



**TATHASTU**  
Institute of Civil Services

# **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS**



**19<sup>th</sup> December, 2023**

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## TELECOM BILL 2023

SOURCE: [INDIAN EXPRESS](#)

### WHY IN NEWS?

- **Telecommunications Bill, 2023** was introduced in the **Lok Sabha** by **Union Minister for Communications, Electronics & Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnav** on **December 18, 2023**.
- The Bill proposes **the first comprehensive rewrite of telecommunications law in 138 years**.
- Aims to consolidate various aspects of telecom regulation into a single statute, **replacing the Telegraph Act, 1885**.

### ABOUT THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS BILL, 2023:

- **Introduction and Repeal:**
  - ✓ The bill introduced in Lok Sabha on **December 18, 2023**.
  - ✓ Seeks to regulate telecommunication, repealing the **Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933, and Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act, 1950**.
- **Authorisation for Telecom Activities:**
  - ✓ **Requires prior authorisation** from the central government for telecommunication services, network operations, or radio equipment possession.
  - ✓ **Existing licences remain valid, and new authorisations** are subject to **renewal every five years**.
- **Spectrum Assignment:**
  - ✓ **Spectrum to be assigned by auction**, with administrative allocation for specified purposes.
  - ✓ **Allows re-purposing or re-assigning** frequency ranges and permits spectrum sharing, trading, leasing, and surrender.
- **Interception and Search Powers:**
  - ✓ **Grants power to intercept**, monitor, or block messages on grounds of public safety, emergency, or specified interests.
  - ✓ **Allows suspension of telecom services** and temporary government possession of infrastructure in emergencies.
- **Standards Specification:**
  - ✓ Central government empowered to **set standards for telecom equipment, infrastructure, networks, and services**.
- **Right of Way:**
  - ✓ Facility providers can seek a right of way for **telecom infrastructure on public or private property**.
  - ✓ Right of way **must be non-discriminatory and non-exclusive** to the extent possible.
- **User Protection Measures:**
  - ✓ Central government may **implement measures to protect users**, including consent

#### WHAT'S IN THE BILL

- ▶ It seeks to allow the **central government** to take over any telecom service or network in case of public emergency
- ▶ Defines **telecommunications services** as "any service for telecommunications"; doesn't specify internet-based calling or messaging
- ▶ Seeks to allow the **central government** to intercept any message between individuals
- ▶ Bats for allowing a senior **private sector executive** as Trai chairperson
- ▶ Calls for **three-year jail or ₹2 crore fine** or both for illegal phone
- ▶ Stays silent on taking back **spectrum** from insolvent telcos





mechanisms, Do Not Disturb registers, and **grievance redressal**.

- **TRAI Appointments:**
  - ✓ **Amends TRAI Act to allow individuals with 30 years** of professional experience as chairpersons and 25 years as members.
- **Digital Bharat Nidhi:**
  - ✓ Retains the Universal Service Obligation Fund as Digital Bharat Nidhi, supporting telecom services in underserved areas and allowing its use for research and development.
- **offences and Penalties:**
  - ✓ **Specifies criminal and civil offences with penalties**, including imprisonment and fines.
  - ✓ Offences include **providing telecom services without authorisation** and breaching terms and conditions.
- **Adjudication Process:**
  - ✓ **Establishes an adjudicating officer for civil offences**, appealable to the Designated Appeals Committee.
  - ✓ Further **appeals against Committee decisions** can be made to TDSAT.

#### CHALLENGES & KEY PROVISION UNDER THE BILL:

- **Spectrum Allocation for Satellite Broadband:**
  - ✓ Satellite broadband spectrum to be **allocated by the government instead of auctioning**.
  - ✓ **Aims to expedite the launch of services** by entities like **OneWeb, Jio Satellite Communications, Starlink, and Project Kuiper**.
- **Biometric Authentication for New Telecom Users:**
  - ✓ **Mandatory biometric verification** for new telecom users to prevent **SIM-based fraud**.
  - ✓ Data privacy rules under the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**, will apply.
- **Powers During War and Emergencies:**
  - ✓ **Empowers the government to take over telecom networks during war or public emergencies**.
- **Messaging Apps and Telecom Regulator Powers:**
  - ✓ **Messaging apps like WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal remain outside the bill's purview**.
  - ✓ **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) powers are not diluted**.
- **Administrative Allocation of Spectrum:**
  - ✓ Administrative allocation for **satcom services, TV broadcast, DTH, etc.**, for specified purposes.
  - ✓ Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) to decide spectrum **pricing and allocation methodology**.
- **Internet Shutdowns and Encryption Standards:**
  - ✓ **Clause 20(2) raises concerns about internet shutdowns** and interception powers.
  - ✓ Government **empowered to regulate encryption standards** for internet communications.
- **Trusted Sources and National Security:**
  - ✓ **Prohibits the use of telecom gear from untrusted sources** in the interest of national security.
  - ✓ **Penalties for vandalism** to critical telecom infrastructure.
- **Dispute Resolution and Grievance Redressal:**





- ✓ Establishes a **two-stage dispute resolution mechanism**.
- ✓ Mandatory grievance redressal mechanism for each service provider.
- **Digital Bharat Nidhi and USOF:**
  - ✓ **Proposes renaming the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)** to Digital Bharat Nidhi.
  - ✓ **Telcos contribute 5% of annual revenues** to USOF for connecting unconnected areas.
- **Opposition and Privacy Concerns:**
  - ✓ Some opposition citing **violation of privacy, referring to the 2017 Supreme Court ruling**.
  - ✓ Assurance that interception rules remain unchanged from the previous law.

## KEY PROVISION UNDER THE BILL FOR NATIONAL SECURITY:

- **Government's Emergency Powers:**
  - ✓ The bill grants the Central Government, State Government, or authorized officers **the authority to act in the occurrence of a public emergency** or in the interest of public safety.
- **Temporary Possession of Telecom Services:**
  - ✓ In situations of public emergency, the government can take **temporary possession** of any telecommunication service or network from an authorized entity.
- **Priority Routing for Emergency Messages:**
  - ✓ To **ensure an effective response** during emergencies, the government is empowered to establish mechanisms for routing messages of authorized users on a priority basis.
- **Grounds for Intervention:**
  - ✓ The **intervention is justified on grounds such as the sovereignty and integrity of India**, defense and security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, or preventing the commission of any offense.
- **Interception, Detention, and Disclosure:**
  - ✓ In the interest of national security, the government can direct that messages transmitted or received by any telecommunication service or **network shall not be transmitted, intercepted, detained, or disclosed**, with the disclosure being in an intelligible format to the specified officer.
- **Protection of Press Messages:**
  - ✓ Press messages **intended for publication in India** by correspondents accredited to the Central Government or a State Government are safeguarded, and **interception or detention is prohibited unless transmission** is specifically prohibited under relevant rules.
- **Government's Authority to Transmit Messages:**
  - ✓ In the public interest, the Central Government **holds the authority to direct any authorized entity to transmit specific messages** through telecommunication services or networks, specifying the manner of transmission.
- **Safeguards for Privacy and Public Interest:**
  - ✓ The bill establishes a **delicate balance between privacy concerns and public interest** by outlining specific conditions and justifications for government intervention in the functioning of telecommunication services.
- **Press Freedom Assurance:**
  - ✓ **Acknowledging the importance of press freedom**, the bill explicitly protects press messages from





**unwarranted interception or detention**, reinforcing the democratic values of information dissemination.

➤ **Centralized Decision-Making for Emergency Measures:**

- ✓ **The bill vests decision-making powers in the Central Government**, ensuring a centralized and coordinated approach in implementing emergency measures for national security.

**GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN TELECOM SECTORS:**

| <i>Initiatives in Telecom Sector</i>                                                | <i>Objectives</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Setting up 100 labs for 5G applications</i>                                      | ✓ Tap <b>employment potential and business</b> opportunities, develop applications in engineering institutions focusing on areas like <b>smart classrooms, precision farming, intelligent transport systems, and healthcare.</b>                                            |
| <i>Allocating ₹1.23-lakh crore for postal and telecom projects</i>                  | ✓ Support telecom sector <b>growth, allocate funds for postal and telecom</b> projects, including <b>capital infusion in State-run BSNL.</b>                                                                                                                                |
| <i>Allocating ₹2,158 crore for optical fibre cable network for Defence Services</i> | ✓ <b>Strengthening defence communication</b> infrastructure through optical fibre cable network investment.                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>Allocating ₹715.8 crore for telecom projects in the North-East</i>               | ✓ <b>Improve telecom infrastructure</b> and connectivity in the North-East region.                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <i>Introducing KYC reforms and Aadhaar-based e-KYC</i>                              | ✓ <b>Simplify onboarding of customers</b> , introduce consumer-friendly methods for obtaining new mobile connections, and enhance user experience.                                                                                                                          |
| <i>Implementing Spectrum Reforms</i>                                                | ✓ Facilitate efficient <b>use of spectrum, encourage spectrum sharing</b> without additional financial burden, increase the <b>validity period of spectrum acquisition</b> , and conduct regular spectrum auctions.                                                         |
| <i>Financial reforms to address sector stress</i>                                   | ✓ Address financial stress in the telecom sector by removing <b>non-telecom revenue from AGR definition</b> , rationalizing interest payments, providing a moratorium on AGR dues and spectrum <b>auction instalments, and reducing the requirement of bank guarantees.</b> |
| <i>Ease of Doing Business Reforms</i>                                               | ✓ Simplify approvals, ease procurement, and encourage investments by introducing reforms such as simplified tower approval processes,                                                                                                                                       |





|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                     | procurement of wireless equipment based on <b>self-declaration, and streamlining procedures</b> through the <b>Saral Sanchar Portal</b> .                                                           |
| <i>PM-WANI (Prime Minister Wi-Fi Access Network Interface)</i>                      | ✓ Accelerate broadband internet services by providing public <b>Wi-Fi through Public Data Offices (PDOs)</b> spread across the country.                                                             |
| <i>BharatNet Project</i>                                                            | ✓ <b>Extend the scope of the BharatNet Project</b> to make service-ready Gram Panchayats, aiming to enhance <b>broadband connectivity in rural areas</b> .                                          |
| <i>India's Data Consumption</i>                                                     | ✓ <b>Acknowledge India's high data consumption</b> , emphasizing the need for robust telecom infrastructure to meet the demands of <b>approximately 5 hours of daily time</b> spent on smartphones. |
| <i>Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for telecom and networking products</i> | ✓ <b>Encourage domestic manufacturing by introducing PLI schemes</b> , fostering <b>self-reliance and boosting the production of telecom and networking products</b> .                              |

#### WAY FORWARD:

➤ **Implementation and Rollout:**

- ✓ The **government should focus on the effective and timely implementation of the provisions** outlined in the Telecom Bill.
- ✓ Regulatory bodies such as the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)** should work closely with industry stakeholders to **ensure a smooth transition** to the new regulatory framework.

➤ **Technology Adoption and Innovation:**

- ✓ **Encourage telecom operators** to adopt new technologies and innovations in line with global standards.
- ✓ Promote research and development in the telecom sector to foster innovation, **especially in areas such as 5G, satellite communication, and digital services**.

➤ **Cybersecurity Measures:**

- ✓ **Strengthen cybersecurity measures to safeguard telecom infrastructure** and protect user data.
- ✓ Collaborate with cybersecurity experts and organizations to develop and implement best practices for the telecom sector.

➤ **Consumer Grievance Redressal:**

- ✓ **Ensure the effective functioning of the grievance redressal mechanisms** outlined in the Telecom Bill.
- ✓ **Establish user-friendly platforms** for consumers to raise complaints and seek resolutions.

➤ **Infrastructure Development:**





- ✓ **Continue investing in the development of telecom infrastructure**, including **broadband networks and satellite communication**, to enhance connectivity across urban and rural areas.
- **Adaptability to Future Technologies:**
  - ✓ **Anticipate and prepare for future technologies**, such as advancements in **artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), and machine learning**, and their implications on the telecom sector.
- **Policy Stability:**
  - ✓ **Maintain stability in telecom policies** to provide a conducive environment for investment and growth.
  - ✓ **Minimize frequent changes** in regulations to offer predictability to industry players.





## COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL (CAG)

SOURCE: **THE HINDU**

### WHY IN NEWS?

- In the **calendar year 2023**, a noticeable decline in the **number of audit reports on the Union government's accounts**, prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), was observed.
- **Only 18 reports were tabled in Parliament**, a significant decrease from the **average of 22 reports per year between 2019 and 2023**.
- This represents a stark contrast to the **period between 2014 and 2018**, where an **average of 40 reports were tabled each year**.
- The trend highlights a **consistent decrease in the number of audits**, with 2015 marking a peak at 53 reports.

### CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS RELATED TO THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR-GENERAL (CAG):

- **Article 148 - Appointment and Removal:**
  - ✓ The **President appoints the CAG**, and **removal occurs similarly to a Supreme Court Judge**.
  - ✓ CAG takes an **oath before assuming office**, as per the form in the **Third Schedule**.
  - ✓ **Salary and conditions determined by Parliament**, with no adverse changes post-appointment.
  - ✓ **Ineligibility for further government office** after tenure.
  - ✓ Conditions of service for audit department personnel prescribed by the President.
- **Article 149 - Duties and Powers:**
  - ✓ CAG performs duties and exercises powers **related to Union and State accounts**, as prescribed by **Parliament**.
  - ✓ Responsibilities include overseeing financial committees and **ensuring compliance with legal procedures**.
- **Article 150 - Form of Accounts:**
  - ✓ The President, **advised by the CAG**, prescribes the **form of accounts for the Union and States**.
- **Article 151 - Audit Reports:**
  - ✓ CAG **submits reports to the President**, who presents them to Parliament for review.
- **Article 279 - Calculation of "Net Proceeds":**
  - ✓ CAG certifies "**net proceeds**" of **taxes after deducting collection costs**.
  - ✓ Parliament or the President's order may specify procedures for calculating proceeds, payments, adjustments, etc.
- **Third Schedule - Oath or Affirmation:**
  - ✓ Specifies the oath or affirmation for the CAG at the time of assuming office.
- **Sixth Schedule - District and Regional Funds:**
  - ✓ Pertains to the **administration of tribal areas in specific states**.
  - ✓ **District and Regional Funds managed** according to rules set by the Governor.
  - ✓ CAG prescribes the form of accounts and **audits District and Regional Councils**, with reports submitted to the **Governor for presentation before the Council**.



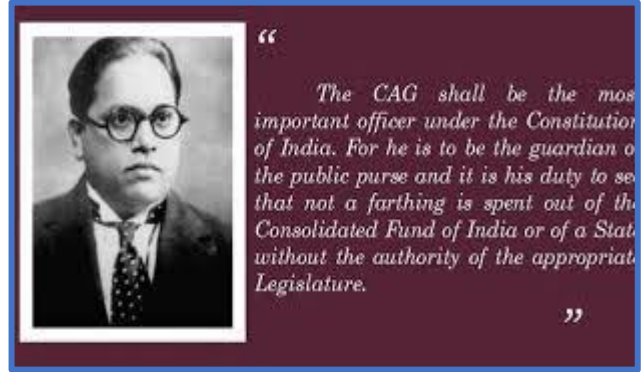
### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL (CAG) IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY:

- **Ambedkar's Emphasis:**





- ✓ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar highlighted the **paramount importance of the CAG**, considering their **duties even more critical than the judiciary**.
- ✓ The CAG plays a **pivotal role in upholding constitutional ideals and ensuring good governance**.
- ✓ Positioned as a guardian of the Constitution, the CAG aligns with the goals of **"AAZADI KA AMRIT MAHOTSAV,"** contributing to national awakening, peace, and development.



- **Pillars of Democracy:**
  - ✓ India's democratic structure rests on three pillars: **the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary**.
  - ✓ Despite their independent functions, **institutions like the CAG, operating autonomously under Article 148**, monitor and contribute to the accountability of these pillars.
  - ✓ Article 151 mandates **CAG reports to be submitted to the President or Governor**, emphasizing the role of public audit in governance.
- **CAG's Autonomous Constitutional Role:**
  - ✓ As an **autonomous constitutional body**, the CAG remains **distinct from the legislature and the executive**.
  - ✓ This autonomy enables the CAG to **impartially scrutinize** and assess the functioning of government entities.
  - ✓ **Envisioned by the founding fathers**, the CAG plays a significant role in public audit, upholding the vision for good governance in India.
- **CAG's Contributions to Good Governance:**
  - ✓ The CAG has been instrumental in addressing issues **related to corruption, black money, and ineffective government policies**.
  - ✓ Notable instances include the **scrutiny of the Ganga Action Plan 1979**, inflation in the Food Corporation of India's accounts, and **exposing financial discrepancies in Bihar in 2000-01**.
  - ✓ **High-profile cases such as the 2G scam and Commonwealth Games irregularities** underscore the CAG's impact in uncovering lapses and ensuring accountability.
- **Historical Roots of Auditing:**
  - ✓ Auditing's historical significance can be traced to **ancient practices**, with references in old treatises like **Arthashastra and Kautilya**.
  - ✓ The financial stewardship arrangement, with **distinct roles for Treasurer and Comptroller-Auditor**, dates back to ancient times.
  - ✓ The king's emphasis on transparent public audits conducted by honest officials aligns with the **enduring role played by the CAG in contemporary India**.

## ROLE OF CAG IN INDIAN DEMOCRACY:

- **Financial Management Oversight:**
  - ✓ CAG ensures **transparency and good governance** by auditing government **spending, verifying legal availability, and alignment with regulations**.
  - ✓ **Proposed change to Comptroller and Auditor-General** reflects the role beyond auditing, actively overseeing government expenditure.
- **Regulatory Audit for Revenue Assurance:**

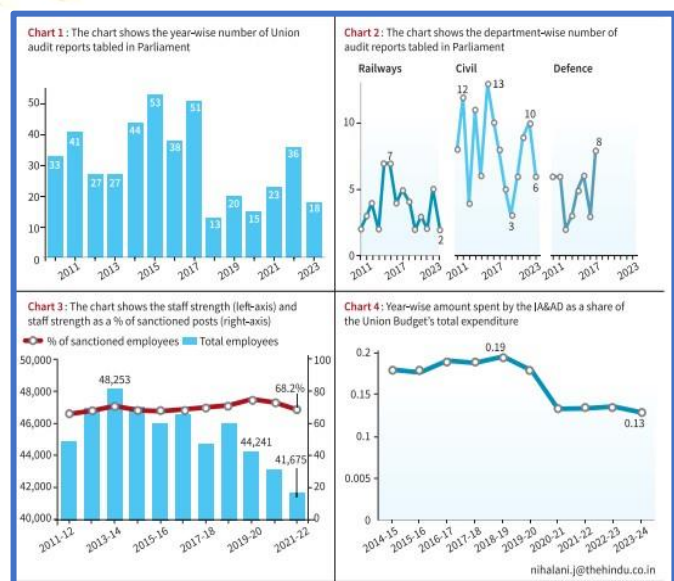


- ✓ **Conducts regulatory audits** to ensure **revenue assessment, collection, and allocation align** with established legal procedures.
- **Propriety Audit for Efficiency:**
  - ✓ CAG has the authority to **conduct propriety audits**, scrutinizing government **spending for wasteful or extravagant expenses**.
  - ✓ This discretionary audit contributes to efficient and prudent use of public funds.
- **Transparency and Accountability:**
  - ✓ CAG plays a pivotal role in maintaining transparency, **preventing corruption and inefficiency in the system**.
  - ✓ **Reports presented under Article 151** are crucial for **parliamentary review**, enhancing **ethical standards, and ensuring accountability**.
- **Welfare Activities and Oversight:**
  - ✓ CAG's oversight helps **ensure that government actions align with the welfare objectives of a "for the people" state**.
  - ✓ Reports, **like the audit on the KG-D6 block**, highlight instances of rule-bending and benefit-granting, contributing to better governance.
- **Parliamentary Engagement:**
  - ✓ CAG reports are **presented before both Houses of Parliament**, encouraging thorough **review by MPs**.
  - ✓ Positive outcomes depend on prompt actions by both legislative and executive branches, working in harmony.
- **Independence in Reporting:**
  - ✓ **CAG maintains independence by declining requests** to allow criticized private companies to influence audit reports.
  - ✓ Responses from private firms are **not sought during the draft phase**, ensuring **unbiased and unaltered reporting**.



## RECENT CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS FOR CAG IN INDIA:

- **Decline in Audit Reports (2019-2023):**
  - ✓ **In 2023**, a significant drop in CAG audit reports, with only **18 presented in Parliament**.
  - ✓ Contrast to the **average of 22 reports per year from 2019 to 2023**.
  - ✓ Sharp decline from the **40 reports per year between 2014 and 2018**.
- **Department-wise Analysis: Railways and Civil Departments:**
  - ✓ Railways Department reports **decreased from 27 to 14 in the last five years**.
  - ✓ Civil Department audit reports reduced **from 42 to 34 during the same period**.
  - ✓ Defence Department's reports less accessible, **with the latest from 2017**.






- **Supreme Audit Institution of India (SAI): Staff Strength and Budget Allocation:**
  - ✓ Staff strength decline in IA&AD, from **48,253 in 2013-14 to 41,675 in 2021-22**.
  - ✓ IA&AS officers reduced from 789 (2014-15) to 553 (2021-22).
  - ✓ Budget allocation to IA&AD decreasing as a share of the Union Budget's total expenditure.
- **Challenges for CAG in India:**
  - ✓ **Audits becoming more complex**, involving **public-private partnerships (PPPs)**.
  - ✓ **No defined criteria for CAG appointment**, relying on executive discretion.
  - ✓ **Difficulty in obtaining timely access** to crucial government records for audits.
  - ✓ **Calls for complete independence of CAG**, making it part of the **Public Accounts Committee (PAC)**.
  - ✓ **Shorter tenure due to age cap (65 years)** affecting leadership continuity and expertise.
  - ✓ **Lack of statutory recognition for IA&AD's work** in India compared to global counterparts.
  - ✓ **Criticism of audit estimates**, emphasizing the need for rigorous standards to maintain audit integrity.

#### **WAY FORWARD & REFORMS SUGGESTED BY VINOD RAI (FORMER CAG):**

- **Expanding CAG's Jurisdiction:**
  - ✓ **Bring all private-public partnerships (PPPs), Panchayati Raj Institutions, and government-funded societies under CAG scrutiny.**
  - ✓ **Adapt audit mechanisms** to address changes in the **exploitation of government funding** and public goods.
- **Amending CAG Act of 1971:**
  - ✓ Amend the CAG Act of 1971 to **keep pace with evolving governance structures**.
  - ✓ Align the Act with contemporary challenges, **such as climate change, Sustainable Development Goals, and Goods and Services Tax.**
- **Collegium Mechanism for CAG Appointment:**
  - ✓ **Establish a collegium-type mechanism** for selecting the **CAG, similar to the Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) selection process.**
- **Auditing Evolving Issues:**
  - ✓ **Prepare CAG to audit emerging issues**, including the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and the **impact of Goods and Services Tax.**
- **Utilizing Technology in Audit:**
  - ✓ Embrace technology in public audit by **implementing Big Data management policies.**
  - ✓ Establish centres, like the **Centre for Data Management and Analytics**, to leverage technology for effective audits.
- **Global Collaboration:**
  - ✓ **Foster partnerships and collaborations with international counterparts** through conferences and forums.
  - ✓ **Share best practices and enhance capacity development** in areas like public and environmental audit.
- **Auditing Multifarious Operations:**
  - ✓ **Demonstrate credibility** by successfully auditing complex operations, such as **the United Nations headquarters.**



## PRELIMS POINTERS:

| TOPIC                                                | DISCRIPTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>India's first winter Arctic expedition begins</b> | <p><b>WHY IN NEWS?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ <b>Arctic Expedition Kickoff:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ The <b>Raman Research Institute (RRI)</b> is partaking in the <b>first winter Indian expedition to the Arctic region.</b></li></ul></li><li>❖ <b>Examination of Radio Frequency Environment:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ RRI researchers will focus on <b>characterizing the radio frequency environment</b> in the <b>Svalbard region</b> of the Arctic in Norway.</li><li>☛ The survey aims to <b>assess the suitability of the region for precision astronomy measurements.</b></li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EXPEDITION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ <b>India's Research Station:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ India has its own research station named <b>Himadri</b> in <b>Svalbard</b> since <b>2008.</b></li><li>☛ The winter expedition is an <b>initiative to maintain a year-long presence at the station.</b></li></ul></li><li>❖ <b>Scientific Objectives:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ A team of four scientists, led by <b>Girish B.S. from the Electronics Engineering Group at RRI,</b> will conduct experiments spanning astronomy, climate change, and atmospheric science.</li><li>☛ The expedition is <b>crucial for research in understanding cosmic dawn and the epoch of reionization in the universe.</b></li></ul></li><li>❖ <b>Exploring New Avenues:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ The survey on the <b>radio frequency environment,</b> a first at the site, could open opportunities for <b>deploying low-frequency radio telescopes</b> in the Arctic region.</li></ul></li><li>❖ <b>Funding and Nodal Agency:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ The <b>month-long scientific expedition</b> is funded by the <b>Earth Sciences Ministry.</b></li><li>☛ The <b>National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, Goa,</b> is the nodal agency <b>leading the expedition until January 15.</b></li></ul></li><li>❖ <b>Addressing Challenges in Urbanization:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ <b>Urbanization has limited spaces</b> for scientific experiments for cosmological studies.</li><li>☛ Places where <b>low-frequency astronomical observations</b> were conducted are no longer suitable due to urban development.</li></ul></li><li>❖ <b>Significance of SARAS:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☛ RRI's SARAS series of experiments, <b>focusing on the measurement of the background radio spectrum,</b> aims to study the <b>cosmological signal from hydrogen</b> known as the <b>21-cm signal.</b></li></ul></li></ul>  |





- ☛ This signal provides insights into cosmic dawn and the **epoch of reionization, crucial phases in the universe's early evolution.**
- ❖ **Challenges in Achieving Sensitivity:**
  - ☛ **Urbanization and Radio Frequency Interference (RFI)** pose challenges in achieving the required sensitivity for astronomical observations.
  - ☛ The expedition utilizes sensitive electronic instruments to study incoming **radio signals in the 5-500 MHz frequency range.**
- ❖ **Space for Scientific Experiments:**
  - ☛ The shrinking space for scientific experiments due to urbanization **underscores the importance of exploring remote locations for astronomical observations.**
- ❖ **Technology and Observations:**
  - ☛ Engineers and scientists at RRI have been **working on the development of SARAS experiments.**
  - ☛ The **expedition leverages technology to observe radio signals** in the specified frequency range at sites near the Himadri station.

## JN.1 variant

### WHY IN NEWS?

- ❖ The Union health ministry has alerted **states and Union Territories** about the **increase in Covid-19 cases in Kerala.**
- ❖ **A new variant, JN.1,** has been identified, and the ministry emphasizes the need for **monitoring, testing, and whole-genome sequencing.**

### JN.1 VARIANT OVERVIEW:

- ❖ **Origins and Detection:**
  - ☛ **JN.1 is a sub-variant of the BA.2.86 variant (Pirola).**
  - ☛ First cases detected in the **United States in September,** with global detection from January this year.
- ❖ **Genetic Characteristics:**
  - ☛ **JN.1 has one additional mutation on the spike protein** compared to Pirola.
  - ☛ Pirola, the **parent variant,** exhibits over **30 mutations on the spike protein.**
- ❖ **Watch-List Status:**
  - ☛ **Researchers are monitoring JN.1** due to its presence on the watch-list.
  - ☛ The focus is on **spike protein mutations,** crucial for virus entry into human cells.
- ❖ **Spike Protein Mutations Significance:**
  - ☛ Mutations on the spike protein are **critical as they facilitate the virus's attachment** to receptors on **human cells.**
  - ☛ Understanding these **mutations aids in assessing potential changes** in transmissibility and severity.



### IMPACT OF JN.1 VARIANT AND CURRENT CONCERNS





- ❖ **Symptoms and Transmission:**
  - ☛ **No evidence indicates that JN.1 causes more severe symptoms** or spreads faster than existing variants.
  - ☛ Initial concerns about immune evasion and rapid spread have not materialized.
- ❖ **Effectiveness Against Immunity:**
  - ☛ WHO assessment revealed **both Pirola and JN.1 were effectively neutralized by serum** from individuals with prior infection or vaccination.
  - ☛ They are categorized as **Variants of Interest, not Variants of Concern.**
- ❖ **Global Increase in Cases:**
  - ☛ Rise in cases linked to **Pirola and JN.1 globally**, detected in the USA, Europe, Singapore, and China.
  - ☛ WHO statement notes their **presence in 17% of Sars-CoV-2 sequences on the GISAID database.**
- ❖ **Prevalence in the United States:**
  - ☛ **JN.1 accounts for 15% to 29% of circulating Covid-19 variants** in the United States.
- ❖ **Transmissibility and Severity Insights:**
  - ☛ **No clear indication that JN.1 or BA.2.86 is more transmissible** or causes severe disease compared to other circulating variants.
- ❖ **Global Database Impact:**
  - ☛ Pirola and its descendants **represent 17% of Sars-CoV-2 sequences**, with JN.1 becoming the majority by December.

## Suspension of MPs in The Parliament

### WHY IN NEWS?

- ❖ **Thirty-three Lok Sabha members and 45 from Rajya Sabha**, all belonging to the Opposition INDIA group, were suspended on Monday, the bulk of them for the remainder of the Winter Session.
- ❖ Fourteen Opposition MPs had been suspended for the remainder of the session last week.
- ❖ And on Tuesday, **49 more MPs were suspended**, bringing the **total number of suspensions in this session to 141.**

### INCIDENT LEADING TO SUSPENSIONS

- ❖ **Last Week's Parliament Security Breach:**
  - ☛ Opposition MPs disrupted proceedings **seeking a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah.**
  - ☛ Placard-waving and climbing onto the **Speaker's podium** occurred in Lok Sabha.
  - ☛ Rajya Sabha faced slogans on the Parliament breach, causing disruptions.





## REASONS FOR DISRUPTIONS

### Tradition of Disorder:

#### ❖ Historical Trend:

- ☛ MPs disrupt Parliament for various reasons, a **tradition transcending party affiliations**.
- ☛ Key reasons **include insufficient time, unresponsiveness from the government**, deliberate disruptions for political purposes, and inadequate action against disruptive MPs.

## SUSPENSIONS AND POWERS OF PRESIDING OFFICERS

#### ❖ Role of Presiding Officers:

- ☛ **Speaker in Lok Sabha, Chairman in Rajya Sabha:**
- ☛ Presiding officers play a pivotal role in suspending MPs.
- ☛ Rules in Lok Sabha: **373, 374, 374A**; Rules in Rajya Sabha: **255, 256**.

### Procedure for Suspension:

#### ❖ Gradual Escalation:

- ☛ **MP directed to withdraw** for disorderly conduct.
- ☛ If disruptions persist, the MP is "**named**" by the **presiding officer**.
- ☛ The House can then move a motion to suspend the MP for the session.

#### ❖ Automatic Suspension (Rule 374A - Lok Sabha):

- ☛ **Lok Sabha Rule 374A empowers the Speaker** to suspend an MP **automatically for five days** or the remaining session without a motion.

#### ❖ Rajya Sabha Procedure:

- ☛ **Rajya Sabha doesn't have the automatic suspension** provision.
- ☛ A motion is moved and adopted to suspend MPs.

## DURATION OF SUSPENSION

- ❖ Mild offences may result in **admonition or reprimand**.
- ❖ **Withdrawal from the House** can be enforced for the day.
- ❖ Suspension can **last for the remainder of the session**, and the House can **reinstate a suspended member at any time**.