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MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



MK Yadav Sir

Table of Contents

1. POEM-3
2. Adjudicating Authority Under PMLA
3. Plastic Overshoot Day Report
4. Invasive Alien Species
5. Baobab Tree
6. Defence Attache (DA)
7. Senior Citizens Act 2007
8. Digi Yatra
9. Comptroller and Auditor General
10. Question Hour

THE HINDU

Page 10

ISRO's 'zero orbital debris' milestone

How did ISRO ensure practically zero debris left in earth orbit after the PSLV-C58/XPoSat mission? What is the purpose and function of the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-3 (POEM-3)? How does it contribute to space debris mitigation efforts? What are the risks space debris poses to space assets?

EXPLAINER

Suchitra Karthikeyan

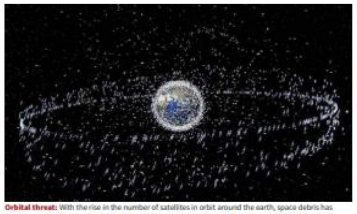
The story so far:

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has said its PSLV-C58/XPoSat mission has practically left zero debris in earth orbit. The space agency explained that the last stage of the Polar Satellite Launch vehicle (PSLV) used in the mission was transformed into a kind of orbital station – called the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-3 (POEM-3) – before it was left to re-enter the earth's atmosphere instead of floating in orbit once its mission was completed. ISRO said that after it completed the primary mission of injecting all satellites into their target orbits, the fourth stage of the PSLV was transformed into the POEM-3. It was subsequently de-orbited from 650 km to 350 km, rendering it more susceptible to being pulled towards the earth and burning up in the atmosphere. ISRO also said it "passivated the stage," meaning dumped its fuel, to avoid an explosion that could have flung small pieces of debris into orbit.

What is POEM?

Developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) as an inexpensive space platform, POEM uses the spent fourth stage of a PSLV rocket as an orbital platform. Used for the first time in the PSLV-C53 mission in June 2022, ISRO had POEM orbit the earth to perform in-orbit scientific experiments with various payloads onboard.

POEM is powered by solar panels mounted on the fuel tank of the rocket's fourth stage and a lithium-ion battery. It has a navigation, guidance, and control (NGC) system to stabilise its altitude along with helium control thrusters. The NGC system has four Sun sensors, a magnetometer, and gyroscopes, and talks to ISRO's NavIC satellite constellation for navigation. POEM also has a telecommand system to communicate with the ground station.



Orbital threat: With the rise in the number of satellites in orbit around the earth, space debris has become a pressing issue. AFP

ISRO first demonstrated the reuse of the spent fourth stage of its rocket in its PSLV C-44 mission in 2019. After satellites were injected into the target orbits, the fourth stage, carrying a student payload called Kalamsat-V2, was moved to a higher circular orbit of 443 km and stayed there, facilitating the payload's requirements.

What has POEM-3 achieved?

ISRO launched the PSLV C-58 mission from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota on January 1.

After deploying the XPoSat satellite in its desired orbit of 650 km, the fourth stage, now called POEM-3, was lowered to a 350-km-high circular orbit. The lower a satellite is in orbit around the earth, the more drag it experiences and the more energy it needs to expend to stay in orbit.

POEM-3 featured nine payloads: two each from VSSC and Bellatrix Aerospace Pvt Ltd, one each from the start-ups TakeMe2Space, Inspecity Space Labs Pvt Ltd., Dhruva Space, and from LBS Institute of Technology, KJ Somaiya Institute of Technology, and ISRO's Physics Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad.

It completed 400 orbits around the earth by its 25th day. The payloads were operationalised to perform their experiments at this time. ARKA200, RUDRA, and LEAP-TD completed their respective experiments while the data from WeSAT, RSEM, and DEX were collected after every orbit for further analysis on the ground. Two fuel cells from VSSC demonstrated their ability to generate power. By January 27, 2024, all of POEM-3's payload objectives were completed.

For two months, POEM-3 prepared for its re-entry while ISRO tracked it with its Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network stations in Bengaluru, Lucknow, Mauritius, Sriharikota, Port Blair, Thiruvananthapuram, Brunei, and Biak (Indonesia) and the Multi-Object Tracking Radar (MOTR) at Sriharikota. On March 21, POEM-3 re-entered the earth's atmosphere, meeting its fiery end.

Why is this significant?

With the rise in the number of satellites in orbit around the earth, space debris has become a pressing issue. Space debris in the low earth orbit (LEO) mainly comprises pieces of spacecraft, rockets, and defunct satellites, and the fragments of objects that have deteriorated explosively as a result of anti-satellite missile tests. This debris often flies around at high speeds of up to 27,000 km/hr. Due to their sheer volume and momentum, they pose a risk to several space assets.

The LEO extends from 100 km above the earth's surface up to 2000 km above. It includes satellites tracking intelligence data, encrypted communication, and navigation. According to ISRO's Space Situational Assessment Report 2022, the world placed 2,533 objects in space in 179 launches in 2022.

Debris also exists, but in smaller volumes, in the geosynchronous orbit (GEO) 36,000 km above the earth's surface. Currently, 7,000 operational satellites are orbiting the earth at different altitudes along with millions of pieces of space debris. The U.S. Space Command tracks and catalogues space debris larger than 10 centimetres in LEO and larger than 0.3-1 metres in GEO.

How are agencies dealing with debris?

The latest incident of space debris causing havoc was recorded on March 8 when a discarded battery pallet dropped by the International Space Station ripped through the roof of a house in Florida.

As more communication satellites/constellations are launched and more anti-satellite tests are conducted, more on-orbit breakup and collisions occur, producing smaller fragments in orbit. The number of space objects (debris or functional equipment) greater than 10 cm in size in LEO is expected to be about 60,000 by 2030, per ISRO estimates. Space debris can also create unusable regions of the orbit where too much debris has accumulated, and which can trigger a cascading avalanche of collisions that produce yet more, but smaller pieces of, debris.

Currently, there are no international space laws pertaining to LEO debris. Most spacefaring nations abide by the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines 2002 specified by the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC), which the U.N. endorsed in 2007.

THE GIST

- ISRO successfully conducted the PSLV-C58/XPoSat mission, deploying the XPoSat satellite into orbit and subsequently transforming the last stage of the PSLV into the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-3 (POEM-3).
- Developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), POEM utilises the spent fourth stage of a PSLV rocket as an orbital platform for scientific experiments.
- POEM-3 completed 400 orbits around the earth, operationalising nine payloads to conduct various experiments before re-entering the earth's atmosphere.
- With the increasing number of satellites in orbit, space debris poses a significant risk to space assets.

Significance

- The increasing number of satellites orbiting Earth has led to a surge in space debris, presenting a significant challenge.
- LEO, where most space debris resides, encompasses crucial satellites for communication, navigation, and intelligence gathering, making debris mitigation imperative.
- Space debris in LEO hurtles at extraordinary speeds, up to 27,000 kilometres per hour, posing a substantial threat to operational satellites due to their sheer momentum and volume.

POEM - 3

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Sci and Tech)

Context: Recently, ISRO's PSLV-C58/XPoSat mission effectively eliminated debris in Earth's orbit by converting the final stage into the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-3 (POEM-3), which safely re-entered the atmosphere after completing its mission.

PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-3 (POEM-3)

- **About**: It is India's cost-effective space platform created from the spent PS4 stage of the PSLV-C58 vehicle, which successfully launched XPoSat on January 1, 2024.
- **Launched by**: PSLV-C58 vehicle
- **Objectives**: Deploying XPoSat into a 650 km orbit, followed by a descent to a 350 km circular orbit to minimize orbit decay time post-experiment completion.
- It is a **three-axis-attitude controlled platform equipped with power generation**, telecommand & telemetry capabilities to support various payloads.
- **Orbital**: By its 25th day in orbit, POEM-3 completed 400 orbits and currently orbits at approximately 322 km by 352 km.
- **Payload Operations**: POEM-3 carried nine payloads from VSSC, PRL, Academia, and Space start-ups through IN-SPACe. All payloads, including ARKA200, RUDRA, LEAP-TD, WeSAT, BeliefSat0, RSEM, DEX, 100 W Fuel Cell Power System, and Si-C based High Power Li-Ion Battery, met their objectives with data collection during every orbit.
- **Debris-Free Mission**: With POEM-3's anticipated orbital decay and re-entry in three months, the PSLV-C58 XPoSat mission stands out for leaving zero debris in space, contributing to responsible space exploration practices.

INDIAN EXPRESS

Page 12

ADJUDICATING AUTHORITY UNDER PMLA

(Syllabus GS Paper 3 – Economy)

ADJUDICATING AUTHORITY (PMLA)

The ED's attachment of National Herald's assets has been confirmed. What happens now?

THE ADJUDICATING Authority under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) has confirmed the attachment of assets worth Rs 751.9 crore of the Congress-promoted *National Herald* newspaper.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) had provisionally attached these properties in November 2023 in a case against Associated Journals Ltd (AJL) that publishes *National Herald*, and Young Indian (YI), which owns the newspaper. Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi hold 38% shares each in YI, which is being investigated after accusations that it acquired AJL and its assets for a "pittance" against an alleged loan extended by the Congress.

Adjudicating Authority

Section 5 of the PMLA provides for the attachment of any property that is suspected to have been acquired with the proceeds of crime. The attachment order is issued if the ED Director feels that "such proceeds of crime are likely to be concealed, transferred or dealt with in any manner which may result in frustrating any proceedings relating to confiscation of such proceeds of crime".

This provisional attachment order must be confirmed within 180 days by an Adjudicating Authority appointed by the central government, failing which the property is automatically released. But there is hardly any attachment under PMLA that the Adjudicating Authority refuses to confirm. The accused can continue to enjoy the property until the Adjudicating Authority confirms the attachment.

What happens afterward

The accused can challenge the confirmation order at the PMLA's Appellate Tribunal within 45 days. If unsuccessful, the accused can then move the High Court.

Unless the property is released along the way, it remains out of bounds for the owner until the trial is completed. In case of a conviction, the trial court may order confiscation of the attached property, and vest its rights to the central government.

Attached properties may remain locked for years and start to decay and crumble. Attached vehicles are sent to warehouses owned by the Central Warehousing Corporation, where the ED pays to park the vehicle. As cases drag on, these vehicles too rot. In the end, neither the accused nor the ED recovers anything from the vehicle, with the agency often paying up more rent than the value of the vehicle. ENS

Context: The Adjudicating Authority under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) recently confirmed the attachment of assets worth Rs 751.9 crore belonging to the Congress party-promoted National Herald newspaper.

Adjudicating Authority Under PMLA

- **About:** It appointed by the central government plays a crucial role in confirming provisional attachment orders issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
- **Validity Period of Attachment Orders**: Provisional attachment orders issued by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) Director remain valid for a duration of 180 days.
- **Release of Property in Absence of Confirmation**: If the provisional attachment order is not confirmed within the stipulated timeframe, the property automatically gets released from attachment.
- **Continued Enjoyment of Property**: During the period of provisional attachment, the accused retains the right to enjoy the property until confirmation by the Adjudicating Authority.
- **ED's Power upon Confirmation**: Upon confirmation of attachment by the Adjudicating Authority, the ED gains the authority to claim possession of the attached property.

After Confirmation of Attachment by Adjudicating Authority

- **Right to Challenge at PMLA's Appellate Tribunal**: The accused can challenge the Adjudicating Authority's confirmation order within 45 days at the PMLA's Appellate Tribunal.
- **Escalation to High Court**: If the Appellate Tribunal confirms the order, the accused can escalate the appeal to the High Court.
- **Status of Attached Property**: Unless released, the attached property remains inaccessible to the owner until trial completion.
- **Vacating Premises**: Upon final confirmation, for residential properties, the ED demands the owner to vacate along with belongings, taking over possession.
- **Confiscation upon Conviction**: In case of conviction, trial courts may order confiscation, vesting property rights with the central government.

DTE

Apr 11

PLASTIC OVERSHOOT DAY REPORT

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

220 million tonnes of plastic waste will be created in 2024: EA Earth Action

Context: A recent study has revealed that in 2024, a staggering 220 million tonnes of plastic waste are poised to be generated.

Key Findings of Plastic Overshoot Day Report

- **Steady Rise in Plastic Waste**: Plastic waste has been increasing steadily at a rate of nearly 10% (7.11% specifically) since 2021.
- **Global Average Plastic Waste Per Person**: The projected global average plastic waste per person for this year is expected to rise to 28 kilograms.
- **Concentration of Responsibility**: Just 12 countries are responsible for 60% of the world's mismanaged plastic waste, with the top five being China, USA, India, Brazil, and Mexico, according to the Plastic Overshoot Day report released by Swiss non-profit EA Earth Action.
- **Expanded Scope of Analysis**: This year's report includes plastic waste from the textile industry and household waste in addition to plastic packaging waste, unlike last year's inaugural report, which focused solely on plastic packaging waste.

Plastic Overshoot Day

- **About:** It marks the point when the amount of plastic waste generated exceeds the world's capacity to manage it, resulting in environmental pollution.
- **National Plastic Overshoot Days**: Each country has its own Plastic Overshoot Day, which is determined by the amount of plastic waste generated and the country's capacity to manage it.
- **Country Archetypes**: To facilitate targeted and effective solutions, 6 country archetypes have been established.
- **Factors Considered**: The profiling of countries is based on factors such as local per capita plastic consumption, the import and export volumes of waste, and the country's waste treatment capabilities.

Plastic

- **Characteristic**: Plastic encompasses primarily of polymers.
- **Material Source and Composition**: chemicals based on fossil fuels, such as natural gas or petroleum.
- **Plastic Waste**: According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), out of the 9.2 billion tonnes of plastic produced from 1950 to 2017, approximately 7 billion tonnes became waste, either in landfills or discarded.
- **Plastic Waste in India:** India has a population of more than 1.4 billion and generates 26,000 tonnes of plastic waste every day.

INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)



Like chital in Andamans: How invasive species threaten natural ecosystems

NIKHIL GHANEKAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

IN A bid to manage the teeming population of *chital* (spotted deer) in Ross Island, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration recently sought help from the Wildlife Institute of India. Native to mainland India, *chital* were brought to the Andamans by British game hunters in the early 20th century. Having no natural predators or competitors, the deer have spread across the islands.

EXPLAINED BIODIVERSITY

Over the past two decades, studies have examined the herbivores' deleterious impact on the Andamans' native flora and fauna.

What are invasive alien species?

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines invasive alien species (IAS) as "species whose introduction and/or spread outside their natural distribution threatens biological diversity". These include animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms.

The CBD, the United Nations' global treaty on safeguarding biological diversity, sums up characteristics of IAS as follows: "arrive, survive and thrive". This means that these species are introduced either through natural or human intervention, survive on native food resources, reproduce at a fast rate, and eventually edge out native species.

In India, the legal definition of IAS under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (amended in 2022), is narrower. They are defined as "species of animal or plant which is not native to India, and whose introduction or spread may threaten or adversely impact wildlife or its habitat." This leaves out species within India which might be invasive to a particular region – like the *chital* in Andamans.

What are some examples of IAS in India?

The list of invasive wildlife in India is dominated by certain fish species such as the African catfish, Nile tilapia, red-bellied piranha, and alligator gar, and turtle species such as red-eared slider.

The red-eared slider, for instance, is a favourite among India's exotic pet owners, and many have been abandoned in local water bodies. The turtle, native to North America, edges out local freshwater species, owing to their fast rates of reproduction, and subsequent competition for food.

Many invasive fish species, such as the African catfish, were introduced in India to cater to aquarium owners.

How do IAS impact native species?

K Sivakumar, a professor in the Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Pondicherry University, said that invasive species act as disruptors in the food chain and disturb the balance of the ecosystem. In habitats where there is no competition, invasive species can dominate the entire ecosystem, he added.

For instance, "in Keoladeo Park, Bharatpur in Rajasthan, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, the African catfish has been known to prey on water fowl and migratory birds as well," Professor Sivakumar said.

Studies have shown that the proliferation of chital in the Andamans has affected the regeneration of native vegetation, as the deer are known to consume seeds and seedlings.

What are IAS' economic impact?

In September 2023, the UN-founded Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) brought out a report on invasive species which showed that around 37,000 established alien species were introduced worldwide, with roughly 200 new alien species introduced each year.

The global economic cost of IAS was over $423 billion annually in 2019. These costs arise out of the damage IAS inflict on an area's natural ecosystem. For example, as per India's National Biodiversity Authority, the cotton mealy bug (*Phenacoccus solenopsis*), an invasive species from North America, has severely affected cotton crops in the Deccan, leading to yield losses.

(*From left*) Red-bellied piranha, from South America; red-eared slider, from North America; and chital. *Wikimedia Commons*

Context: In a bid to manage the teeming population of chital (spotted deer) in Ross Island, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration recently sought help from the Wildlife Institute of India.

Invasive Alien Species

- **About**: Invasive alien species (IAS) are defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as species whose introduction and/or spread outside their natural past or present distribution threatens biological diversity.
- **Scope**: IAS encompass animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms, affecting various ecosystems.
- **Characteristics**: According to the CBD, IAS exhibit the traits of "arrive, survive, and thrive," needing introduction, native food resources, fast reproduction, and outcompeting native species.
- **Legal Definition in India**: India's Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (amended in 2022), defines IAS more narrowly as species not native to India, whose introduction or spread may threaten wildlife or its habitat.
- **Exclusion of Regional Invasives:** The Indian definition excludes species within India that may be invasive to specific regions, like the chital in the Andamans, which are protected in mainland India but pose a threat in the island chain.
- **Examples:** African catfish, Nile tilapia, red-bellied piranha, and alligator gar, and turtle species such as the red-eared slider.

Impact on Native Flora and Fauna:

- In the absence of competition, invasive species can dominate entire ecosystems, altering their dynamics.
- The African catfish in Keoladeo Park, Bharatpur, preys on water fowls and migratory birds, illustrating the direct impact of invasive species on native fauna.
- **Economic Impact of Invasive Alien Species**
- The IPBES report highlights that approximately 37,000 established alien species have been introduced worldwide, with around 200 new alien species added annually.
- The proliferation of invasive species can result in significant economic losses due to damage to agriculture, infrastructure, and ecosystems.

DTE Apr 11

BAOBAB TREE
(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

Baobab reforestation efforts show rapid impact in Madagascar

Context: In a groundbreaking conservation endeavour, the Global Society for the Preservation of Baobabs and Mangroves (GSPBM) has initiated a mission to rejuvenate the iconic baobab trees.

Baobab Tree

- **About**: The baobab tree, also known as the upside-down tree, belongs to the Adansonia genus within the Malvaceae family, subfamily Bombacoideae.
- **Distribution**: Nine species of baobab trees exist, with two native to mainland Africa, six to Madagascar, and one to Australia. Mandu, in Madhya Pradesh, India, is a notable area where baobabs thrive.
- **Features:**
  - Baobabs are characterized by their longevity, with some living for thousands of years.
  - They possess massive, bottle-shaped or cylindrical trunks with faint growth rings and compact tops.
  - The fruit of the baobab tree is highly nutritious and either round or oval-shaped.
  - It is renowned as the 'Tree of Life'.
- **Ecological Significance**:
  - Baobabs play a crucial role as keystone species in Madagascar's landscapes.
  - Their large trunks and extensive root systems store water, providing a vital resource during droughts.
  - This water storage capacity supports diverse life forms, contributing to biodiversity in baobab habitats.



BUSINESS STANDARD

Apr 11

DEFENCE ATTACHE (DA)

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – IR)

India posts defence attaches to several new nations for 1st time

Context: In a significant step to broaden strategic relationships with key global regions, India has initiated the appointment of military and defense attachés to numerous new countries.

Defence Attache (DA)

- **About:** It is a representative of a country's defense establishment stationed in an embassy abroad, tasked with promoting and safeguarding defense interests.
- **Expertise and Appointment**: Typically a high-ranking military officer, the DA is a military expert attached to a diplomatic mission, maintaining their commission while serving in this capacity.
- **Diversity and Representation**: While the term DA encompasses all branches of the armed services, larger nations may appoint attaches specifically representing individual branches such as air force or navy.
- **Responsibilities**: The primary responsibility of a DA is to protect, develop, and advocate for their country's defense interests in the host nation, as well as fostering bilateral military relations.
- **Specialized Assignments**: Some DAs are deployed for specific tasks, such as addressing migration issues, and may participate in military missions with organizations like NATO, the EU, or the UN.
- **Leadership and Multilateral Engagement**: When serving on military deployments, DAs often operate as mission heads or military advisors, with assignments commonly involving multilateral cooperation.
- **Diplomatic Status**: The **Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961**, grants DAs diplomatic immunity, considering them as members of the diplomatic staff.

TIMES OF INDIA

Page 9

SENIOR CITIZENS ACT 2007

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Vulnerable Sections of India)

Senior Citizens Act not a tool to settle property row: HC

Swati.Deshpande
@timesgroup.com



Getty Images

The Act seeks to ensure that elderly parents are restored residence rights in the house that was gifted to children, HC said

Mumbai: Bombay high court held that the basic idea behind Senior Citizens Act is not to nullify a validly executed gift deed, but to ensure that the elderly parents are restored the residence rights in the house that was gifted to the child/ren.

The judgment is significant, said legal experts. HC single-judge bench of Justice S V Marne on April 10 set aside an Oct 31, 2022, order of a senior citizens Maintenance Tribunal that had set aside three gift deeds by a widower for his share in Mumbai flats at Kandivli and Andheri to one of his three sons. The tribunal had also directed the son to vacate two Kandivli flats with his family.

HC said the objective under section 23 (1) of Senior Citizens Act of 2007, a socio-welfare legislation, in enabling a tribunal to revoke such a gift is based on the intent to ensure the elderly's basic needs are protected. The tribunal ought to have ensured the dad is looked after rather than revoke gift deeds, said the bench. Noting that the son was willing to let the dad reside with him and his wife and children in Kandivli, but relations had soured, the HC directed the father to reside separately in an Andheri flat.

HC also directed the son to pay a monthly maintenance of Rs 25,000 to the father.

The father, represented by counsel Ameet Mehta and Sheetal Pandya, in April 2021, complained to the tribunal, alleging ill-treatment by the son after execution of the deeds. He said he was "forced" to reside in Gujarat with another son.

Aggrieved by the tribunal's order, the son had earlier this year approached HC. Senior counsel G S Godbole with advocate Manuj Borkar for the son argued that the magistrate lacked jurisdiction to set aside the gift deeds and argued that the son was one-third owner in the Andheri flat and cannot be kicked out.

Justice Marne observed that the salutary senior citizens law cannot be used as a tool to settle property disputes between heirs, but in many cases, unfortunately, that is the trend.

Under section 23 (1) of Sr Citizens' Act, a gift deed, which is made subject to conditions that the gifting parent should be looked after, can be held null or void by a tribunal if the giftee neglects the parent. HC, however, said that what the Tribunal exercising jurisdiction needs to see is whether the gift deed establishes such a condition of providing 'basic amenities', even if it is not spelt out in the document.

Context: The Bombay High Court recently affirmed that the Senior Citizens Act aims not to void validly executed gift deeds but to reinstate the residence rights of elderly parents in homes gifted to their children.

The Senior Citizens Act 2007

- **About:** It encompasses legislation aimed at safeguarding the rights, welfare, and well-being of elderly individuals within society.
- **Determining Senior Citizenship**: The designation of senior citizenship varies globally, often beginning at ages 60 or 65, though specifics can differ based on regional regulations.
- **Legal Obligation for Support**: The Act legally obliges adult children and heirs to provide a monthly allowance for parents.
- **Definition of Parents**: According to the Act, parents encompass biological, adoptive, or step-parents.
- **Protection of Life and Property**: The Act includes provisions to safeguard the life and property of elderly individuals.
- **Legal Provisions**: The Senior Citizens Act typically includes legal provisions ensuring access to healthcare, financial assistance, and protections against elder abuse, though specifics vary by jurisdiction.

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019

- **Expansion of Definition**: The Bill expands the definition of children to include step-children, adoptive children, children-in-law, and legal guardians of minor children.
- **Removal of Upper Limit:** Under the Act, Maintenance Tribunals can direct children to pay a maximum of Rs 10,000 per month as maintenance to their parents; however, the Bill eliminates this upper limit.
- **Extension of Appeal Rights**: While the Act allows senior citizens to appeal Tribunal decisions, the Bill extends this right to children and relatives as well.
- **Enforcement Measures**: The Bill empowers Tribunals to issue warrants for the levy of due maintenance amounts, and failure to comply may result in imprisonment for up to one month or until payment is made.
- **Regulation of Care Facilities**: Introducing regulations, the Bill addresses the oversight of private care-homes for senior citizens and institutions offering home-care services.

LIVEMINT Page 9

DIGI YATRA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Gov Initiatives/Policies)

14 airports set for Digi Yatra rollout



The Digi Yatra facility is currently available at 14 airports for domestic passengers. HT

Digi Yatra is likely to be rolled out at 14 more airports by the end of this month and efforts are on to make the facility more user friendly with certain changes in the architecture, according to a top executive.

Based on Facial Recognition Technology (FRT), Digi Yatra provides for contactless, seamless movement of passengers at various check points at airports and currently, there are nearly 5 million users.

The facility is now there at 14 airports for domestic passengers and discussions are ongoing with various stakeholders concerned to make it available for international travellers as well.

Digi Yatra Foundation CEO Suresh Khadakbhavi told *PTI* that Digi Yatra is expected to be available at 14 more airports by the end of April. A not-for-profit entity, the foundation is the nodal agency for Digi Yatra, which was introduced in December 2022.

The 14 new airports where the facility is to be rolled out soon are Bagdogra, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Chennai, Coimbatore, Dabolim, Indore, Mangalore, Patna, Raipur, Ranchi, Srinagar, Trivandrum and Vishakhapatnam. PTI

Benefits

- Pax need not show boarding pass or ID at multiple check points.
- Minimum human intervention. Less queuing time.
- The security is enhanced as the system will map the passenger with the PNR. Only bona fide passenger will be allowed entry at every check point.
- Airport operator will have real time information on Passenger load and resource planning becomes better.
- Airlines will be benefitted by knowing the passenger position in the airport.

Context: Digi Yatra is poised to expand to 14 additional airports by the end of this month, with ongoing efforts to enhance user-friendliness through architectural modifications, as stated by a top executive.

Digi Yatra

- **About:** It is an industry-led initiative co-ordinated by the Ministry in line with the Prime Minister of India's Digital India's vision to transform the nation into a digitally empowered society.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Civil Aviation
- **4 Key Pillars:** Connected Passengers, Connected Airports, Connected Flying and Connected Systems
- **Joint Venture:** AAI (26% share) and 5 Airports (BIAL, DIAL, GHIAL, MIAL and CIAL).
- **Objective:**
  - Provide a simple and easy experience to all air travelers.
  - Utilize existing infrastructure efficiently through a "Digital Framework."
  - Result in reduced operational costs.
  - Replace current manual processes with digital ones for enhanced efficiency.
  - Improve current system performance to elevate security standards.

TIMES OF INDIA

Page 1

COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Polity)



It's TN versus CAG as state repatriates senior audit officer

Removed After 'Unscheduled Sudden Meet'

New Delhi: A confrontation appears to be brewing between the Tamil Nadu govt and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) after the former abruptly removed its director general (DG) of audit, a senior CAG official on deputation, on April 1 after he was called for an "unscheduled sudden meeting" by the state's finance secretary, **reports Pradeep Thakur.**

DG audit D Jaisankar has written to the CAG that he was repatriated after he objected to the manner in which fund audit authorities at district levels had settled 300-400 audit objections in one hour at joint sittings: an exercise which was "unconvincing and unjustified".

DIFFERENT TAKES

- **DG audit D Jaisankar writes to CAG** that he was repatriated after he objected to manner in which **fund audit authorities at TN dist levels settled 300-400 audit objections in an hour,** which was 'unconvincing and unjustified'
- **TN finance secy** justifies repatriation, **saying DG had issued orders in violation of rules,** which 'caused irreparable damage' to the functioning of various local bodies in the state

At the "sudden" meet in Chennai on April 1, the audit officer was asked by the finance secretary to withdraw his orders related to "settlement of audit objections". When he refused, the DG was repatriated to his parent cadre.

▶ 'Near standstill', P 11

Context: A brewing confrontation recently surfaced between the Tamil Nadu government and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) following the sudden removal of its deputed senior official amidst an unplanned meeting on April 1st by the state's finance secretary.

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)

- **Constitutional Body**: The **Constitution of India (Article 148) provides for an independent office** of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).
- **Appointment**: The CAG is **appointed by the President of India** by a warrant under his hand and seal. He is **not eligible for further office**, either under the Government of India or of any state, after he ceases to hold his office.
- **Term of office**: The CAG holds office for a **period of six years or up to the age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier. He can resign any time from his office by addressing the **resignation letter to the president.**
- **Removal**: He can be removed by the president **on the basis of a resolution passed to that effect by both the Houses of Parliament with special majority,** either on the ground of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.
  - He can be removed by the president **on the same grounds and in the same manner as a judge of the Supreme Court.**

Duties of CAG

- The CAG conducts audits on expenditures from the Consolidated Fund of India, the consolidated fund of each state, and the consolidated fund of each union territory with a Legislative Assembly.
- Auditing extends to the Contingency Fund of India, the Public Account of India, as well as the contingency fund and public account of each state.
- In an advisory capacity, the CAG provides guidance to the President on the prescribed form in which the accounts of the Centre and states should be maintained.
- Audit reports related to the accounts of the Centre and state are submitted to the President and governor respectively.

LIVEMINT

Page 13

QUESTION HOUR

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Polity)

Question hour: Have opposition parties done well in Parliament?

Analysis reveals differences between the NDA and UPA in their use of a device designed to hold the government accountable



YUGANK GOYAL & SHREYAS RAMKUMAR

are, respectively, an associate professor and founder-director of Centre for Knowledge Alternatives at Flame University, and a student at Flame University.

The right to question

In opposition, the BJP (and NDA) asked more Lok Sabha questions of the ruling Congress (and UPA) in 10 years than it was asked by the latter after the 2014 power switch, although the scale tilts the other way on queries in proportion to MPs

Lok Sabha	Percentage of questions by opposition	Opposition
14	67	NDA et al
15	63	NDA et al
16	31	UPA et al
17	51	UPA et al

Lok Sabha	Party	Seats	Questions	Questions per seat
14	BJP	138	647	4.69
15	BJP	116	570	4.91
16	INC	44	276	6.27
17	INC	52	368	7.08
14	CPIM	43	210	4.88
16	CPIM	9	70	7.78
17	CPIM	3	23	7.67
14	SP	36	127	3.53
15	SP	23	72	3.13
16	SP	5	24	4.80
17	SP	5	1	0.20

mint

Source: Authors' research, Lok Sabha data

Question Hour (QH) is a powerful tool in the hands of the Legislature to question the Executive. In India, each Lok Sabha session begins with the QH from 11am till noon, in which parliamentarians pose a range of questions for various ministers to answer on a range of policy matters. The questions need to be given around two weeks in advance, so the ministers who respond have adequate time to prepare their answers. Televising this hour can also mean significant electoral gains and losses. Despite the large amount of policy and political information it generates, the QH has not been subject to much scholarly or data-driven media scrutiny.

As the country approaches general elections to the next Lok Sabha, we thought it relevant to explore the data on all the 'starred' (oral) questions asked during the last four Lok Sabha terms and look for underlying patterns. Insofar as QH reflects legislative inquiries of the executive, such an analysis can reveal party dispositions and how queries are distributed across ministries.

Note that QH is used by not just the opposition, but also the ruling party. This is because the latter may use it as an opportunity to highlight its strengths. To draw the essence of QH in advancing democratic ideals, however, we focus on questions from opposition parties and members. We only look at unique questions—those asked by only one member and are non-supplementary. These account for 80%-plus of all oral questions. Interesting patterns emerge. In the last four Lok Sabhas, there were about 10,000 questions asked during QH: 2,466, 2,059, 2,864 and 2,347 respectively, with opposition parties asking 67%, 63%, 31% and 51% of these. Clearly, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was a more 'pronounced' opposition than the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Specifically, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which leads the NDA, asked 1,217 questions during the 2004-14 decade, when the UPA was in power at the Centre. The UPA leader, the Indian National Congress (INC), asked only 644 questions during 2014-24, the span in which the current BJP government has been in power. But this may simply be reflective of their respective strengths in the Lok Sabha. The BJP had an average of 127 seats during the period of 2004 to 2014, while the INC's average from 2014 to 2024 was just 52.

Therefore, to effectively examine the opposition's role, we need to adjust for total seats in opposition, and also go beyond the BJP-INC rivalry. A questions-per-seat calculation yields a measure for how effective the opposition has been in the context of asking questions. From the data, it is clear that the opposition was weakest in 2014-19, when its share of questions was less than its share of seats (its questions-per-seat was 0.85). This measure took the value of 1.15 and 1.21 during 2004-09 and 2009-14 respectively, and 1.37 in 2019-24, indicating strong opposition in the latest Lok Sabha. Note, however, that a decision to give the floor to a Member of Parliament (MP) is largely up to the Speaker of the House.

We can analyse this for each party. Adjusting for party size, we look at the number of 'questions per MP' from a party to see how each party fared during QH while in opposition. The graph above is instructive. The BJP, for instance, was a 'quieter' opposition during 2004-14 than the INC was in 2014-24. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was the 'loudest' and its questioning has increased over the years. The Telugu Desam Party and Shiv Sena were very strong during QH in 2004-09, but their questioning weakened in the next Lok Sabha (even though they remained strong overall). The Biju Janata Dal has played a consistent role as an opposition party, although it has also quietened during later Lok Sabhas. The Samajwadi Party, while asking most questions in 2014-19, seems to have fizzled out on this front in 2019-24.

Since opposition parties use QH to scrutinize specific ministries, the data also reveals which of these faced the most opposition QH queries as well as trends in the share of questions directed at the 'most scrutinized' of them. The numbers show that as an opposition alliance, the NDA was especially focused on questioning ministries for the petroleum sector, human resource development, agriculture and commerce and industry under the ruling UPA coalition of 2004-14. Interestingly, when power changed hands in 2014, so did the direction of questions, which focused thereafter more on matters related to health, finance and rural development. This data is also reflective of the nature of policies that may have been put in place by the respective ruling coalitions, and is therefore a useful signal of the changing policy landscape at the national level.

There is a compelling case for extending this research to include state-level legislative assemblies, and perhaps making a metric to estimate a party's opposition performance within state Houses of representation.

Research on the Lok Sabha's QH, though still in its infancy, holds critical importance in the national context. It informs people of the role that representatives have played in using a device designed to hold the Executive accountable and keep ministries on their toes. Questions posed on behalf of people lend dynamism to the business of legislation, which is crucial for policymaking. QH research will hopefully raise the sensitivity of parties to how voters may be appraising their performance.

QUICK READ

The BJP raised 1,217 Question Hour queries during the decade that the Congress was in power while the latter asked 644 from 2014 to 2024, though it also had far fewer seats in the Lok Sabha.

The ministries that were put to most scrutiny in Parliament saw a significant shift after the BJP won power in 2014. This may partly reflect changing policies in the country's political focus.

The right to question

In opposition, the BJP (and NDA) asked more Lok Sabha questions of the ruling Congress (and UPA) in 10 years than it was asked by the latter after the 2014 power switch, although the scale tilts the other way on queries in proportion to MPs

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Context: Analysis of the utilization of the Question Hour (QH) highlights distinct approaches between the NDA and UPA, showcasing variations in holding the Executive accountable through legislative interrogation.

Question Hour in Parliament

- **Definition**: The first hour of every parliamentary sitting, where MPs pose questions to ministers to hold them accountable.
- **Regulation**: Governed by parliamentary rules, with presiding officers of both Houses having final authority.
- **Timing**: Each Lok Sabha session in India initiates with the Question Hour (QH) from 11 am till noon.
- **Parliamentary Engagement**: During the Question Hour, parliamentarians pose inquiries to various ministers on a variety of policy matters.
- **Preparation Period**: Questions for the Question Hour need to be submitted around two weeks in advance. This allows ministers sufficient time to prepare their responses..
- **Information Generation:** The Question Hour generates a substantial amount of policy and political information.
- **Kinds of Questions:**
  - **Starred questions**: Require oral answers and allow for supplementary questions.
  - **Unstarred questions**: Demand written answers, disallowing supplementary questions.
  - **Short notice questions**: Asked with less than ten days notice and are answered orally.

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