UPSC Daily Current Affairs | Prelim Bits 22-04-2021

Britcoin

- The Bank of England and the Treasury will work together to assess the benefits of creating a new Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) called "Britcoin", at a time when cash payments are generally on the decline.
- If the new currency comes to pass, it would be a new form of digital money for use by households and businesses and would exist alongside cash and bank deposits, rather than replacing them.
- The vision of this coin is to have a more open, greener, and more technologically advanced financial services sector.

Digital Currency

- Digital currency, also known as digital money, electronic money, electronic currency or cyber cash, is a form of currency that is available only in digital or electronic form, and not in physical form.
- They are already being explored or even implemented in several other countries, with many proponents drawing inspiration from the success of Bitcoin and other so-called cryptocurrencies.
- All cryptocurrencies are digital currencies, but not all digital currencies are cryptocurrencies.
- **Benefits of a digital currency** - Backup to card payments if cash payments continue to drop in the years to come.
- [By the end of this decade, only one in 10 payments in the U.K. are expected to be made with traditional paper money.]
- They can provide another way for people to make purchases online.

Central Bank Digital Currency

- A CBDC uses an electronic record or digital token to represent the virtual form of a fiat currency of a particular nation (or region).
- It is centralized; it is issued and regulated by the competent monetary authority of the country.
- These digital currencies are different in a key sense to Bitcoin as they are issued by state authorities.
- Currently, only the Bahamas has such a currency, though China is trialing it in several cities.

- Sweden could have its own digital currency by 2026, while the European Central Bank could have an electronic euro created within four years.

National Policy for Rare Diseases 2021

- The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has notified the National Policy on Rare Diseases, 2021.
- Though the document specifies increasing the government support for treating patients with a 'rare disease' - from Rs. 15 lakh to Rs. 20 lakh - caregivers say this doesn't reflect actual costs of treatment.
- According to the policy, rare diseases include genetic diseases, rare cancers, infectious tropical diseases, and degenerative diseases.
- **Centres of Excellence** - The government would notify selected Centres of Excellence at premier government hospitals for comprehensive management of rare diseases.
- These Centres would be provided a one-time grant to a maximum of ₹5 crore each for infrastructure development for screening, tests, treatment.
- **Patient registry of rare diseases** is to be constituted under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
- **Categorisation** - A 'rare disease' has been categorised into 3 groups.
    1. **Group 1 diseases** - include osteopetrosis and immune deficiency disorders, among others - would be eligible for a one-time curative treatment cost of up to Rs. 20 lakh.
    2. **Group 2 diseases** require long-term treatment with low cost.
    3. **Group 3 Diseases** require long-term treatments with high cost.
- For Group 1 diseases, Rs. 20 lakh assistance will be provided to the patients with these disease that require a one-time treatment under 'Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi'
- These beneficiaries should conform to definition of Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana and were treated in government tertiary care hospital.
- For Group 2 diseases, the States could consider supporting patients of these diseases that can be managed with special diets or hormonal supplements or other relatively low cost interventions.
- For the diseases, such as Hurler Syndrome, Gaucher's disease, that requires annual treatment expenses from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore, a digital platform is to be set up to raise donations and corporate funding.
- It aims to create **Administrative Committee** that will develop guidelines to determine which rare diseases to fund.
- **Detection** - The policy aims to screen and detect rare diseases at early stages, which will in turn help in their prevention.
- It aims to achieve this through the help of Health and Wellness Centres,

District Early Intervention Centres and counselling.

World Press Freedom Index 2021

- It is published by the Reporters Without Borders or Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) since 2002.
- It ranks countries and regions according to the level of media freedom available to journalists.
- It is based on an evaluation of media freedom that measures pluralism, media independence, media environment and self-censorship, transparency, and the legal framework and the safety of journalists.
- It is also based on the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information.
- It includes indicators of level of media freedom violations in each region.

Findings

- The 2021 index ranked 180 countries. It is topped by Norway, while Eritrea is at the bottom.
- India is ranked 142, same as last year, after it had consistently slid down from 133 in 2016. India continues to be counted among the countries classified "bad" for journalism, along with Brazil, Mexico and Russia.
- With four journalists killed in connection with their work in 2020, India is one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists trying to do their job properly.
- Instead of drafting new repressive laws to impose censorship, many Asia-Pacific countries have contented themselves with strictly applying existing laws that was already very draconian.

International Religious Freedom Report 2021

- This report was released by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).
- For the second year in a row, it has recommended that the State Department put India on a 'Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs)' list for the worst violations of religious freedoms in 2020.
- It recommended imposing targeted sanctions on Indian individuals and entities for 'severe violations of religious freedom'.
- It recommended for the administration to promote inter-faith dialogue and the rights of all communities at bilateral and multilateral forums.
- It recommended the U.S. Congress to raise issues in the US-India bilateral space, such as by hosting hearings, writing letters, etc.,
- **CPC list** - Russia, Syria, Vietnam, Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria,

North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.
- **Special Watch List** - Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Cuba, Egypt, Iraq, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Turkey, Nicaragua and Uzbekistan.

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

- It is an independent bi-partisan U.S. federal government commission that was created by the International Religious Freedom Act, 1998.
- It is dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.
- It monitors religious freedom violations globally and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.

RESPOND Programme

- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will support eight joint research projects mooted by the Space Technology Cell (STC), Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi under its RESPOND programme.
- RESPOND Programme **(**Research Sponsored) aims to establish strong links with premiere academic institutions in India to carry out research and developmental projects in advanced areas of relevance to space.
- It aims to enhance academic base, generate human resources and infrastructure at the academic institutes to support the Indian Space program.
- The research proposals received from academia for consideration under RESPOND are accepted for taking up research along with appropriate technical and financial support, only after thorough review of proposals.
- ISRO helps these institutions to provide fellowships to researchers to work on cutting edge research topics.

Space Technology Cell

- Space Technology Cell (STC) was set up at IIT, Delhi under a MoU signed between the ISRO and IIT-D in 2019 to strengthen the research collaboration between the two organisations.
- It was set up to carry out focused research projects in the space technology domain with specific deliverables.
- Since an MoU was signed between the ISRO and IIT-D in 2019, eight collaborative research projects have been announced.

Appointment of Ad-hoc Judges

- To deal with mounting backlog of cases, the Supreme Court cleared the way for appointment of retired judges as ad-hoc judges in High Courts under

Article 224A of the Constitution.

- There are almost 40% vacancies remaining in the regular appointments (both permanent and additional judges) over the last two years.
- So, the court ruled that the Chief Justice of a High Court may initiate the process of recommending a name if,

1. Number of judges' vacancies is more than 20% of the sanctioned strength,
2. Cases in a particular category are pending for over five years,
3. More than 10% of pending cases are over 5 years old, or percentage of the rate of disposal is lower than the institution of the cases either in a particular subject matter or generally in the court.

- The Chief Justice of a High Court should prepare a panel of judges after personal interaction with the concerned judge to take their consent.
- The appointments can follow the procedure laid down in the Memorandum of Procedure for appointment of judges.
- Since the nominees have been judges before, the need to refer the matter to the IB or other agencies would not arise, shortening the time period.
- A Chief Justice should start the recommendation process three months in advance for such appointment.
- **Tenure -** Generally for a period between two and three years (may vary on the basis of the need.)
- **Number -** The number of ad-hoc judges in the court should be in the range of 2 to 5 for the time being (Depending on the strength of the High Court and the problem faced by it.)
- **Work** - Since the goal was to clear the backlog, the ad-hoc judges can be assigned more than five-year-old cases; however, this would not affect the High Court Chief Justice's discretion to allot any other matter.
- The ad-hoc appointees are barred from performing any other legal work - advisory, arbitration or appearing in court for clients.
- If a Division Bench needs to be constituted to hear a matter, it would comprise of only ad-hoc judges (not a mix of ad-hoc and sitting judges).
- **Allowances** - Their emoluments and allowances should be on a par with a permanent judge of that court minus the pension.
- They will be entitled to allowance/perks/perquisites as are available to permanent/additional judge(s).

Source: PIB, The Hindu, The Indian Express, Down To Earth, Business Line



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