

## US IN PACIFIC ISLANDS

- The United States announced \$810 million in new funding for Pacific islands at a summit with President Joe Biden amid inroads by China in the strategic but sparsely populated region.
- \$600 million will be in the form of a 10-year package to clean up and develop dirty waters to support the tuna industry, while the United States will also expand climate and development aid and its diplomatic presence.
- China has asserted itself strongly in recent years through investment, police training and, most controversially, a security pact with the Solomon Islands.
- The Biden administration also announced that the United States would recognise Cook Islands and Niue, a self-governing territory whose foreign and defence policies and currency are linked to New Zealand.
- The step will allow the United States to increase its diplomatic footprint in the Cook Island and Niue, which have fewer than 20,000 inhabitants.
- Western officials and analysts fear that Beijing will use the Solomon Islands as a base to expand militarily into the Pacific.
- The United States and the Region U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, based in Hawaii, encompasses the Pacific Islands as part of its area of responsibility.
- The U.S. military has air and naval bases on Guam and operates the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site at Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.
- The Department of Defense is building a high-frequency radar system in Palau.
- The U.S. military has ties with Fiji, PNG, and Tonga, the only PICs with regular armed forces.
- The Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy (February 2022) states that the United States "will work with partners to establish a multilateral strategic grouping that supports Pacific Island countries as they build their capacity and resilience as secure, independent actors."

### China's Influence

- China has become a significant actor in the region through diplomacy and economic engagement.
- The PRC is an important market for PIC natural resource exports and tourism. China's fishing fleet in the

region has contributed significantly to IUU fishing.

- Ten PICs have joined China's Belt and Road Initiative, which promotes PRC-backed infrastructure development.
- In May 2022, the PRC proposed a sweeping diplomatic, economic, and security pact between China and the region that met resistance among some PICs and was shelved.

## THE HINDU

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### UNESCO LISTS INDIAN TEXTILE

- UNESCO released a list of 50 exclusive and iconic heritage textile crafts of the country.
- Toda embroidery and Sungadi from Tamil Nadu, Himroo from Hyderabad, and Bandha tie and dye from Sambalpur in Odisha were some of the textiles that made the cut
- According to UNESCO, one of the major challenges to the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the South Asia is the lack of proper inventory and documentation.
- The publication, which aims to bridge this gap, brings together years of research on the 50 selected textiles.
- Some of the iconic handcrafted textiles documented from north

India are Khes from Panipat, Chamba rumals from Himachal Pradesh, Thigma or wool tie and dye from Ladakh, and Awadh Jamdani from Varanasi.

- Finding a place from the south, Ilkal and Lambadi or Banjara embroidery from Karnataka, Sikanayakanpet Kalamkari from Thanjavur have been included.
- Kunbi weaves from Goa, Mashru weaves and Patola from Gujarat, Himroo from Maharashtra and GaradKoirial from West Bengal also find a place among the 50 iconic textiles.

## THE HINDU

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### FLOOD AND CORRUPTION

- We must decongest the city, plant more trees, save wetlands, even reclaim them, desilt drains, enlarge sewers, deconcretise pavements and stop the clogging of waterways with unsegregated garbage.
- The State government announced tough measures such as the demolition of unauthorised encroachments impeding drainage streams in the city, but quickly backed away. It now plans to divert drains to avoid already built-up areas.

- Corruption cripples economic growth in ways not readily apparent.
- Apart from transferring inordinate wealth to the undeserving, it creates a slew of vested interests, who resist anti-corruption process reforms.
- Our narrow, legal definition of corruption enables many in a corrupt system to escape culpability.
- Indian law recognizes only corrupt acts by public servants to be 'acts of corruption' under the law.
- As private corruption is not criminalised, many government actions are outsourced to private agents, who collect 'handling fees' on behalf of their partners in crime within the government.
- E-Governance is often not the effective solution as claimed. E-enabled systems often only relocate the locus of corruption; they do not solve all of it.
- First, regular assessments and evaluations of ongoing anti-corruption measures
- Second, a genuine regime of whistleblower protection assures honest citizens, politicians, bureaucrats and judges of protection, as they otherwise fear the adverse repercussions for uncovering illegal activities
- Third, there has to be a conscious move towards promoting ethical behavior.

## THE HINDU

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### DRAFT Telecommunication bill 2022

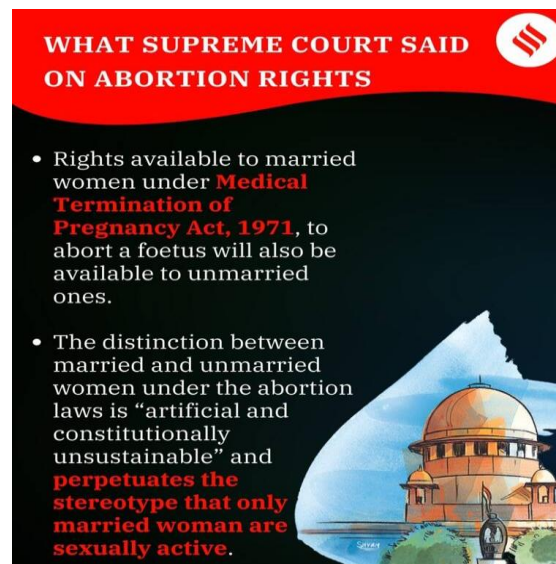
- Why has the government issued a draft Telecommunication Bill?
- Through the Indian Telecommunication Bill, 2022, the Centre aims to consolidate and amend the existing laws governing the provision, development, expansion and operation of telecommunication services, telecom networks and infrastructure, in addition to assignment of spectrum.
- What are some of the key amendments to existing telecom laws?
- One of the key changes is inclusion of new-age over-the-top communication services like WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram in the definition of telecommunication services.
- As per the draft law, providers of telecommunication services will be covered under the licensing regime, and will be subjected to similar rules as other telecom operators.

- This issue has been under contention for several years now with telecom service providers seeking a level-playing field with OTT apps over communication services such as voice calls, messages, etc. where operators had to incur high costs of licences and spectrum, while OTT players rode on their infrastructure to offer free services.
- Are there other areas where the government has proposed to increase its powers?
- The Centre is also looking to amend the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act (TRAI Act) to dilute the sectoral watchdog's function of being a recommendatory body.
- The current TRAI Act mandates the telecom department to seek the regulator's views before issuing a new licence to a service provider. The proposed Bill does away with this provision
- It has also removed the provision that empowered TRAI to request the government to furnish information or documents necessary to make this recommendation.
- Additionally, the new Bill also proposes to remove the provision where if the DoT cannot accept TRAI's recommendations or needs modification, it had to refer back the recommendation for reconsideration by TRAI.
- Does the proposed Telecom Bill also look to address issues being faced by the telecom industry?
- The DoT has also proposed that if a telecom entity in possession of spectrum goes through bankruptcy or insolvency, the assigned spectrum will revert to the control of the Centre.
- So far, in insolvency proceedings, there has been a lack of clarity on whether the spectrum owned by a defaulting operator belongs to the Centre, or whether banks can take control of it.
- The draft Bill also accords the Centre powers to defer, convert into equity, write off or grant relief to any licensee under extraordinary circumstances, including financial stress, consumer interest, and maintaining competition, among other things.
- It also proposes to replace the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) with the Telecommunication Development Fund (TDF).
- USOF is the pool of funds generated by the 5 per cent Universal Service Levy that is charged upon all telecom fund operators on their Adjusted Gross Revenue.

- The USOF has largely been used to aid rural connectivity. However, with the TDF, the objective is also to boost connectivity in underserved urban areas, R&D, skill development, etc.

### SC on abortion

- The Supreme Court in a significant judgment on Thursday said it is unconstitutional to distinguish between married and unmarried women for allowing termination of pregnancy on certain exceptional grounds when the foetus is between 20-24 weeks.
- What is the court's decision?
- A three-judge Bench comprising Justices D Y Chandrachud, A S Bopanna, and J B Pardiwala framed the interpretation of Rule 3B of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Rules, 2003, as per which only some categories of women are allowed to seek termination of pregnancy between 20-24 weeks under certain extraordinary circumstances.



### What does the law on abortion say?

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act allows termination of pregnancy by a medical practitioner in two stages.
- After a crucial amendment in 2021, for pregnancies up to 20 weeks, termination is allowed under the opinion of one registered medical practitioner. For pregnancies between 20-24 weeks, the Rules attached to the law prescribe certain criteria in terms of who can avail termination.
- It also requires the opinion of two registered medical practitioners in this case.
- For pregnancies within 20 weeks, termination can be allowed if:
- The continuance of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the

pregnant woman or of grave injury to her physical or mental health; or

- There is a substantial risk that if the child was born, it would suffer from any serious physical or mental abnormality.
- Who falls in the category of women allowed to terminate a pregnancy between 20-24 weeks?
- For pregnancies between 20-24 weeks, Section 3B of the Rules under the MTP Act lists seven categories of women:
- Survivors of sexual assault or rape or incest; (b) minors; (c) change of marital status during the ongoing pregnancy (widowhood and divorce); (d) women with physical disabilities (major disability as per criteria laid down under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016); (e) mentally ill women including mental retardation; (f) the foetal malformation that has substantial risk of being incompatible with life or if the child is born it may suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities to be seriously handicapped; and (g) women with pregnancy in humanitarian settings or disaster or emergency situations as may be declared by the Government.”

### **What is the court’s interpretation?**

- The court stated that the whole Rule 3B(c) cannot be read in isolation but has to be read together with other sub-clauses under 3B.
- When other sub-clauses do not distinguish between married or unmarried women, for example survivors of sexual assault, minors, etc., only 3B(c) cannot exclude unmarried women, the court held
- “Rule 3B(c) is based on the broad recognition of the fact that a change in the marital status of a woman often leads to a change in her material circumstances. A change in material circumstance during the ongoing pregnancy may arise when a married woman divorces her husband or when he dies, as recognized by the examples provided in parenthesis in Rule 3B(c). The fact that widowhood and divorce are mentioned in brackets at the tail end of Rule 3B(c) does not hinder our interpretation of the rule because they are illustrative,” the court said.
- The court also expanded on Rule 3B (a) “survivors of sexual assault or rape or incest” to include married women in its ambit. Although it does not have the effect of striking down the marital rape exception under the Indian Penal Code, the ruling said

that even women who have suffered “marital assault” can be included under the provision.

### What is the effect of the judgment?

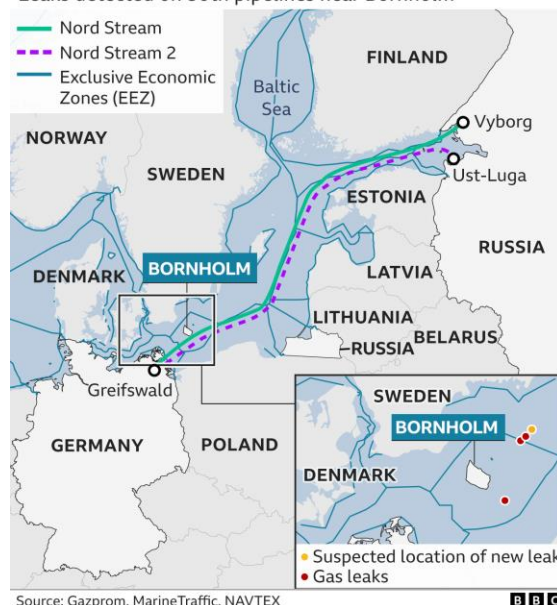
- The court’s “purposive interpretation” states that the common thread in Rule 3B is “a change in a woman’s material circumstance”.
- While the ruling recognises the right of unmarried women, it leaves the enforcement of the right to be decided on a case-to-case basis.
- “It is not possible for either the legislature or the courts to list each of the potential events which would qualify as a change of material circumstances.

### Nord Stream

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or NATO has called the Nord Stream pipeline leaks in the Baltic Sea deliberate acts of sabotage.
- Leaks in two gas pipelines Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 off Nato member Denmark and would-be member Sweden in international waters in the Baltic Sea have raised concerns amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

### Nord Stream pipelines from Russia

Leaks detected on both pipelines near Bornholm



### About Nord stream

- Nord Stream is a pair of offshore natural gas pipeline sets in Europe that run under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany.
- It includes the Nord Stream 1 pipeline running from Vyborg in northwestern Russia, near Finland, and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline running from Ust-Luga in northwestern Russia, near Estonia.
- Both pipelines run to Lubmin in the northeastern German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Nord Stream 2 has been denied certification as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- The name "Nord Stream" occasionally refers to a wider pipeline network, including the

feeding onshore pipeline in Russia, and further connections in Western Europe.

- Nord Stream 1 is owned and operated by Nord Stream AG, whose majority shareholder is the Russian state company Gazprom. Nord Stream 2 is owned and planned to be operated by Nord Stream 2 AG, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Gazprom.
- The first line of Nord Stream 1 was laid by May 2011 and was inaugurated on 8 November 2011.
- The second line of Nord Stream 1 was laid in 2011–2012 and was inaugurated on 8 October 2012.
- At 1,222 km (759 mi) in length, Nord Stream 1 is the longest sub-sea pipeline in the world, surpassing the Norway-UK Langeled pipeline.
- The laying of Nord Stream 2 was carried out in 2018–2021. [7] The first line of Nord Stream 2 was completed in June 2021, and the second line was completed in September 2021.
- According to data from 2015, Germany imported about 40% of natural gas from Russia, 29% from the Netherlands, 34% from Norway, with only around 10% from Germany's own gas fields.
- According to a media report, about a quarter of Germany's electricity now

comes from coal, about another quarter from renewables, 16% from natural gas and around 11% from nuclear energy.

- The dispute over Nord Stream 2 takes place at a time when Germany has set out a plan to shut down its nuclear and coal power plants, with an objective of gradually moving towards renewable sources of energy.
- In order to fill the supply gap and diversify the sources, the country plans to build its first LNG terminal to receive gas from Qatar, the U.S., and others.

**THE HINDU**

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