
Prelims Exam Topics

GARUD HIGH RESOLUTION BINOCULARS

Context

India Optel Limited (IOL), a Mini Ratna Category-I Defence Public Sector Undertaking, has launched the indigenous **GARUD High Resolution Binoculars** for the civilian market.

About GARUD High Resolution Binoculars

- **Nature:** GARUD is an indigenous **defence-grade high-resolution binocular platform** adapted for civilian applications, based on optical equipment used by the **Indian Armed Forces and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)**.
- **Manufacturer:** Manufactured by **Ordnance Factory, Dehradun**, a unit of **India Optel Limited (IOL)** under the **Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence**.
- **Objective:** To commercialise India's indigenous defence optical capabilities under **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** and make high-precision optical equipment accessible to civilian users.

GAJ GAURAV AWARDS 2026

Context

The **Gaj Gaurav Awards 2026** were conferred during the national celebration of **World Elephant Day 2026** in **Visakhapatnam** to recognise frontline contributions to **Asian elephant conservation and management**.

About Gaj Gaurav Awards

- **Nature:** The **Gaj Gaurav Award** is a national honour recognising **exemplary field service and frontline contributions** to the conservation and management of Asian elephants.
- **Instituted:** The award was instituted in **2022** by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** as part of the **30-year celebrations of Project Elephant**, launched in **1992**.
- **Objective:** To recognise and motivate **forest staff, mahouts, trackers, local communities, Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs)** and **field conservationists** working to reduce **human-elephant conflict, protect elephant corridors and conserve wild and captive elephants**.

SMALL MODULAR REACTORS (SMRS)

Context

Under the **Nuclear Energy Mission**, the Government of India plans to develop and operationalise at least **five indigenous Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) by 2033** as part of its goal of reaching **100 GWe of nuclear capacity by 2047**.

About Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)

- **Definition:** **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)** are advanced nuclear reactors with a lower electrical output than conventional gigawatt-scale plants; the **IAEA** generally defines an SMR as a reactor with a capacity of **up to 300 MWe per unit**.
- **Indian Developer:** **Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC)** under the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** is developing indigenous SMR designs.
- **Legislative Framework:** Their development and deployment is enabled by the **SHANTI Act, 2025**, which facilitates greater **private-sector participation** in nuclear technology manufacturing and deployment.
- **Objective:** To provide **clean, low-carbon baseload electricity and industrial heat** while reducing initial capital requirements, construction time and land requirements compared with large nuclear power plants.
- **Key Features & Significance:** Passive safety through natural emergency core cooling, scalable deployment by adding modules progressively with demand, factory-based production reducing construction delays, financing costs and site-level engineering risks, and a flexible pathway for expanding low-carbon nuclear power to strengthen India's energy security and decarbonisation goals.

JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (JPC)

Context

The **Lok Sabha** referred the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026** to a **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** following objections raised by Opposition parties and civil society groups.

About Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)

- **Nature:** A **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** is an **ad hoc parliamentary committee** constituted by both Houses of Parliament to undertake a detailed examination of a specific **Bill, legislative proposal, or major financial/governance issue**.
- **Constitutional Status:** A JPC is **not explicitly provided for in the Constitution**; it is constituted under the **Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Parliament**.
- **Constitution:** A JPC is created when a **motion adopted by one House is concurred in by the other House**.
- **Bicameral Representation:** Members are drawn from **both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha**.
- **Membership Ratio:** The committee generally maintains a **2:1 ratio between Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members**.
- **Chairperson:** The **Speaker of the Lok Sabha** appoints the Chairperson.
- **Recommendations:** Submits a **report with recommendations** to Parliament; members may also append **Notes of Dissent**.
- **Dissolution:** The JPC is an **ad hoc body** and stands dissolved after submission of its final report to Parliament.

RIVER BOARD

Context

The Chairperson of the **Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA)** recently proposed a **unified River Board** to own, operate, manage and regulate reservoirs across the entire **Cauvery basin**.

About River Board

- **Nature:** A **River Board** is a statutory or administrative body comprising **technical experts, government officials and stakeholders** to regulate and develop an **inter-State river or river valley as an integrated hydrological unit**.
- **Constitutional Basis:** **Entry 56 of the Union List** empowers Parliament to regulate and develop inter-State rivers and river valleys in the public interest, while **Entry 17 of the State List** places water supply, irrigation, canals and water storage primarily under State jurisdiction; **Article 262** enables Parliament to provide for adjudication of inter-State river water disputes.
- **Legal Basis:** The **River Boards Act, 1956**, enacted under Entry 56, enables the Union Government to establish River Boards **on the request of States or suo motu** to advise States on the regulation and development of inter-State rivers.

River Boards in India

- **History:** The **River Boards Act, 1956** was enacted alongside the **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956**, during the period of linguistic reorganisation of States.
- **Implementation Gap:** Despite remaining on the statute book for decades, **no River Board has been formally established under the 1956 Act**, largely due to concerns among States regarding loss of control over their water resources.
- **Alternative Mechanisms:** In its place, various river management institutions have been created through **specific Parliamentary laws, executive decisions, reorganisation legislation and tribunal awards**.

VOYAGER 2 MISSION

Context

NASA has carried out a “**Big Bang**” **power-saving upgrade** to **Voyager 2**, extending its scientific operations by another **year** nearly five decades after its launch.

About Voyager 2 Mission

- **Nature:** Voyager 2 is an **unmanned NASA deep-space probe** launched in **1977** to study the outer planets and subsequently continue its **interstellar mission**.
- **Launch:** It was launched on **20 August 1977** from **Cape Canaveral, USA**, aboard a **Titan IIIE-Centaur** launch vehicle.
- **Primary Mission:** Its planetary mission covered **Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune**, along with their moons.
- **Interstellar Space:** Voyager 2 entered **interstellar space in November 2018**, becoming the **second human-made spacecraft** to do so after Voyager 1.

Major Achievements

- **Jupiter:** Discovered a new **Jovian moon** and provided detailed observations of Jupiter, its atmosphere, rings and moons.
- **Saturn:** Conducted a close **Saturn flyby**, providing detailed observations of its **rings and moons**.
- **Uranus:** Became the **first human-made spacecraft to fly past Uranus**, discovering **10 new moons and two new rings**.

- **Neptune:** Became the **first human-made spacecraft to fly past Neptune**, discovering **six new moons and four new rings**, and observing the **Great Dark Spot**.
- **Unique Achievement:** It is the **only spacecraft to have studied all four giant planets—Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune—at close range**.

PM VISHWAKARMA SCHEME

Context

The Government of India has invited **100 PM Vishwakarma beneficiaries from the Delhi-NCR region** as **Special Guests** to attend the **80th Independence Day ceremony** at the **Red Fort, Delhi**.

About PM Vishwakarma Scheme

- **Nature:** PM Vishwakarma is a **Central Sector Scheme** launched in **2023** to provide comprehensive support to **traditional artisans and craftspeople**.
- **Nodal Ministry:** **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)**.
- **Objective:** To promote the **socio-economic empowerment of artisans**, strengthen traditional crafts and create **sustainable livelihood opportunities** through skill development, finance, technology and market support.
- **Coverage:** It covers **rural and urban artisans and craftspeople across India** engaged in **18 identified traditional trades**.

Eligibility

- **Age & Occupation:** Applicants must be **18 years or above** and engaged in one of the specified traditional trades.
- **Loan Condition:** Beneficiaries should not have availed **similar loans during the preceding five years**.

Key Features

- **Recognition:** Eligible artisans receive a **PM Vishwakarma Certificate and ID Card**.
- **Skill Development:** Provides **Basic Training of 5–7 days** and **Advanced Training of 15 days or more**, with a **₹500 per day stipend**.
- **Toolkit Support:** Provides a **toolkit incentive of up to ₹15,000** through **e-vouchers** at the beginning of Basic Skill Training.

- **Credit Support:** Offers collateral-free Enterprise Development Loans up to ₹3 lakh in two tranches of ₹1 lakh and ₹2 lakh, at a concessional interest rate of 5%.



Places in News

DANUBE RIVER

Context

Romania recently declared a **30-day energy alert** after severe drought reduced **Danube water levels to historic lows**, forcing the shutdown of **Unit 1 of the Cernavodă Nuclear Power Plant**, which supplies nearly **10% of Romania's electricity**.

About Danube River

- Nature:** The **Danube** is the **second-longest river in Europe after the Volga** and the only major European river flowing generally **from west to east**.
- Origin & Mouth:** It originates in the **Black Forest mountains of western Germany** from the **Breg and Brigach streams** and empties into the **Black Sea through the Danube Delta** in **Romania and Ukraine**.
- Countries:** It flows through or forms the boundaries of **10 countries-Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine**.
- Tributaries:** Major tributaries include the **Inn, Drava, Tisza, Sava, Morava and Olt rivers**.
- Major Cities:** Important cities along the Danube include **Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, Regensburg, Passau and Linz**.
- Major Ports:** Important river ports include **Regensburg, Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, Belgrade, Ruse, Brăila, Galați and Izmayil**.
- Danube Delta:** The river forms the **Danube Delta**, a major wetland ecosystem in **Romania and Ukraine** and a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.



PETERMANN GLACIER

Context

The **Petermann Glacier** in northwest **Greenland** recently calved a **76.4 sq. km ice island**, its largest floating-ice loss and the **largest Arctic calving event since 2020**.

About Petermann Glacier

- **Location:** Petermann Glacier is situated in **northwest Greenland**, east of the **Nares Strait**, the narrow sea passage separating **Greenland and Ellesmere Island, Canada**.
- **Significance:** It is one of the major glaciers connecting the **Greenland Ice Sheet with the Arctic Ocean**.
- **Calving:** Like other glaciers that discharge ice into the ocean, Petermann periodically **calves large icebergs and ice islands**; its ice flow has also accelerated in recent years.
- **Climate Link:** Greenland's land-based glaciers are an important contributor to **global sea-level rise**, and continued warming is expected to increase ice loss into the oceans.
- **Sea-Level Impact:** Scientists estimate that a **complete collapse of Petermann Glacier** could contribute about **30 cm to global sea-level rise**.



KENYA

Context

India recently welcomed **Kenya's decision to recognise Persons of Indian Origin as an indigenous community**.

About Kenya

- **Location:** Kenya is located in **Eastern Africa** and has a coastline along the **Indian Ocean** to the southeast.

- **Land Borders:** It shares borders with **Somalia (northeast), Ethiopia (north), South Sudan (northwest), Uganda (west) and Tanzania (south).**
- **Capital:** **Nairobi**, which hosts the headquarters of the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** and **UN-HABITAT**.
- **Major Lakes:** **Lake Victoria** is shared by **Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania**, while **Lake Turkana** lies in northern Kenya.
- **Major Rivers:** Important rivers include the **Tana**, the **longest river in Kenya**, along with the **Athi/Galana and Mara**.
- **Mountains:** Major highland features include the **Aberdare Range and Mau Escarpment**; **Mount Kenya** is the country's highest peak and the **second-highest peak in Africa** after **Mount Kilimanjaro**.
- **Island:** **Lamu Island** forms part of the **Lamu Archipelago** in the Indian Ocean.
- **Natural Resources:** Major mineral and energy resources include **lead, zircon, iron, titanium, mica, oil, coal, diatomite and gypsum**.
- **Tribal Communities:** Major communities include the **Samburu and Maasai**, among others.



Mains Exam Topics

TRIBUNALS IN INDIA

Context

Recently, Parliament passed the **Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026**, which proposes an independent **National Tribunals Commission (NTC)** to oversee the **appointments, administration and functioning of 16 major tribunals**.

What are the Key Provisions of the Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026?

The **Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026** seeks to establish a unified institutional framework for the administration, appointment, oversight and functioning of tribunals in India through a proposed **National Tribunals Commission (NTC)**.

Key Provisions of the Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026

1. National Tribunals Commission (NTC)

- **Establishment and Functions:** The Bill proposes a National Tribunals Commission as the central body responsible for the administration and oversight of tribunals. Its functions include conducting the selection process for tribunal vacancies, reviewing tribunal performance, supervising inquiries into complaints against chairpersons and members, and developing and maintaining the **National Tribunals Data Grid**.
- **Composition:** The Commission will comprise a **Chairperson**, two **judicial members**, and two **technical members**. The Chairperson must be a former Supreme Court Judge or Chief Justice of a High Court, while judicial members must have served as Chief Justice or Judge of a High Court. Technical members must possess at least **25 years of experience** in fields such as public administration, finance, law, accountancy, banking, management or technology.
- **Appointment:** Members of the Commission will be appointed by the **Central Government**. Appointment of the Chairperson and judicial members will require consultation with the **Chief Justice of India**.
- **Tenure:** The Chairperson and members will serve for **five years or until attaining 70 years of age**, whichever is earlier.
- **Secretariat:** The Commission will have a dedicated Secretariat headed by a Central Government Secretary to provide administrative and institutional support.

2. Selection Process for Tribunals

- **Search-cum-Selection Committee:** The NTC will constitute a Search-cum-Selection Committee for recommending appointments to tribunals. The NTC Chairperson will head the committee for selection of a tribunal chairperson, while a judicial member will head it for selection of other members. For every vacancy, the committee will recommend **one candidate and one additional name for the waiting list**. The Central Government must make the appointment within **three months** of receiving the recommendation.
- **Composition of Selection Committee:** The committee will include a retired Chief Justice of a High Court or a retired High Court Judge, depending on the vacancy; a technical member of the NTC; a Central Government Secretary; two expert members; and the Commission Secretary.
- **Voting Rights:** The two expert members and the Commission Secretary will not possess voting rights. The Chairperson of the committee will have a **casting vote** in case of a tie.

3. Conditions of Service of Tribunal Members

- **Tenure:** Tribunal chairpersons will hold office for **five years or until 70 years of age**, whichever is earlier. Other members will have the same five-year tenure but an upper age limit of **67 years**.
- **Reappointment:** Chairpersons and members may be considered for reappointment based on their **previous performance**. For members, reappointment will also require consultation with the chairperson of the concerned tribunal.
- **Grounds for Removal:** The Central Government may remove the Chairperson or a member of the NTC or a tribunal for grounds such as insolvency, conviction for an offence involving moral turpitude, physical or mental incapacity, abuse of position, or acquisition of interests that could adversely affect their functions. Tribunal members may additionally be removed for **incompetence, inefficiency or undertaking paid assignments**.
- **Service Conditions:** The Central Government will prescribe through Rules the qualifications, selection procedure, salaries and allowances, resignation, removal and other service conditions of tribunal members.
- **Uniform Applicability:** The Bill seeks to establish common rules governing selection, tenure and service conditions across **16 major tribunals** listed in the First Schedule. These include the **Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT), National Green Tribunal (NGT) and National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)**.

Why were tribunals created despite existing courts?

- **Specialised Adjudication:** Tribunals were designed for disputes where **technical, economic or sector-specific expertise** could complement conventional judicial adjudication.

- **Eg:** The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** combines judicial adjudication with environmental expertise; the **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)** handles specialised company-law and insolvency disputes.
- **Speed and Procedural Flexibility:** Tribunalisation was intended to provide **faster and less formal adjudication than** ordinary courts by using procedures adapted to the subject matter.
 - **Eg:** The NCLT replaced multiple earlier company-law forums with a consolidated specialised mechanism.
- **Decongestion as an Institutional Objective:** Tribunals were expected to **remove specialised caseloads from ordinary courts**, although subsequent experience showed that transferring jurisdiction does not automatically reduce total litigation.
 - **Eg:** CAT was created under the Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985 to adjudicate specified service disputes involving government employees.
- **Alternative-Theory Phase:** In **S.P. Sampath Kumar v. Union of India (1987)**, the Supreme Court accepted tribunalisation on the premise that a tribunal could provide an **equally effective and efficacious alternative** to the High Court in the jurisdiction transferred to it.
 - **Eg:** CAT was envisaged as an alternative adjudicatory mechanism for service disputes rather than merely an executive grievance forum.
- **Constitutional Enabling Framework:** The **42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976** inserted **Part XIV-A**, comprising **Articles 323A and 323B**, giving constitutional recognition to specialised tribunals.
 - **Eg:** **Article 323A** specifically deals with administrative tribunals, while **Article 323B** provides for tribunals for specified subjects such as taxation and labour disputes.

What explains the tension between tribunal expertise and judicial independence?

- **Policy Role:** Tribunals often combine **legal adjudication with economic, technical and policy considerations**, making their role broader than merely determining legal rights.
 - **Eg:** The **NCLT** applies insolvency law while considering resolution and value maximisation; **TDSAT** adjudicates telecom disputes within a regulated sector.
- **Appointment Control:** Executive influence over appointments creates a risk of **executive influence over adjudication**, especially where tribunals review government decisions.
 - **Eg:** In **Union of India v. R. Gandhi (2010)**, the Supreme Court scrutinised the appointment structure of the NCLT/NCLAT to protect judicial independence.

- **Tenure Dependence:** Short tenure or executive-controlled reappointment can make tribunal members **dependent on the authority deciding their continuation**.
 - **Eg:** The Supreme Court has repeatedly treated tenure and reappointment as important safeguards of tribunal independence.
- **Administrative Control:** Executive control over **finance, infrastructure and day-to-day administration** can weaken the institutional independence of tribunals even when adjudicators have formal security of office.
 - **Eg:** The **Madras Bar Association** cases called for an independent administrative structure for tribunals rather than continued dependence on parent Ministries.
- **Regulatory Conflict:** In regulatory tribunals, the executive may be both the **regulator and the institutional authority**, creating a risk that tribunals become less independent in reviewing regulatory decisions.
 - **Eg:** **TDSAT** adjudicates telecom disputes within a regulatory framework substantially shaped and administered by the executive.

Why has the expansion of tribunals not produced a proportionate improvement in speedy justice?

- **Capacity Deficit:** Specialised jurisdiction cannot produce speed when tribunals lack **adequate benches, members, staff and infrastructure**.
- **Vacancy–Backlog Cycle:** Delayed appointments reduce bench strength, which increases pendency and further delays appointments and institutional reform.
- **Courtification of Tribunals:** Forums intended to operate with **procedural flexibility** can gradually adopt court-like pleadings, extensive oral advocacy and adjournment-heavy practices, eroding their original speed advantage.
- **Epistemic Friction:** Judicial review creates an institutional interface between **specialist expertise and generalist constitutional adjudication**: excessive deference may make review ineffective, while intrusive re-evaluation of technical findings can undermine the tribunal's comparative advantage.
- **Fragmented Architecture:** Multiple tribunals with different statutes, appointment structures and procedures create **jurisdictional complexity and uneven institutional standards**, weakening the economies of specialisation.

Way Forward

- **Establish an Independent National Tribunals Commission:** Create a genuinely autonomous body for **appointments, administration, infrastructure and oversight**, reducing Ministry-wise control over institutions adjudicating government and regulatory disputes.
 - **Eg:** The Supreme Court directed the Union to establish a **National Tribunals Commission** in its 2025 Madras Bar Association judgment.
- **Secure Appointment and Tenure:** Adopt **transparent selection, adequate tenure and safeguards against reappointment dependence**, making adjudicators less vulnerable to executive influence.
- **Reverse Courtification:** Simplify pleadings, control adjournments, expand digital procedures and reduce unnecessary oral advocacy so tribunals retain a genuine **procedural advantage over conventional courts**.
- **Rationalise Before Expanding:** New or existing tribunal jurisdictions should be justified by a clear **specialisation test, caseload threshold and comparative advantage** over ordinary courts.
- **Undertake Judicial-Impact Assessment:** Before transferring jurisdiction, assess likely effects on **tribunal workload, High Court review, staffing requirements and total litigation time**, rather than measuring success solely by tribunal-level disposal.