India Surya Kant's oral remarks telling a lawyer seeking intervention against police excess not to "waste our time" highlighted a perceived disconnect between citizens and judicial institutions.
- **Disproportionate police force:** Reports from Delhi streets highlighted the use of excessive and disproportionate force, including pellet guns, lathicharges, and tear gas shells against student protesters.
- **Flouting of established protocols:** The police actions raised concerns over short-circuiting standard protocols laid down in Delhi Police Standing Orders and landmark Supreme Court rulings regarding crowd dispersal.
- **Principle of least invasiveness:** Editorial commentary underscored the failure to follow the judicial principle of "least invasiveness", such as utilizing water cannons before resorting to injurious methods like pellet guns.
- **Judicial recourse:** Acknowledging the complexities, the Delhi High Court agreed to hear two Public Interest Litigations (PILs) concerning the police excesses, emphasizing that due process remains paramount.

Essential Definitions

- **Due Process of Law:** A constitutional guarantee that ensures governments respect all legal rights that are owed to a person, balancing the power of law of the land and protecting the individual person from coercive state action.
- **Least Invasiveness:** A policing and legal doctrine requiring law enforcement to employ the least restrictive or injurious measures necessary to achieve a legitimate public order objective during crowd control.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Fundamental Freedoms:** Rooted in Article 19(1)(a) freedom of speech and expression and Article 19(1)(b) right to assemble peaceably, balanced with reasonable restrictions under Article 19(3).
- **Statutory and Judicial Guidelines:** Governed by Delhi Police Standing Order 309 and Standing Order 152, alongside the Supreme Court's 2012 ruling in the Ramlila Maidan case, which mandates strict restraint, proportionality, and adherence to due process in handling public protests.

Conclusion

The friction between protesting youth, police response, and judicial observation underscores the critical necessity of upholding due process in a democratic polity. State authorities must exercise utmost proportionality, ensuring that the rulebook is not weaponized to suppress peaceful dissent.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is highly relevant for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper II (Indian Constitution, Fundamental Rights, Judiciary, and statutory institutions)** and **General Studies Paper III (Internal Security, maintenance of public order, and role of police forces in a democracy)**.

9. The Green We Celebrate: Uttarakhand's Forest Diversion and Black Harela Protests

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Black Harela protest:** The traditional green festival Harela in Uttarakhand was marked by protests under the banner of "Black Harela" as citizens and youth opposed the proposed felling of 4,000 mature trees to widen national highways and link roads.
- **Massive forest diversion:** An RTI reply revealed that since the state's formation in 2000, \$46,203\$ hectares of forest land have been diverted for various infrastructure and development projects.
- **Ecological vulnerability in Doon Valley:** The planned tree felling threatens ecologically sensitive zones, including the Shivalik Elephant Reserve and critical wildlife corridors, exacerbating landslide risks and fragility in the Himalayas.
- **Capital city burden:** Dehradun alone accounts for 21,618 hectares, or nearly \$47\text{\%}\$, of all forest land diverted across Uttarakhand for infrastructural expansions such as the Bhaniyawala-Rishikesh highway.
- **Policy dichotomy:** Activists have raised concerns over the contradiction between state-backed afforestation drives like *Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam* and the large-scale commercial felling of centuries-old irreplaceable forest canopies.



Essential Definitions

- **Harela:** A traditional folk festival celebrated in Uttarakhand marking the onset of the monsoon and the sowing season, symbolizing new life, prosperity, and ecological harmony with nature.
- **Forest Land Diversion:** The legal or administrative reallocation of designated forest areas for non-forestry purposes such as road construction, mining, hydro-projects, and industrial expansions.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980:** Statutory legislation requiring central government approval and compensatory afforestation for the diversion of forest land for non-forest uses.
- **Constitutional Safeguards:** Article 48A of the Constitution of India directs the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife, while Article 51A(g) imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife.

Conclusion

The friction between rapid infrastructure development and massive ecological degradation in Uttarakhand highlights the urgent need for sustainable developmental planning in the fragile

Himalayan region. Striking a balance between economic connectivity and environmental preservation is paramount to preventing irreversible climate and geological disasters.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is highly relevant for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper III (Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment)** and **General Studies Paper I (Geographical features and location-changes in critical geographical features including water bodies and ice-caps, and in flora and fauna)**.

10. US-Saudi Nuclear Pact and Regional Power Dynamics in West Asia

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Nuclear agreement signing:** The United States and Saudi Arabia have signed a controversial civil nuclear cooperation agreement (Section 123 agreement) that could enable Riyadh to kickstart a civilian nuclear program.
- **Uranium enrichment concerns:** The deal potentially permits Saudi Arabia to enrich uranium on its soil—primarily for power plants but with dual-use risks—raising alarms about nuclear proliferation and a potential regional arms race.
- **Abraham Accords linkage:** President Donald Trump claimed that the pact could pave the way for Saudi Arabia to join the Abraham Accords and establish diplomatic relations with Israel, contingent on regional policy postures.
- **Congressional ratification hurdle:** The agreement requires formal ratification by the US Congress, where broad bipartisan support for Israel may trigger stiff opposition and intense scrutiny over safeguards.
- **Geopolitical balancing act:** Analysts warn the pact could embolden Iran further, push Saudi Arabia closer toward cooperation with China and Russia, and drastically alter the geopolitical balance in West Asia.

Essential Definitions

- **Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (Section 123 Agreement):** A bilateral accord required under US federal law (Section 123 of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954) that governs peaceful nuclear cooperation, technology transfer, and nonproliferation safeguards between the US and partner nations.
- **Nuclear Proliferation:** The spread of nuclear weapons, fissionable material, and weapon-making technology and information to nations that are not recognized as Nuclear Weapon States by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **US Atomic Energy Act of 1954 (Section 123):** Mandates strict nonproliferation controls, technology-sharing frameworks, and congressional oversight before the US can transfer nuclear materials or equipment to another country.



US approves landmark Saudi nuclear deal, reshaping West Asia

- **International Nonproliferation Standards:** Governed by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, bilateral inspections, and global treaties designed to ensure nuclear technology remains strictly limited to peaceful civilian energy generation.

Conclusion

The US-Saudi nuclear pact represents a high-stakes geopolitical gamble that could reshape West Asia's strategic architecture. While offering economic integration and energy diversification, the agreement introduces severe proliferation risks that demand stringent international oversight and robust legislative safeguards.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is highly relevant for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper II (Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests, effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests)** and **General Studies Paper III (Security challenges, international security, and nuclear proliferation issues)**.

11. Commissioning of Submarine Hunter INS Malvan and Coastal Defense

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Naval commissioning:** The Indian Navy has commissioned **INS Malvan**, its second Mahe-class Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC), at Karwar, Karnataka.
- **Shipbuilding collaboration:** Built by Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL), Kochi, INS Malvan is part of a planned series of 16 vessels being constructed by CSL and Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) to replace older Abhay-class corvettes.
- **Crest symbolism:** The ship's crest features the historic **Bagh Nakha** (tiger-claw weapon associated with Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj) symbolizing courage, agility, stealth, and swift strike capabilities.
- **Shallow water specialization:** Designed specifically for littoral zones, these vessels feature low draught, advanced sonar systems, and high maneuverability to counter stealthy diesel-electric submarines in shallow coastal waters.
- **Multi-role utility:** Beyond anti-submarine warfare, the vessels are equipped for underwater surveillance, search and rescue, low-intensity maritime operations, and mine-laying.
- **Blue water freedom:** By establishing a dedicated anti-submarine screen along India's 7,500km coastline, these shallow water platforms free up larger warships to focus on critical blue-water power projection.

Essential Definitions

- **Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC):** Specialized, lightweight warships designed to operate in shallow littoral waters to detect, track, and destroy enemy submarines and secure maritime chokepoints.



- **Littoral Zone:** The region near the shore where land and water meet, holding immense strategic, economic, and security significance for coastal nations.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **National Security Sovereignty:** Anchored under the sovereign defense responsibilities of the Union Government pursuant to **List I (Union List)** of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India.
- **Maritime Law Compliance:** Aligned with international conventions including UNCLOS 1982, ensuring sovereign rights over territorial waters, contiguous zones, and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).

Conclusion

The induction of INS Malvan significantly bolsters India's coastal security grid by plugging critical surveillance gaps in littoral waters. Enhancing indigenous anti-submarine warfare capabilities ensures uninterrupted maritime trade and safeguards national maritime borders against asymmetric underwater threats.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is vital for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper III (Indigenization of technology, security challenges and their management in border areas, role of forces in internal and external security)** and Prelims regarding naval defense acquisitions and ship classes.

12. Fast-track Courts: Establishment, Performance, and Constitutional Scope

Key Highlights & Summary

- **Prime Ministerial commitment:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent push to establish fast-track courts (FTCs) for tackling paper leaks has brought renewed attention to their efficacy in curbing judicial delays.
- **Lack of central legislation:** There is no single central legislation governing FTCs; their establishment has historically been driven by recommendations of successive Finance Commissions and centrally sponsored schemes.
- **Funding and special focus:** Following a 2019 criminal law amendment and Supreme Court directives, the Centre launched a centrally sponsored scheme partially funded by the Nirbhaya Fund to fast-track rape cases and POCSO offenses.
- **Performance metrics:** As of January, 862 regular FTCs and 774 FTSCs (including 398 exclusive POCSO courts) operate across states and UTs, showing a disposal rate around 96% for specialized matters.
- **Persistent bottlenecks:** Despite high disposal rates, over 2.4 lakh cases remained pending in FTCs by the end of 2023, plagued by infrastructure deficits, investigative delays, forensic backlogs, and vacant judicial posts.



Essential Definitions

- **Fast-track Courts (FTCs):** Dedicated temporary or specialized judicial forums established to expedite the trial of specific heinous crimes, reducing massive case backlogs in regular courts.
- **Principle of Least Invasiveness / Rational Classification:** A constitutional requirement under Article 14 mandating that special courts must be constituted based on a rational, objective basis rather than arbitrary executive selection.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 14 (Equality Before Law):** As established in *State of West Bengal v. Anwar Ali Sarkar* (1952), special courts must satisfy Article 14, requiring a rational nexus between the classification of cases and the objective of speedy trials.
- **Statutory and Procedural Guidelines:** Governed by the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), recommending trial completions within two years and sexual offense trials within two months, while the landmark *P. Rama Chandra Rao v. State of Karnataka* (2002) ruling barred courts from prescribing rigid outer limits for concluding all criminal proceedings.

Conclusion

While fast-track courts offer a specialized mechanism for expedited justice in high-priority cases, they cannot function as a silver bullet without comprehensive systemic reforms. Addressing underlying constraints such as forensic infrastructure, investigation quality, and judicial vacancies is vital for ensuring meaningful justice delivery.

UPSC Relevance

This topic is extremely vital for **UPSC Civil Services Exam** under **General Studies Paper II (Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Quasi-Judicial bodies)**.