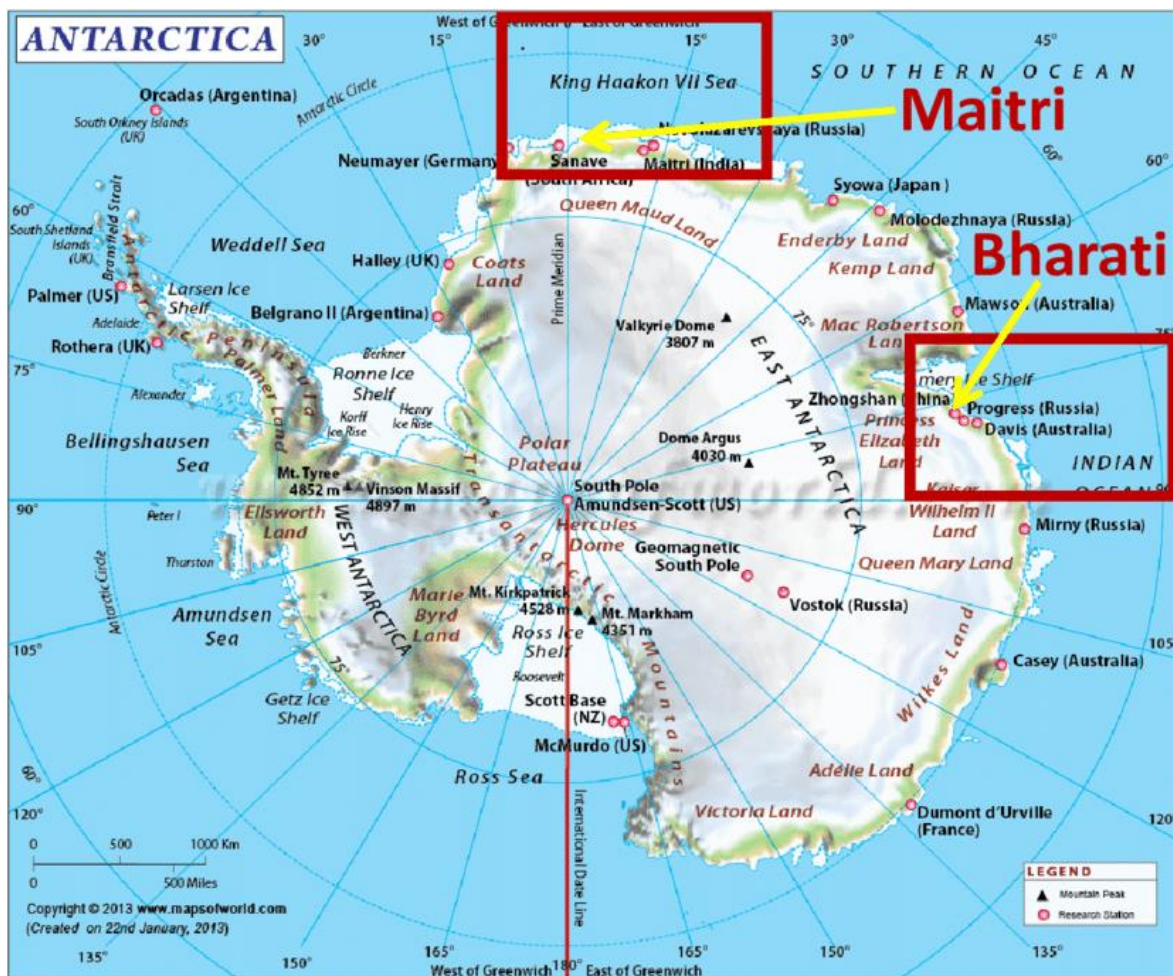




Current Affairs of the Day

Center introduces Antarctica Bill



1. The government introduced the 'Antarctica Bill' in the Lok Sabha that envisages regulating visits and activities to Antarctica as well potential disputes that may arise among those present on the continent. The Bill also prescribes penal provisions for certain serious violations.
2. The text of the Bill says that it seeks to "... prohibit Indian expedition to Antarctica or carrying of certain activities in Antarctica without a permit or the written authorisation of another party to the protocol...provide for



inspection in India by an officer designated by the Central government as an Inspector and to constitute an inspection team to carry out inspections in Antarctica.”

3. India had been a signatory to the Antarctica Treaty since 1983 and that encumbered India to specify a set of laws governing portions of the continent where it had its research bases
4. Antarctica is no man’s land... It isn’t that India is making a law for a territory that doesn’t belong to it... the question is if in the territory involving India’s research stations, some unlawful activity happens, how to check it? The Treaty made it mandatory for the 54 signatory countries to specific laws governing territories on which their stations are located,” said the government.

Antarctic treaty:

1. India is also a signatory to treaties such as the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources and the Commission for Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, both of which enjoin India to help preserve the pristine nature of the continent.
2. Not only was India obliged to have such obligations but it would also clearly establish that any illegal act or “crime” in Indian territory in Antarctica would mean that a person — even if they were a foreigner — would be subject to Indian laws.

Need a new, independent body to oversee probe agencies: CJI

The country needs an independent umbrella institution with oversight over agencies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), as the image of the institutions has been tarnished by allegations of corruption, excesses, lack of impartiality, and a close nexus with the political class, Chief Justice of India (CJI) said.

Umbrella institution with oversight over probe agencies:

1. This umbrella institution, he added, needs to be created through a comprehensive statute, clearly defining its powers, functions and jurisdictions.



2. The head of this body should be an impartial and independent authority, appointed by a committee, much like a panel that appoints the CBI director.
3. The CBI director is appointed by a three-member committee comprising the Prime Minister, the CJI, and the leader of the Opposition.
4. The CJI asserted that having such an organization, which can have separate prosecution and investigation wings, will also end the multiplicity of proceedings.
5. A single incident these days gets investigated by multiple agencies, often leading to dilution of evidence, a contradiction in depositions, and prolonged incarceration of innocents.
6. It will also save the institution from being blamed as a tool of harassment. Once an incident is reported, the organization should decide as to which specialized wing should take up the investigation, said CJI.
7. He suggested the states can also replicate having such institutions in their respective jurisdictions. CJI Ramana further said that CBI's credibility has come under public scrutiny due to its "actions or inactions".

The declined public image of the police, CBI and other agencies:

1. "When it comes to the CBI, it possessed immense trust of the public in its initial phase. In fact, the judiciary used to be flooded with requests for transfer of investigations to the CBI, as it was a symbol of impartiality and independence.
2. Whenever the citizenry doubted the skill and impartiality of its own state police, they sought an investigation by CBI, as they wanted justice to be done.
3. But, with the passage of time, like every other institution of repute, CBI has also come under deep public scrutiny. Its actions and inactions have raised questions regarding its credibility, in some cases," CJI said.

Way Forward:

1. Dwelling on the eroding image of police and agencies in India, Ramana told the chiefs of the country's top agencies, senior police and CBI officers present at the event "the need of the hour is to reclaim social legitimacy and public trust", the first step in which is "to break the nexus with the political executive".



2. “The truth is, no matter how deficient and non-cooperative the other institutions maybe if you all stand by your ethics and stand united with integrity, nothing can come in the way of your duty. In fact, this stands true for all institutions,” Ramana said.
3. Asserting that the investigative agencies should not allow authoritarian tendencies to creep into the democratic Indian society, the CJI said the officers must remember that their allegiance “must be to the constitution and the rule of law, and not to any person.”
4. “When you stand upright, you shall be remembered for your courage, principles and valour. The political executive will change with time.
5. “But you, as an institution, are permanent. Be impermeable and be independent. Pledge solidarity to your service. Your fraternity is your strength,” he added.
6. “A few upright officers can bring a revolution within the system. We can either go with the flow or we can be role models. The choice is ours,” Justice Ramana said.

GST collections at a record ₹1.42 lakh crore in March

1. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection in March 2022 touched ₹1.42 lakh crore, the highest ever since the inception of the new indirect tax regime in 2017, highlighting the ongoing robust economic recovery, technology-based compliance and rationalization of inverted duty structure.
2. This is the ninth month in a row that GST revenue crossed ₹1 lakh crore mark; the record collection of ₹1,42,095 crore in March is 15% higher than ₹1,23,902 crore achieved in the same month a year ago, according to the government data. The previous record collection was ₹1,40,986 crore in January.
3. According to government data, total GST collections in the current financial year ended March 31 were, at a little over ₹14.8 lakh crore, 17.5% higher than the ₹12.2 lakh crore collected in 2019-20, a non-Covid year.
4. The numbers reflect the ongoing economic recovery. The Indian economy is expected to grow by 8.9% in 2021-22 according to the government’s second



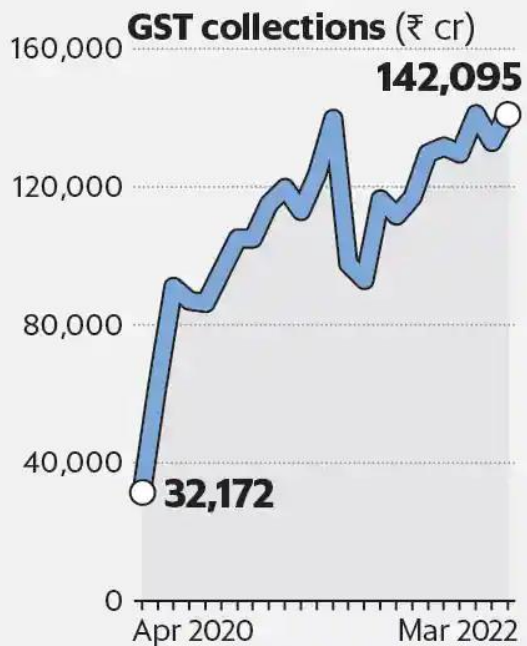
advance estimates, helping the economy expand beyond its pre-pandemic level.

Result of reforms:

- Economic recovery,
- Anti-evasion activities, especially action against fake billers have been contributing to the enhanced GST.
- The improvement in revenue has also been due to various rate rationalization measures undertaken by the [GST] Council to correct the inverted duty structure

Up, up and away

Gross GST collections rose to ₹1.42 tn in March, surpassing the previous high of ₹1.41 tn in January.



Source: Ministry of Finance

High Note

GST COLLECTIONS (₹ Crore)

April	1,41,384
May	1,02,709
June	92,849
July	1,16,393
Aug	1,12,020
Sep	1,17,010
Oct	1,30,127
Nov	1,31,526
Dec	1,29,780
Jan	1,40,986
Feb	1,33,026
Mar	1,42,095

TOTAL ₹14,89,905 CR

MARCH collections 15% higher than last fiscal, 40% over 2020

AVERAGE monthly collection ₹1.38 lakh crore in Q4

MAHARASHTRA recoded highest collection at ₹20,305 cr

EXPERTS predict April collection to remain high

WHAT IT MEANS

HIGH collections suggest economic recovery gaining pace

RAILWAY freight at record high in Mar provides further evidence

PETROL AND DIESEL sales also rise as mobility increases



Challenges:

1. Experts said that while the March collections were robust, they were uneven, that is inter-state variation in collections.
2. While collections grew over 15% for Punjab, Haryana, Odisha, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh in March 2022 for states such as West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, growth was less than 10%.
3. This suggests inter-state variation in consumption and investment growth and provides more support to states' demand for the continuation of GST compensation beyond five years.
4. While statewide variations exist in terms of the growth in GST collections, it would be interesting to see an analysis linking the statewide GDP [gross domestic products] growth with the GST collections during the same period.

MAINS DAWP

Q1. Account for increased GST collection last financial year. Discuss remaining challenges in the GST framework.

Q2. Discuss salient features and positive implications of the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill, 2022 on law enforcement. Highlight concerns regarding its provisions.

Q3. *The country needs an independent umbrella institution with oversight over agencies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), as the image of the institutions has been tarnished by various allegations, Chief Justice of India (CJI) observed recently. Give your response with reasoned arguments.*



MCQs

Q1. The CBI director is appointed by a three-member committee comprising

1. The Prime Minister
2. The Chief Justice of India
3. The Home Minister

Select the correct answer from the codes given below

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 2 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3