



## CURRENT AFFAIRS: OCTOBER 2024

### FREE LEGAL AID

- The Supreme Court (SC) issued directions for Legal Services Authorities (LSAs) to ensure access to free legal aid for prison inmates.

### SC Directions to ensure access to free legal aid for prison inmates

- **Strengthening Legal Services Authorities:** The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in cooperation with the state and district level legal authorities shall ensure effective implementation of SOP-2022 with periodic upgradation.
- **Strengthen the monitoring of Prisoner Legal Aid Clinics (PLACs):** Periodic review of the functioning of the PLACs by the Legal Services Authorities (LSAs).
- **Data-led improvements:** The LSAs to periodically update statistical data and address the shortcomings highlighted on the analysis of this data.
- **Legal Aid Defence Counsels:** Periodic inspection and audit of the work of the Legal Aid Defence Counsels should be carried out.
- **Awareness generation:** Improving awareness about available schemes and legal aid services including literature in local languages and employing appropriate promotional methods.
- **Effective Communication:** Periodic interaction by the LSAs with convicts as well as Jail Visiting Lawyers (JVLs) and Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs).
  - o The High Courts may on their webpage carry information about the legal aid facilities available in the State.
- **Periodic reporting:** Periodic reports should be submitted by the DLSAs to the SLSAs and the SLSAs to the NALSA and the process can be digitized for ease of access.

### About free legal aid in India

- Legal aid in India refers to the provision of free legal services to individuals who are unable to afford legal representation or access to the justice system.
- Legal aid can include legal advice, representation in court proceedings, mediation, negotiation, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.
- **Constitutional provisions for legal aid**

- o Article 21: It states that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

- o Article 39-A: Ensure 'Equal Justice and Free Legal Aid' to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen because of economic or other disabilities, inserted by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976).

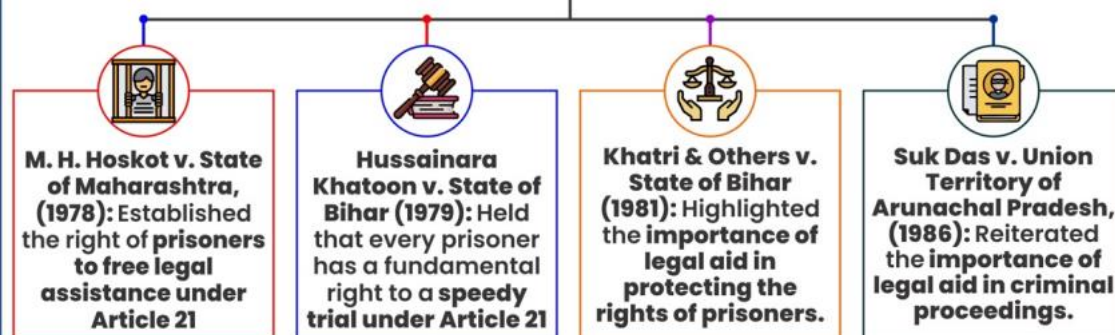
- **Statutory provisions**

- o **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987** (came into force in 1995): To constitute legal services authorities to provide free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of society.

- > National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), State Legal Services Authority (SLSAs) and the District Legal Services Authority (DLSAs) were accordingly constituted.

- o Section 341 of the **Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023**: Legal aid to accused at State expense in certain cases where the accused lacks the means for legal engagement.

## Important Judgements regarding legal aid





## The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)

- It is a **statutory** body constituted under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987** to provide **free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society**.
- **Functions:**
  - **Formulate policies, principles, guidelines** and frame effective schemes for the **State Legal Services Authorities** to implement the Legal Services Programmes throughout the country.
  - **Monitor and evaluate implementation** of legal aid programmes.
  - Organize **Lok Adalats** for amicable settlement of disputes.
- **Eligibility for free legal aid:**
  - Women and children
  - Members of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes
  - Industrial workmen
  - Victims of mass disaster, violence, flood, drought, earthquake, industrial disaster.
  - Persons with Disabilities
  - Persons in custody in protective home, juvenile home, or in a psychiatric hospital.
  - Persons whose annual income does not exceed Rs. 1 lakh ( Under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, higher amount may be prescribed by the State Govt)
    - > In the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee the limit is Rs. 5,00,000/.
  - Victims of Trafficking in Human beings or beggar

## Government Steps

- **Designing Innovative Solutions for Holistic Access to Justice in India (DISHA) scheme:** To strengthen pre-litigation mechanism.
- **Tele-Law:** To facilitate delivery of **legal advice through an expert panel of lawyers** – stationed at the SLSA.
- **Nyaya Bandhu (Pro Bono Legal Services) programme :** Through this interested lawyers can register themselves to **volunteer pro bono services** for the underprivileged litigants.
- **Nyaya Mitra programme:** To facilitate **disposal of 10 to 15 years old cases (both civil and criminal cases)** pending in High Courts and Subordinate Courts.
- **Lok Adalat:** One of the alternative dispute redressal mechanisms, where disputes/cases pending in the court of law or at pre-litigation stage are settled/ compromised amicably.
  - **There is no court fee payable** when a matter is filed in a Lok Adalat.

## RIGHT TO INFORMATION (RTI) ACT, 2005

- As the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 approaches its 20th anniversary in 2025, it is crucial to reflect on its impact and the challenges it faces.

### About RTI Act, 2005

- It was enacted in June 2005 and came into force in October 2005.
- The act provides citizens the right to secure access to information under control of Public Authorities (PAs).
- Coordinating agency: Department of Personnel and Training under Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievance sand Pensions (MoPPG&P).



- **Background:**

- o Right to Information finds articulation as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- o India enacted the “Freedom of Information Act, 2002” in order to promote, transparency and accountability in administration.
- o Later, RTI Act 2005 replaced the Freedom of Information Act, 2002.
- o ‘Raj Narayan v/s Uttar Pradesh Government’: Supreme Court established the Right to information as a fundamental right under the Article 19 of Indian Constitution.

## **Key Provisions of the RTI Act**

- **Institutional framework:**

- o Central and State Information Commissions: to oversee its implementation and address appeals regarding non-disclosure of information.
- o Central Public Information Officers (PIO) or State PIO: in every public authority to provide information to persons requesting for the information under this Act.

- **Rights provided:**

- o Every citizen has the right to request information from a public authority.
- o Obligations of Public Authorities (Section 4): To maintain records and proactively disclose certain categories of information to minimize the need for formal requests.



- **Applicability:** Public Authorities, including all authorities/bodies/institutions of Government established under the Constitution, any other law made by the Parliament or a State Legislature or through notification issued/order made by the appropriate Government.

- o It also includes bodies owned, controlled or substantially financed by the Central/State Government and non-Government organisations substantially financed (directly/indirectly) by the Central/State Government also fall within the definition of public authority.

- **Exemptions from Disclosure:**

- o Section 8: Certain information is exempt from disclosure

- o Certain intelligence and security organisations specified in the Second Schedule: Includes 27 organizations like Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, Directorate of Enforcement, National Technical Research Organisation etc.

| Examples of cases in which Information is exempt from disclosure (Section 8)  |  |
|---|--|
|  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Affects sovereignty and integrity, security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of India.</b></li> <li>▶ Affects <b>relations with foreign State</b></li> <li>▶ Leads to <b>incitement of an offence</b></li> <li>▶ Causes <b>Breach of privilege</b> of Parliament/ State Legislature</li> <li>▶ <b>Expressly forbidden</b> to be published by any court of law/tribunal</li> <li>▶ May constitute <b>contempt of court.</b></li> </ul> |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Commercial <b>confidence, trade secrets</b> or intellectual property.</li> <li>▶ Information received in confidence from foreign Government</li> <li>▶ <b>Endangers the life or physical safety</b> of any person.</li> <li>▶ <b>Cabinet papers</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Impedes investigation process</b> or apprehension/ prosecution of offenders etc.</li> <li>▶ Relates to <b>personal information</b></li> </ul> |

## SUPREME COURT QUESTIONS FEASIBILITY OF GRAM NYAYALAYAS

- SC raised concern regarding the feasibility of setting up Gram Nyayalayas (village courts), as mandated by the Gram Nyayalayas Act of 2008.
- Gram Nyayalayas ensures that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of social, economic or other disabilities.

### Key Concern raised by SC

- Establishment of Gram Nyayalayas by States/UTs is mandatory or not: Section 3 of the Act provides that governments "may" constitute Gram Nyayalayas.
- Resource Crunch: State governments, already facing limited resources for regular courts, find it challenging to fund additional gram nyayalayas.
- Rising Burden: They may end up burdening high courts with appeals and writ petitions.





## Key Features of Gram Nyayalayas

- Seat: Establish at intermediate level Panchayat or a group of contiguous Panchayats.
  - o State government appoints 'Nyayadhikari' for each Gram Nyayalaya in consultation with the high court.
- Jurisdiction: Shall be a mobile court, with both civil and criminal jurisdiction.
- Dispute Process: Disputes are to be preferably settled with the help of conciliation.
  - o Social workers may be appointed as Conciliators.
  - o They are not bound by the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (replaced by the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam) but by Principles of Natural Justice

### **Implementation Status of Gram Nyayalayas**

- There was an initial target of around 2,500 gram nyayalayas, however, fewer than 500 have been established, with only 314 currently operational across India.
- States such as Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have shown progress, yet other major states, including Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, have seen limited or no implementation.

### **Initiative to Support Gram Nyayalayas**

- Under **Gram Nyayalayas scheme** (Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)), Union Government provides financial assistance to States to set up Gram Nyayalayas.




## SECTION 6A OF CITIZENSHIP ACT

- Constitution bench of Supreme Court (SC) upheld the validity of **Section 6A of Citizenship Act**.
- Section 6A is a special provision added through Citizenship Amendment Act, 1985 in furtherance of a Memorandum of Settlement called the 'Assam Accord' between then central government and leaders of the Assam Movement.
- It conferred citizenship to those who migrated from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to Assam from January 1, 1966, until 24 March 1971 upon completion of ten years from the date of detection as a foreigner.

## SC judgment:

- On legislative competence of Parliament to enact Section 6A: Law is enacted in exercise of power under Article 246 read with Entry 17 of List I (Union list)
  - o Entry 17 deals with Citizenship, naturalization and aliens.
- Article 14 (Equality): Assam's special citizenship law does not violate equality because the migrant situation in Assam was unique compared to rest of India.
- Impact on Culture (Article 29 (1)): No evidence that migrants harmed cultural rights of Assamese.
- On the cut-off date of 24 March 1971: It is reasonable because Pakistani Army launched Operation SearchLight to curb Bangladeshi nationalist movement in East Pakistan on 26 March 1971.
  - o Migrants after this date were considered to be migrants of war and not partitions.

## About Citizenship Act, 1955

-  **Prescribes five ways of acquiring citizenship:** birth, descent, registration, naturalisation and incorporation of territory.
-  Does not provide for **dual citizenship**.
-  **Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019** exempts Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, or Pakistan who entered India before December 31, 2014, from being considered illegal migrants.

## BRICS

- 16<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit, and the First Summit with expanded BRICS membership was held in Kazan (Russia).

## About BRICS

- Genesis: British economist Jim O' Neill in 2001 coined acronym 'BRICs' representing the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
  - o BRIC started functioning as a formal grouping on the margins of G8 Outreach Summit in 2006. 1st BRIC Summit was held in Russia in 2009. BRIC became BRICS with the inclusion of South Africa in 2010.



- Members (10):
  - o Initial 5 members (BRICS): Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and
  - o 5 new members (BRICS+): Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
- It represents:
  - o 45% of the world's population.
  - o 37.3% of world GDP (compared to EU's 14.5 % and the G7's 29.3%)

## Key Initiatives of BRICS

| Area                  | Initiatives  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Financial             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>New Development Bank(NDB) headquartered in Shanghai (2014):</b> Aims to provide financial resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in <b>BRICS &amp; other developing countries</b>. It has an equal distribution of voting shares among BRICS founding members.</li><li>• <b>Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA):</b> A financial safety net to provide short-term liquidity support to <b>member countries</b> facing balance of payments difficulties.</li><li>• <b>BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative (BCBPI) or BRICS Pay:</b> BRICS Pay is a payment service built on blockchain technology for making settlements <b>between member states</b> and provide an alternative to existing global financial infrastructure dominated by Western systems like SWIFT.</li><li>• <b>BRICS Grain Exchange: A Russian</b> initiative to establish a grain (commodities) trading platform within BRICS to "develop a fair agricultural trading system."</li><li>• <b>BRICS Clear Depository:</b> It is a cross-border payment settlement and depository infrastructure.</li></ul> |
| Voice to Global South | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>"BRICS Plus" Dialogue:</b> The <b>dialogue</b> was hosted with <b>emerging markets and developing countries</b> from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East with motto <b>"BRICS and Global South: Building a Better World Together."</b></li><li>• <b>Endorsed 'BRICS Partner Country': This new category'</b> added <b>13</b> new partner countries, including Cuba, Turkey, and Vietnam.</li></ul>   |
| Security              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>BRICS Rapid Information Security Channel:</b> Promotes exchange of information on cyber threats among their central banks.</li><li>• In its 14<sup>th</sup> summit in 2022, BRICS called for finalization and adoption of the <b>Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism</b> within the UN framework.</li></ul>   |

## INDIA FOREX RESERVE CROSS 700 BILLION DOLLAR

- India is now the fourth country in the world to have over \$700 billion in foreign reserves, following China, Japan, and Switzerland.
- India's reserves can cover 11.9 months of imports, well above the general norm of six-months.



## About Forex (Foreign Exchange) Reserve

- It comprises of different assets that are held by a central bank.
  - o In India, the RBI Act of 1934 contains the enabling provisions for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to act as the custodian of forex reserve, and manage reserves within the defined objectives.
- Components of Reserve (in descending order as per their value)-
  - o Foreign Currency Assets (FCA): It is valued in currencies other than the country's own
  - o Gold reserves
  - o Special Drawing Rights: A reserve asset provided by International Monetary Fund (IMF).
    - > Its value is based on a mix of five major currencies- the US dollar, euro, Chinese renminbi, Japanese yen, and British pound sterling.

## MILITARY EXERCISES IN NEWS

- **Exercise KAZIND-2024:** 8th edition of India-Kazakhstan Annual Joint Military Exercise KAZIND-2024 commenced in Auli (Uttarakhand).
- **Exercise Malabar 2024:**
  - o Annual maritime exercise, which will take place both in harbour and at sea.
  - o Participant: Australia, Japan, the United States and India.
- **Naseem-Al-Bahr:** It was conducted between the Indian Navy and Royal Navy of Oman in Goa

## NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE



- South Korean author Han Kang gets Nobel Prize in Literature for her intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes fragility of human life.

## **About Nobel Prize**

- Established by Alfred Nobel in 1895. First Nobel Prizes were awarded in 1901 and they have been awarded annually since then.
- An international award administered by Nobel Foundation in Stockholm, Sweden.
- 6 Categories: Peace, Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Literature and Economic Science.
  - In 1968, Sweden's central bank established Economic Sciences award in Memory of Alfred Nobel.
- From 1974, Statutes of Nobel Foundation stipulate that prize cannot be awarded posthumously, unless death has occurred after announcement of Nobel Prize

## **NOBEL PRIZE IN CHEMISTRY 2024**

- The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences has awarded the 2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry to David Baker for computational protein design and jointly to Demis Hassabis and John Jumper for protein structure prediction.

## **NOBEL PRIZE IN MEDICINE 2024**

- Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2024 has been awarded to Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun for the discovery of microRNA and its role in post-transcriptional Gene Regulation.

## **NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSICS 2024**

- Nobel Prize in Physics 2024 has been awarded to John J. Hopfield and Geoffrey Hinton for foundational discoveries and inventions that enable Machine Learning (ML) with Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs).



## **NOBEL PEACE PRIZE**

- Nobel Peace Prize 2024 has been awarded to Japanese organization Nihon Hidankyo for its efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.
- It is a grassroots movement of atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki

## **CLASSICAL LANGUAGE**

- Recently, Union Cabinet has approved Classical Language status to Marathi (Maharashtra), Pali and Prakrit (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), Assamese (Assam) and Bengali (West Bengal) languages.

### **About Classical Language**

- Classical Languages serve as a custodian of India's profound and ancient cultural heritage, embodying the essence of each community's historical and cultural milestone.
- In 2004, the Government of India, for the first time, created a new category of languages known as Classical Languages.
- Earlier, six Indian languages namely Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), Telugu & Kannada (2008), Malayalam (2013) and Odia (2014) were accorded the status of Classical Language.
  - o All these Classical Languages are listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution

## **KARTARPUR SAHIB CORRIDOR**

- Recently, India and Pakistan has agreed to extend the validity of the Agreement on Sri Kartarpur Sahib Corridor for next five years period.

### **About Dera Baba Nanak - Sri Kartarpur Sahib Pilgrimage**

- Gurdwara Sri Kartarpur Sahib falls in district Narowal of Pakistan, about 4.5 k.m. from the international border near the historic town of Dera Baba Nanak, District Gurdaspur, Punjab.
  - o Village Kartarpur is located at the west bank of river Ravi.
  - o Gurdwara Dera Baba Nanak is on the east bank of River Ravi.

## Dera Baba Nanak – Sri Kartarpur Sahib Pilgrimage



### NEW FLAG, INSIGNIA AND LADY JUSTICE AT SUPREME COURT

- Recently, Indian President unveiled new flag and insignia of Supreme Court, whereas Chief Justice of India unveiled 'new lady justice' statue at Supreme Court.

#### About Lady Justice

- Origin: Greek and Roman mythology
  - o 1st Roman Emperor Augustus introduced worship of Justice in the form of goddess Justitia.
- Depiction: Scales in one hand and a sword in other.
- Addition of blindfold was done during the Renaissance period (14th century): as a satire on the corrupt state of legal systems with judicial institutions turning a blind eye.
- Enlightenment period (17th-18th century): blindfold came to be reinterpreted as representing impartiality.
  - o British introduced Lady Justice in India, 1st in Calcutta High Court in 1872

## India

### Ladakh

- Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has cleared key road stretches passing through the Karakoram Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS).

### Rajasthan

- Artificial insemination of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) was achieved at the National Breeding Centre in Jaisalmer under the Bustard Recovery Program.
- Meta and 'IndiaAI' unveiled the Centre for Generative AI, Shrihar at IIT Jodhpur.

### Gujarat

- Cabinet Approves Development of National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) At Lothal, Gujarat.

### Jharkhand

- Prime Minister gifted Sohrai Painting, a mural art form in Hazaribagh district, to Russia's President Vladimir Putin during BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia.
- Study indicated shale gas generation potential in eastern South Karanpura coalfield, Jharkhand.

### Kerala

- Farmers in Idukki are experiencing the menace of locust infestation.

### Andhra Pradesh

- A Brahmi inscription found in Dharanikota village at Amaravathi mandal in Palnadu district, Andhra Pradesh.

### Uttarakhand

- A dense forest created at 8,000 ft in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand, using the Miyawaki method has achieved 93% success rate.

### Bihar

- Bihar's first dry port also known as inland container depot (ICD) inaugurated in Bihta near Patna.

- National Tiger Conservation Authority's (NTCA) has given approval to develop Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS) as Bihar's second tiger reserve after Valmiki Tiger Reserve.

### Manipur

- The Poumai Naga tribe of Senapati District, Manipur has banned hunting, trapping and killing of wild animals and birds within their territory.

### West Bengal

- Red Panda Program of Darjeeling's Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoo's has been selected as finalist for 2024 WAZA (World Association of Zoos and Aquariums) Conservation Award.

### Assam

- Recently Asiatic Golden Cat (*Catopuma temminckii*) was spotted at Assam's Manas National Park.

- Nine captive-bred pygmy hogs released in Assam's Manas national park.

- Women from flood-prone Borchila in Assam are transforming water hyacinth into eco-friendly products and creating jobs under SBM-Urban.

- The National Board for Wildlife deferred its nod for oil exploration in Assam's Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary which is the habitat of the Hoolock Gibbon.

## Places in News: World

### Falkland Islands and Gibraltar

British Foreign Secretary affirms that UK's sovereignty over Falkland Islands and Gibraltar is non-negotiable.

### Algeria

President of India recently paid a visit to Algeria.

### Colombia

India has signed Audio-visual Co-production Agreement with Colombia.

### Mauritania

Recently, the President of India visited Mauritania.

### Albania

India opened new mission in Albania to boost its diplomatic footprint.

### Ukraine

Russian missiles attacked Ukraine's Snake Island, also known as Zmiyni Island, located in the Black Sea.

### Blue Line

UN said that the Israeli military has fired on its peacekeepers near the Blue Line.

### Kazakhstan

Recently, Kazakhstan held a referendum on constructing its first nuclear power plant to increase energy production.

### Triton Island

Recent satellite imagery reveals a significant military buildup by China on Triton Island.

### Congo Basin

According to a recent Study, Cacao farming has surged in Congo Basin due to rising chocolate demand leading to deforestation.

### Malawi

President of India paid visit to Malawi.

### South Africa

South Africa becomes first country to allow Heritable Human Genome Editing (HHGE).