



Current Affairs of the Day

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UN makes public third communication on J&K

- United Nations Special Rapporteurs have made public their third communication forwarded to India since the August 5, 2019, decision to revoke Jammu and Kashmir's special status, expressing "grave concern over alleged excessive use of force, ill-treatment during arrests and detentions".
- Four rapporteurs had forwarded a joint communication to India on May 4, 2020 — on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions; on minority issues; and on freedom of religion or belief — and made it public recently, after 60 days of response time.

'Quorum not needed for routine panel meetings'

- Contradicting the Opposition's argument for virtual meetings of **standing committees** to ensure quorum during deliberations, officials at the Rajya Sabha Secretariat have said that quorum is essential only when the committees take decisions or adopt reports and not during routine deliberations.

Value Added Information

What are parliamentary committees?

- Parliament is the embodiment of the people's will. Committees are an *instrument of Parliament for its own effective functioning*.
- Committees are *platforms for threadbare discussion on a proposed law*.
- The *smaller cohort of lawmakers*, assembled on the basis of the proportional strength of individual parties and interests and expertise of individual lawmakers, could have more open, intensive and better-informed discussions.
- Committee meetings are '*closed door*' and *members are not bound by party whips*, which allows them the latitude for a more meaningful exchange of views as against discussions in full and open Houses where grandstanding and party positions invariably take precedence.



- Members of Parliament may have great acumen but they would **require the assistance of experts in dealing with such situations**. It is through committees that such expertise is drawn into lawmaking.
- Executive accountability to the legislature is enforced through questions in Parliament also, which are answered by ministers. However, department standing committees go one step further and hear from senior officials of the government in a closed setting, **allowing for more detailed discussions**.
- This mechanism also enables parliamentarians to **understand the executive processes closely**.

What are the types of committees?

- Most committees are '**standing**' as their existence is uninterrupted and usually reconstituted on an annual basis; some are '**select**' committees formed for a specific purpose, for instance, to deliberate on a particular bill. Once the Bill is disposed of, that select committee ceases to exist. Some **standing committees** are departmentally related.
- Financial control is a critical tool for Parliament's authority over the executive; hence **finance committees** are considered to be particularly powerful. **The three financial committees are** the Public Accounts Committee, the Estimates Committee and the Committee on Public Undertakings.

Powers:

- Parliamentary committees draw their authority from **Article 105 (on privileges of Parliament members) and Article 118 (on Parliament's authority to make rules for regulating its procedure and conduct of business)**.

Significance:

- Committee reports are usually exhaustive and provide authentic information on matters related to governance. Bills that are referred to committees are returned to the House with significant value addition. Parliament is not bound by the recommendations of committees.



What these committees do?

- Support Parliament's work.
- Examine ministerial budgets, consider Demands for Grants, analyse legislation and scrutinise the government's working.
- Examine Bills referred to by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or the Speaker, Lok Sabha.
- Consideration of Annual Reports.
- Consideration of national basic long term policy documents presented to the House and referred to the Committee by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or the Speaker, Lok Sabha.

Advantages of having such committees:

- The deliberations and scrutiny by committees ensure that Parliament is able to fulfil some of its constitutional obligations in a politically charged environment.
- They also help in obtaining public feedback and building political consensus on contentious issues.
- They help develop expertise in subjects, and enable consultation with independent experts and stakeholders.
- The committees perform their functions without the cloud of political positioning and populist opinion.
- These committees allow the views of diverse stakeholders.
- They function through the year.
- They also offer an opportunity for detailed scrutiny of bills being piloted by the government.
- They increase the efficiency and expertise of Parliament.
- Their reports allow for informed debate in Parliament.

How can these committees be made more effective?

- Parliamentary committees don't have dedicated subject-wise research support available. The knowledge gap is partially bridged by expert



testimony from government and other stakeholders. Their work could be made more effective if the committees had *full-time, sector-specific research staff*.

- The national commission to review the working of the Constitution has recommended that in order to strengthen the committee system, *research support should be made available to them*.
- Currently, the rules of Parliament don't require every bill to be referred to a parliamentary committee for scrutiny. While this allows the government greater flexibility and the ability to speed up legislative business, it comes at the cost of ineffective scrutiny by the highest law-making body. *Mandatory scrutiny of all bills by parliamentary committees would ensure better planning of legislative business*.

UAE in support of open skies agreement with India

Key Points:

- The UAE is keen to have an open sky agreement with India, its Ambassador to India A.R. Albanna said.

Bilateral agreement:

- There are about 1,068 flights a week between India and the UAE operated by the airlines of the two countries under the bilateral Air Service Agreement.
- India has a open skies policy with SAARC countries and those beyond the 5,000-km radius, which implies that nations within this distance need to enter into a bilateral agreement and mutually determine the number of flights that their airlines can operate between the two countries.
- It is this policy that the Ambassador wants India to revisit.

Interest threatened:

- Mr. Albanna sought to underline that this would not bestow the capability to operate flights from one country and fly them to a third country, which is also referred to as fifth and six freedoms of air, and where the interest of Indian airlines will be threatened by carriers like Emirates and Etihad.



Rental housing scheme for migrants cleared

Key Points:

- A scheme for providing affordable rental housing to about 3 lakh urban migrants was approved by the Union Cabinet.
- The creation of affordable rental housing complexes was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on May 14 as a part of the package to address the COVID-19 crisis.
- At a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Cabinet approved the scheme, which will be a sub-scheme of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban that is implemented by the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry.
- About 1.03 lakh completed government-funded houses across cities that were yet to be allotted to beneficiaries under existing schemes would be converted into the rental housing complexes, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said at a press briefing. He said the urban local bodies in cities would decide the rent amount.
- The vacant housing complexes would be converted through 25-year concession agreements, a statement said.
- It added that the target beneficiaries would be workers who come from rural areas or towns to work in manufacturing, hospitality, health, construction, etc.

Navy concludes Samudra Setu

Key Points:

- Operation Samudra Setu, which was launched by the Navy on May 5 as part of the national effort to repatriate Indian citizens abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic, has culminated after successfully bringing back 3,992 individuals, the Navy said on Wednesday.
- Landing Platform Dock INS Jalashwa and Landing Ship Tanks INS Airavat, Shardul and Magar participated in this operation that lasted over 55 days and involved traversing more than 23,000 km by sea, the Navy said in a statement. The evacuated Indians disembarked at Kochi, Thoothukudi and Porbandhar.



Previous Operations:

- The Navy has previously undertaken similar evacuation operations as part of **Operation Sukoon in 2006 (Beirut)** and **Operation Rahat in 2015 (Yemen)**.

Indian trawlers are back, say Sri Lanka's fishermen

Key Points:

- Sri Lanka's northern fishermen have reported a "sudden increase" in the number of Indian trawlers being spotted in the island's territorial waters, flagging an old problem that seriously impaired their post-war recovery.
- Fishermen along the northern coast of Jaffna Peninsula, especially Point Pedro, have complained to northern Fisheries authorities about their nets being found damaged in the sea, after being caught under the large Indian trawlers that were reportedly in Sri Lanka's territorial waters.
- Familiar with the brutal impact that Indian trawlers had on their fish production and the marine habitat in the post-war decade — scooping out marine organisms, including fishes and prawns — the northern Tamil fishermen fear that their livelihoods, now under strain due to the coronavirus pandemic that has impaired exports, would be further hit by the trawlers. The Indo-Lanka fisheries conflict became a strain on the countries' bilateral ties, with talks at the highest levels and among fisher leaders on both sides proving futile for years.
- After some respite in the last couple of years, since Sri Lanka introduced tougher laws banning bottom-trawling, and heavy fines for trespassing foreign vessels, the reappearance of Indian vessels along their shores has come as a shock, fisher leader said. While the Sri Lankan Navy arrested over 450 Indian fishermen in 2017, they arrested only 156 in 2018 on charges of poaching. A total of 210 arrests were made in 2019, while 34 have been made so far in 2020.