



## **DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 20-07-2024**

### **GS-1**

1. Umling La

### **GS-2**

2. What is the role of finance commission?
3. How do Assam's Foriegners Tribunals Function
4. Hannibal Directive
5. India and a case of strategic autonomy

## Umling La

Syllabus: GS-1; Geography- Passes in India

### Context

- A Bengaluru-based firm has claimed to have successfully tested a 100-kg **Max Take Off Weight (MTOW) Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV)** at an altitude of 19,024 feet at Ladakh's Umling La pass, which also happens to be the highest motorable pass in the world.



### About

- Umling La, also known as Umlingla Pass, is the highest motorable road and mountain pass in the world, located in **Ladakh, India**.
- It is situated on the ridgeline between **Koyul Lungpa** and the **Indus River**, near Demchok village.
- Standing tall at an elevation of 19,024 feet (5,799 meters), Umling La is a feat of engineering marvel achieved by the **Border Roads Organisation of India (BRO)** as part of Project Himank.
- The road itself is 86 kilometers long, stretching between the villages of Chisumle and Demchok.

## Geography

- *Location: Ladakh region, India*
- *Elevation: 19,024 feet (5,799 meters)*
- *Connection: Chisumle and Demchok villages*
- *Significance: Highest motorable road in the world, strategically important due to its proximity to the Line of Actual Control (LAC)*

## Weather

- *Summer (June to October): Pleasant weather, but can be treacherous due to strong currents in the Indus River during peak monsoon months.*
- *Winter (November to March): Extreme weather conditions with temperatures dropping as low as -40°C (-40°F) and oxygen levels 50% lower than sea level.*

## What is the role of finance commission?

### Syllabus: GS-2; Constitutional Bodies, Centre-State Relations, Indian Constitution, Co-operative Federalism

#### Context

- *The sixteenth Finance Commission headed by former Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman **Arvind Panagariya** has begun its work by inviting suggestions from the public on the mandate set for it by the Centre.*
- *The latest Finance Commission, which consists of five members including the chairman, was constituted in December last year (2023) and is expected to submit its recommendations by October, 2025.*
- *Its recommendations will be valid for five years starting from April 1, 2026.*

#### What is the Finance Commission?

- *The Finance Commission is a **constitutional body** that recommends how tax revenues collected by the Central government should be distributed among the Centre and various States in the country.*
- *The Centre, however, is not legally bound to implement the suggestions made by the Finance Commission.*
- *The Commission is **reconstituted typically every five years** and usually takes a couple of years to make its recommendations to the Centre.*

### How does the Commission decide?

- *The Finance Commission decides what proportion of the Centre's net tax revenue goes to the States overall (**vertical devolution**) and how this share for the States is distributed among various States (**horizontal devolution**).*
- *The horizontal devolution of funds between States is usually decided based on a formula created by the Commission that takes into account a **State's population, fertility level, income level, geography, etc.***
- *The vertical devolution of funds, however, is not based on any such objective formula. Nevertheless, the last few Finance Commissions have recommended greater vertical devolution of tax revenues to States.*
- *The 13th, 14th and 15th Finance Commissions recommended that the Centre share 32%, 42% and 41% of funds, respectively, from the divisible pool with States.*
- *It should be noted that the Centre may also aid States through additional grants for certain schemes that are jointly funded by the Centre and the States.*
- *The 16th Financial Commission is also expected to recommend ways to augment the revenues of local bodies such as **panchayats and municipalities**.*
- *It should be noted that, as of 2015, only about 3% of public spending in India happened at the local body level, as compared to other countries such as China where over half of public spending happened at the level of the local bodies.*

### Why is there friction between the Centre and States?

- *The Centre and the States have been at loggerheads over the issue of sharing tax revenues for a while now.*
- *The Centre collects major taxes such as the **income tax, the corporate tax, and the goods and services tax (GST)** while the States primarily rely on taxes collected from the sale of goods such as liquor and fuels that are beyond the ambit of GST.*
- *The States, however, are responsible for the delivery of many services to citizens, including education, healthcare and the police.*
- *This has led to complaints that the Centre has reduced the power of the States to collect taxes and that it does not give enough funds to the States to match with the scale of their responsibilities.*

### What are the disagreements?

- *The States and Centre often disagree on what percentage of the total tax proceeds should go to the States and about the actual delivery of these funds.*
- ***States argue** that they should receive more funds than what is recommended by the Finance Commission as they have greater responsibilities to fulfil than the Centre.*
- *They also point out that the Centre does not even share the amount of funds recommended by the Finance Commissions, which they believe is already too low.*

- For example, according to analysts, the Centre has devolved an average of only 38% of funds from the divisible pool to the States under the current Fifteenth Finance Commission as against the Commission's actual recommendation of 41%.
- Further, States have complaints about what portion of the Centre's overall tax revenues should be considered as part of the divisible pool out of which the States are funded.
- It is believed that cesses and surcharges, which do not come under the divisible pool and hence not shared with the States, can constitute as much as 28% of the Centre's overall tax revenues in some years, causing significant revenue loss for States.
- So, the increased devolution of funds from the divisible pool, as recommended by successive Finance Commissions, may be offset by rising cess and surcharge collections.
- In fact, it is estimated that if cesses and surcharges that go to the Centre are also taken into account, the share of States in the Centre's overall tax revenues may fall to as low as 32% under the 15th Finance Commission.
- **More developed States** such as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have also complained that they receive less money from the Centre than what they contribute as taxes.
- Tamil Nadu, for example, received only 29 paise for each rupee that the State contributed to the Centre's exchequer while Bihar gets more than ₹7 for each rupee it contributes.
- In other words, it is argued that more developed States with better governance are being penalised by the Centre to help States with poor governance.
- Some critics also believe that the Finance Commission, whose members are appointed by the Centre, may not be fully independent and immune from political influence.

## **How do Assam's Foreigners Tribunals Function**

### **Syllabus: GS-2: Indian Polity - Tribunals**

#### **Context:**

- On July 5, 2024 the Assam government instructed the Border wing of the State's police not to forward cases of non-Muslims who entered India illegally before 2014 to the Foreigners Tribunals (FTs).

#### **Background:**

- **Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019:** *Provides a citizenship application window for non-Muslims (Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Jains, and Buddhists) who allegedly fled persecution in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.*

### Foreigners Tribunals (FTs)

- **Formation:** *Quasi-judicial bodies formed through the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order of 1964 under Section 3 of the Foreigners' Act of 1946.*
- **Function:** *Allow local authorities in a State to refer a person suspected to be a foreigner to tribunals.*
- **Current Status:** *Exclusive to Assam; other states deal with "illegal immigrants" under the Foreigners' Act.*
- **FT Members:** *Headed by members drawn from judges, advocates, and civil servants with judicial experience.*
- **Statistics:** *Ministry of Home Affairs in 2021 mentioned 300 FTs in Assam; however, only 100 are currently functioning as per the State's Home and Political Department.*

### Functioning of FTs

- **Powers:** *Similar to civil courts in summoning and enforcing attendance, examining on oath, and requiring document production.*
- **Notice Procedure:**
  - *Serve notice within 10 days of receiving a reference.*
  - *The individual has 10 days to reply and another 10 days to produce evidence.*
- **Case Disposal:** *Must dispose of a case within 60 days.*
- **Detention:** *If citizenship proof is inadequate, the person may be sent to a detention center (now called a transit camp) for deportation.*

### Role of the Border Police

#### Establishment and Functions

- **History:** *Established in 1962 under the Prevention of Infiltration of Pakistani (PIP) scheme; became an independent wing in 1974.*
- **Renaming:** *Post Bangladesh Liberation War, renamed to Prevention of Infiltration of Foreigners (PIF) scheme.*
- **Personnel:** *3,153 posts sanctioned by the Centre, 884 by the Assam government.*



➤ **Responsibilities:**

- *Detecting and deporting illegal foreigners.*
- *Patrolling the India-Bangladesh border with the Border Security Force.*
- *Maintaining a second line of defence against illegal entry.*
- *Monitoring settlements in riverine and char (sandbar) areas.*
- *Referring suspicious citizenship cases to FTs.*
- *Handling cases of 'D' or doubtful voters and those excluded from the NRC draft.*

**Issues with FT Orders**

- **Supreme Court Intervention:** *On July 11, the Supreme Court set aside an FT order declaring Rahim Ali, a deceased farmer, a foreigner, citing a "grave miscarriage of justice."*
- **Criticisms:**
  - *Accusations of randomly selecting individuals to prove citizenship.*
  - *FT member in Morigaon in 2018 highlighted the existence of an "industry" around foreigners' cases, driven by financial motives.*
  - *Notices often improperly served, with suspected non-citizens unaware of cases against them.*

## **Hannibal Directive**

**Syllabus: GS-2: International Events.**

**Context:**

- *A recent report indicates that the Israeli military reportedly employed the **Hannibal Directive** during the **October 7 attack** by Hamas.*

**About Hannibal Directive**

- *The Hannibal Directive, also known as the **Hannibal Procedure** or **Hannibal Protocol**, is a purported operational doctrine of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).*
- *This doctrine involves **using maximum force to prevent the capture of soldiers, even at the expense of military and civilian lives.***

- *The policy aims to **avoid politically sensitive prisoner swaps** by eliminating everyone around a captured Israeli soldier, potentially risking the soldier's life.*

### Key Points

- **Expression:** *The Hannibal Directive refers to an IDF operational policy to avoid politically costly prisoner exchanges.*
- **Existence:** *The full text of the doctrine has never been published but is widely discussed among soldiers and analysts.*
- **Naming:** *Named after Carthaginian general Hannibal, who chose to kill himself to avoid capture by the Romans around 181 BCE.*

### Origin

- *The Hannibal Doctrine was **formulated in response to the Jibril Agreement of 1985**, which saw 1,150 Palestinian prisoners exchanged for three Israelis captured by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC).*

### Criticism

- *Legal experts have criticized the Hannibal Doctrine for its apparent **disregard for human life**.*

## India and a case of strategic autonomy

**Syllabus: GS-2: Bilateral Relations – Strategic Autonomy.**

### Context:

- *On July 11, 2024, two days after **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** had concluded his first visit to **Moscow since Russia invaded Ukraine** on February 24, 2022, Eric Garcetti, the United States Ambassador to India, said, “In times of conflict there is no such thing as strategic autonomy; we will, in crisis moments, need to know each other.*

### Historical Context and Stress Points

- **Strategic Partnership with Russia:**
  - *India maintained its partnership with Russia despite **Western sanctions and support for Ukraine**.*



- *India expanded **energy cooperation with Russia** and refrained from condemning the invasion.*
- **Concept of Strategic Autonomy:**
  - *Defined as the ability of a nation to make decisions in its best interest, **free from external pressures.***
  - *Has been a consistent approach in **India's foreign policy**, termed as non-alignment, multi-alignment, or strategic autonomy.*
- **India's Non-Alignment Policy:**
  - *Initially maintained equidistance between **capitalist and communist blocs.***
  - *Built stronger ties with Moscow after U.S. alliances with Pakistan and China's shift towards the U.S.*
  - **Post-Soviet collapse**, India integrated more with the global economy and the West.

### Current Global Order and Great Power Rivalry

- **Changing Dynamics:**
  - *The U.S. remains the most powerful, but the world is no longer unipolar.*
  - *China is emerging as a strong competitor.*
  - *Russia is challenging Western security in Europe.*
  - *Conflicts in West Asia involve key U.S. and Russian allies.*
- **India's Strategy:**
  - *Strives to balance relations with great powers without joining any alliances.*
  - *Maintains strategic autonomy to navigate the complex global order.*

### India's Russia Policy

- **Energy and Defense Cooperation:**
  - *Driven by opportunistic energy trade due to cheap prices.*
  - *Structural defense partnership: over 40% of India's defense imports and 86% of military equipment are of Russian origin.*
- **Geopolitical Considerations:**
  - *Russia's closer ties with China present challenges and opportunities.*

- *India aims for a balanced bilateral partnership with Russia.*
- *Autonomy enables India to maintain its Russia ties while partnering with the West.*

### **Positive-Sum Game and Western Perception**

#### ➤ **India's Approach:**

- *Not a disruptive power; supports a multilateral global order.*
- *Seeks a more representative international system reflecting current geopolitical realities.*
- *Engages with different power centers based on informed national interest.*

#### ➤ **Western Concerns:**

- *Agitation over India's Russia ties and strategic autonomy.*
- *Perception of a zero-sum game vs. India's view of a positive-sum game.*

#### ➤ **Benefits of Strategic Autonomy:**

- *India's energy trade with Russia stabilizes global oil prices.*
- *Close cooperation with Russia can moderate its alignment with China.*
- *Promotes a multipolar world order where diverse voices are heard.*

### **Conclusion**

#### ➤ **Strategic Autonomy:**

- *Essential for India's foreign policy in a multipolar world.*
- *Allows India to pursue its national interests and balance relations with major powers.*

#### ➤ **Future Prospects:**

- *India's emphasis on strategic autonomy will continue to shape its global engagements.*
- *Western partners need to appreciate the broader strategic context of India's foreign policy choices.*