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### (1) Supreme Court would consider a plea seeking to revive NJAC: Chief Justice of India

#### Why in the news ?

Recently, Supreme Court agreed to consider a PIL questioning the Collegium system for appointment of judges in the top court and the High Courts and seeking revival of the National Judicial Appointment Commission (NJAC).

#### About the NJAC Act, 2014

- **Constitutional Amendment:** Established by the 99th Constitutional Amendment to replace the Collegium system for higher Judiciary appointments.
- **Composition:** Appointments to be recommended by a six-member commission: the CJI, two senior Supreme Court judges, the Union Law Minister, and two eminent persons.
- **Judicial Verdict:** Struck down in the Fourth Judges Case (2015), for violating 'Basic Structure' (Judicial Independence).

#### Concerns with the Collegium

- **Opacity and Accountability Deficit:** Collegium decisions are not answerable to any external authority—neither Parliament nor the executive.
- **Exclusionary Nature:** Collegium has been criticised for under-representation of women judges, inadequate presence from marginalized communities, etc.
- **Constitutional ambiguity:** Collegium system emerged from judicial interpretation (Three Judges Cases) undermining the principle that Parliament should determine institutional design.
- **Vacancy:** Persistent standoffs between the Collegium and Executive delay appointments.

## Conclusion

While the Collegium system safeguards judicial independence, the concerns highlight the need for reform, such as a restructured National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) with safeguards, or a collegium-plus model ensuring transparency, accountability, and diversity.

## Existing System of appointments in Higher Judiciary

- Appointments are via the **Collegium System** formalized by the **Memorandum of Procedure (MoP)**.
  - The MoP is the rulebook outlining the recommendation, approval, and consultation steps between the Judiciary and the Executive.
- **For appointments in Supreme Court:** Collegium consists of the **Chief Justice of India and the four senior-most Supreme Court judges**.
- **For appointments in High Courts:**
  - Collegium at HC consists of **Chief Justice of High Court and two senior judges of the concerned court**.
  - Collegium at SC consists of **CJI and two seniormost Judges of the Supreme Court**.
  - Chief Justice of India seeks views of the Judges of the Supreme Court, outside the Collegium, who are conversant with the affairs of the concerned High Court.

## (2) Union Cabinet Approves Scheme to Manufacture Rare Earth Magnets in India

### Why in the news ?

The Union Cabinet has approved the “**Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Sintered Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPMS)**” to secure India’s long-term supply of rare earth magnets and reduce dependence on imports.

- **Sintering** is a process where **magnet materials are heated to high temperatures without melting**. It strengthens the magnets, enhances magnetic performance, and makes them more resistant to corrosion.

### Key Features of Scheme:

- **Financial Outlay:** ₹7,280 crore.
  - **Incentive Structure:-**
    - **₹6,450 crore** as sales-linked incentives over five years.

- ₹750 crore as capital subsidy for facility setup.
- **Total Duration of the Scheme: 7 years**
- 2 years: facility setup (gestation period)
- 5 years: incentive disbursement on sales
- **Objective:** Establish 6,000 Metric Tons per Annum (MTPA) of integrated REPMs manufacturing in India.
- **Beneficiaries Allocation:**
  - **The 6,000 MTPA capacity** will be allocated to five beneficiaries through global competitive bidding.

### Rare Earth Permanent Magnets:

- They are a type of permanent magnet made from alloys of rare earth elements.
  - **Rare Earth Elements** are a group of seventeen elements, including the fifteen lanthanides on the periodic table, along with scandium and yttrium.
- **Properties:** exceptional magnetic strength, high energy density, and superior performance compared to other types of magnets.
- **Applications:** electric vehicles, renewable energy, electronics, aerospace, and defence sectors
  - Each beneficiary may receive up to 1,200 MTPA capacity.

**End-to-End Manufacturing Integration:** It supports the creation of facilities that cover the **complete processing facilities:-**

**Rare earth oxides → metals → alloys → finished rare earth permanent magnets**

## (3) PM calls on Citizens to Uphold Fundamental Duties

### Why in the news ?

On Constitution Day, the Prime Minister called upon citizens to uphold their fundamental duties and actively contribute to strengthening India's democratic framework.

### Constitutional Status of Fundamental Duties

- **Constitutional Provision:** Enshrined in **Article 51A (Part IVA)**, inserted by the **42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976**.
- **Committee Recommendation:** Recommended by the **Swaran Singh Committee (1976)**.
- **Amendments: Originally 10 duties.** 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002 added the 11th duty.
- **Purpose:** To outline the moral obligations of citizens and promote patriotism, unity, and integrity of the nation.
- **Nature: Non-justiciable** in nature, as **courts cannot enforce** them, but they remain essential for governance and citizen responsibility.

### Relationship between Rights and Duties

- **Complementary Nature:** Rights and duties are complementary and **interdependent**, as one **cannot be meaningfully** exercised without the fulfilment of the other.
- **Balance in Democracy:** Duties ensure that the enjoyment of individual rights **does not violate** the rights of others or harm societal harmony.
- **Moral Linkage:** Duties foster **discipline**, respect for institutions, and constitutional values, thereby reinforcing the **ethical framework** within which **rights are exercised**.
- **Sustainable Rights:** Rights remain **meaningful** only when citizens fulfil their duties; duties provide the **foundation** for the long-term **sustenance of rights**.

## (4) How Delhi's Air Quality Monitors Work: Methods, Errors & CAG Findings Explained-

### Why in the news?

The Supreme Court has asked authorities to justify whether Delhi's air-quality monitoring equipment is appropriate for the city's conditions.

Delhi currently operates 40 **Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS)**, each functioning as a compact, automated laboratory housed in a temperature-controlled cabin.

These stations, positioned across the city for representative measurement, monitor **eight key pollutants** — **PM2.5, PM10, NO<sub>2</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, CO, O<sub>3</sub>, ammonia and lead** — as mandated by CPCB's 2012 guidelines.

Inside each dust-proof, air-conditioned unit, racks of analysers, pumps and data loggers process samples drawn through inlets mounted on masts above the station roof.

## How Delhi's AQI Stations Measure Pollutants

- Delhi's air-quality monitors use specialised, CPCB-approved techniques to measure each pollutant.
- Particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>) is tracked using Beta Attenuation Monitors, which gauge how dust collected on filter tape reduces beta-ray transmission.
- Gaseous pollutants are measured through optical and chemical methods:
  - (2) sulphur dioxide via UV fluorescence,
  - (3) ozone by UV photometry, and
  - (4) carbon monoxide with Non-dispersive infrared (NDIR) absorption.
- NDIR absorption is a gas sensing technology that measures the concentration of a specific gas by analyzing how much infrared light it absorbs.
- Nitrogen oxides are detected through chemiluminescence, while ammonia is measured using optical spectroscopy.
- Chemiluminescence is the emission of light as a result of a chemical reaction.
- Optical spectroscopy is a scientific technique that studies the interaction of light with matter to determine a sample's physical and chemical properties.
- These instrument-based techniques comply with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards to ensure uniform, reliable data nationwide.

## Factors That Distort Air-Quality Readings

AQI accuracy depends on equipment reliability and the volume of validated data recorded daily.

Stations often miss CPCB's 16-hour data requirement due to shutdowns caused by calibration, power cuts, extreme weather or transmission failures.

A recent CAG report found many Delhi stations failed to log complete data or measure key pollutants like lead, weakening daily AQI assessments.

Technical issues also distort readings: high humidity inflates particulate measurements, instruments drift without frequent calibration, and poor station siting near buildings or vents skews airflow.

Together, these operational and environmental challenges reduce the precision of Delhi's air-quality readings.

## Ensuring Reliable Air-Quality Data: Calibration, Compliance & Oversight

- **Calibration and Maintenance Are Crucial**

Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) must follow strict calibration schedules.

CPCB's 2012 guidelines mandate maintaining detailed calibration records for every particulate monitor.

Regular checks are essential because even minor instrument drift affects readings — especially for gases measured through sensitive optical methods.

- **Major Gaps in Data Reporting**

The CAG audit exposed serious shortcomings in Delhi's monitoring network:

None of DPCC's 24 stations measured lead (Pb), despite its mandatory inclusion in AQI calculations.

Monthly AQI data was incomplete for 12% of months (2014–2021), meaning many stations failed to produce the minimum required valid data.

- **Need to Upgrade and Reposition Stations**

CAG recommendations include:

Relocating stations obstructed by buildings, trees or improper siting.

Upgrading or replacing equipment unable to measure all mandated pollutants.

Ensuring daily data availability for all pollutants to provide a complete air-quality picture.

### **Third-Party Audits for Accountability**

Experts, including Anumita Roychowdhury (CSE), stress the need for regular independent audits to verify:

Whether stations follow CPCB protocols,

Equipment calibration accuracy

## **(5) Higher Education Commission of India Bill 2025: Key Provisions , Concern & NEP link :**

### **Why in the news ?**

Five years after NEP 2020 proposed it, the government is set to table the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill 2025 in the upcoming Winter Session. The Bill aims to merge the regulatory roles of the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE into one unified authority, marking the second attempt to establish a single higher education regulator in India.

## **HECI: India's Proposed Single Regulator for Higher Education**

The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill draws directly from NEP 2020, which recommended replacing the fragmented regulatory structure with a single overarching authority.

Currently, India's higher education landscape is regulated by multiple statutory bodies:

the University Grants Commission (UGC) oversees higher education,

the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) regulates technical and professional education, and

the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) governs teacher education.

### **Four Verticals Under HEC I**

NEP 2020 outlines four specialised bodies within HECI:

- (1) National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC): Regulates all higher education except medical and legal fields.
- (2) National Accreditation Council (NAC): Serves as the accrediting authority.
- (3) General Education Council (GEC): Frames academic learning outcomes and standards.
- (4) Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC): Handles funding and grants (though officials indicate funding may still rest with the government).

HECI itself will function as a compact body of eminent experts overseeing the four verticals.

### **The 2018 HECI Bill: Key Provisions and Why It Stalled**

- The government's first attempt to replace the UGC came through the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill, 2018.
- It proposed a new commission with a chairperson, vice-chairperson, and 12 members appointed by the Centre.
- Since the Bill did not merge AICTE and NCTE, their chairpersons were included as members.
- The 2018 draft limited HECI's powers to setting academic standards and granting autonomy while leaving funding authority with the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- It also planned an advisory council headed by the HRD Minister and comprising state higher education council heads.
- However, the Bill drew criticism for potentially centralising authority and creating excessive overregulation.
- Following strong pushback during public consultations, it was shelved and revisited for alignment with the NEP 2020 framework.

### **Opposition to HECI: Concerns Over Centralisation and Autonomy**

#### **Fears of Excessive Centralisation**

- Critics argue that the HECI framework concentrates too much authority with the Union government.
- The 2018 Bill shifted UGC's financial powers to the MHRD, raising concerns that universities could lose autonomy and become dependent on central directives.

#### **Lack of Diverse Representation**

- Opposition leaders objected to the commission's composition.
- They noted the absence of representation from disadvantaged groups — women, Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, minorities, and persons with disabilities — while industry stakeholders were prominently included.

#### **Apprehensions From States**

- The then CM of Tamil Nadu warned that centralised funding could lead to biased resource allocation.
- He feared that replacing UGC grants with ministry-controlled funding might shift to a 60:40 Centre-state share, reducing states' financial autonomy.

#### **Parliamentary Panel's Warning**

- A parliamentary standing committee flagged "excess centralisation" concerns.
- The panel noted that while multiple regulators create inconsistency, the proposed HECI model risks trapping state universities between national and state rules, with insufficient state representation in decision-making.

#### **Overall Concern**

Across political and academic circles, the prevailing worry is that HECI could weaken federalism, dilute institutional autonomy, and marginalise key stakeholders in higher education governance