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PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUPS(PVTGS)

In News

- The Ministry Tribal Affairs recently told the Rajya Sabha that the population of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) was not in decline.

Who are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)?

- PVTGs are the most marginalized and extreme backward sections among Scheduled Tribes (STs).

- The criteria for identifying Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups are: -

    - Pre-agricultural level of technology,
    - Low level of literacy,
    - Economic backwardness,
    - A declining or stagnant population.

- History of PVTGs: Dhebar commission (1960-61) identified that there is inequality among tribal communities in terms of socio-economic development.

    - In 1975, acting on the Dhebar Commission report, the government identified Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as a separate category and listed 52 tribal groups as PTGs.

    - Later, in 1993, more tribal groups were added to the list. As per 2001 census, there are 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) with a total population of 27,68,322, living in 18 States and Union Territory.

    - In 2006, PTGs were renamed as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

Current status:

- In six States namely, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, the PVTGs constitute more than 77% of their total population covering 38 out of the 75 PVTGs.

- Among the 75 listed PVTG's the highest number are found in Odisha, followed by Andhra Pradesh (12), Bihar and Jharkhand (9), Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (7), Tamil Nadu (6) and Kerala and Gujarat (5 each).

- The Saharia tribe of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan is the largest among PVTGs, with a population of more than 4 lakhs.

Recent Government Initiatives

- The PM-PVTG Development Mission program: It has been envisaged in the Union Budget 2023-24 with an allocation of Rs 15,000 crore for Scheduled Tribes.

    - The programme envisions connecting all 22,544 PVTG villages to basic government services like communications, electricity, public education, healthcare, water supply, and connectivity.

- Pradhan Mantri-Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan: The Cabinet recently approved the ₹24,000 crore Pradhan Mantri-Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan.

    - Through 9 Ministries it will focus on 11 critical interventions like Provision of pucca houses, Connecting roads, Piped Water Supply, Community water supply, Mobile Medical Units with medicine cost, etc.

    - The plan also intends to set up vocational and skill training centres in 60 aspirational PVTG blocks and build 500 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras to help people trade in forest produce.

Challenges

- The lack of current data: The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is yet to compile an accurate and current dataset of PVTGs populations.

    - No Census since 1951 had accounted for PVTGs separately and has not submitted any data on their socio-economic indices to the House panel either.

- Diverse groups: Each of the 75 PVTGs is small in number, culturally different from one another and lives in remote habitat with poor administrative and infrastructure back up, thus making it difficult to form a coherent policy.

- Loss of their customary habitats: The PVTGs are becoming increasingly vulnerable due to loss of their customary habitats and the livelihood resources leading to hunger/starvation, malnutrition and ill-health.

- Verge of extinction: Some of them are even on the verge of extinction, including Shompens, Jarawas, Sentinelese of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; Bondos of Orissa; Choianaickans of Kerala, the Abujhmarias of Chhattisgarh; and Birhors of Jharkhand.

- The most vulnerable sections: Reports of the Government of India reveal that most of these

groups had not attained any significant level of social and economic progress, becoming "the most vulnerable sections", needing special attention.

Measures/Suggestions

- In 2013, a National Advisory Council (NAC) report on the state of PVTGs had recommended that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs should design and conduct a Census specifically for the PVTG communities.
  - It should not just enumerate but also find out the status of education, health, and housing.
- Habitat rights: The protection of their land and resources is central to the dignified survival of all tribal people as it ensures their livelihood.
  - Therefore as a priority, the rights of the PVTGs to their land and habitats must be recognized and respected.
- Bottom-up approach: It is essential that PVTGs must be able to determine and control the nature of development they want and should be active participants of the government initiatives rather than passive recipients.
- Strong commitment: The rift between policy and performance is still large, hence a strong commitment to bring public facilities to the most marginalised among us is needed.

Way Ahead

- PVTGs are one of the most vulnerable sections of the country. Therefore, there is a need for taking steps for the empowerment of such tribal groups.
- However, it needs to be kept in mind that while taking such steps, the autonomy of the tribes is not disturbed and affirmative action is taken while keeping their uniqueness in mind.

Source: TH

FREEBIES IN ELECTIONS

News

- The Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar recently said that the politics of freebies distort expenditure priorities, and asserted that the need is to "empower not pockets but human minds." The Kesavananda Bharati judgment, delivered on 24 April 1973, was a verdict in a case filed by Sri Kesavananda Bharati.

About Freebies

- "Freebies" are goods or services provided by the government to citizens without any charge.

- They encompass a wide range of programs and benefits, from food subsidies and healthcare to education and transportation.
- **Types of Freebies:**
  - **Subsidies:** like food, fuel, and electricity.
  - **Direct transfers:** This involves providing cash or vouchers directly to beneficiaries.
  - **Public services:** This encompasses free education, healthcare, and other public services.
  - **Tax breaks:** This includes exemptions or reductions in taxes for certain individuals or groups.

Current status in India
- The political class has engineered a constituency of 'beneficiaries' to power electoral viability. The polls are reduced to a contest of competing promises of freebies and cash transfers.
- The old approach of wooing voters across segments has given way to targeted promises. For instance, women and farmers are emerged as major targets of this freebies culture:
- Women: States are racing to up the ante with promises for the affection of women voters.
- In Madhya Pradesh, cash transfer under the Ladli Behna scheme increased from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 before the recent Assembly Elections.
- In Rajasthan the earlier government had promised an annual allowance of Rs 10,000 to women and in Telangana K Chandrasekhar Rao government had promised Rs 3,000 a month to women.
- Farmers: Over 45 percent of India's working age populace are engaged in agriculture and also form a core constituency.
- In 2018, Telangana and Odisha formulated a scheme to supplement the income of farmers under the Rythu Bandhu and KALIA schemes. The idea was adopted nationally as a PM Kisan Samman Nidhi.

Arguments in Favor of Freebies

- **Reduce poverty and inequality:** Freebies can provide essential support to vulnerable populations, helping them meet their basic needs and reducing poverty and inequality.
- **Ensure social justice:** Free education and healthcare can empower individuals and create opportunities for upward mobility in the society.
- **Stimulate economic growth:** Freebies can boost economic activity by increasing consumer spending and demand.

- Fulfill welfare obligations: Providing basic needs of the citizens is considered as a prime welfare responsibility of the government.

Arguments Against Freebies

- Financial burden: Freebies can be a significant strain on government finances, leading to fiscal deficits and debt accumulation.

- Misuse and leakages: Improper targeting and inefficient implementation can lead to leakages and misuse of funds, diverting resources away from intended beneficiaries.

- Paracetamol effect: The need for cash transfers and freebies is essentially the price of unattended issues. There is a deafening silence on policy matters like agriculture, education and health.

- Moral hazard: Critics argue that freebies can create a culture of dependence and discourage people from working.

- Economic distortions: Price subsidies and other freebies can distort economic incentives and create inefficiencies.

- Waste Expenses: Free Smartphones and Television sets are distributed at a time when their penetration is already very high even in remote villages.

What is needed?

- Election promises to build human capital like good quality local language educational content, or setting up computer labs for children in slums or investing in health infra is needed.

- Girls and women are good investment options.

  - Ex. Free Bicycles for girls takes away excuses from families to not continue girls' education or Education Vouchers for girls for vocational study, paid directly to the institution are better options.

Conclusion

- Globally, India ranks top in various metrics from population and internet users. However, the worrying note is India's low rankings in the world Human Capital Index(116th/174).

- Hence, our goal posts now need shifting and turning inward to boost our human capital as the central focus of our polity, even in election promises.

Source: ET

EUROPEAN UNION REGULATORY FRAMEWORK ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

News: The world's first comprehensive laws to regulate artificial intelligence (AI) have been agreed in a deal between the European Parliament and EU member states.

Why do we need rules on AI?

- Ethical Concerns: AI systems can make decisions and take actions that impact individuals and society. Establishing rules helps address ethical concerns related to the use of AI, ensuring that it aligns with human values and respects fundamental rights.

- Privacy: AI often involves the processing of large amounts of data. Rules can help protect individual privacy by specifying how data should be collected, stored, and used.

- Security: Rules are necessary to ensure the security of AI systems. This includes safeguarding against potential vulnerabilities and protecting against malicious uses of AI technology.

- Transparency: Rules can mandate transparency in AI systems, requiring developers to disclose how their algorithms work.

- Competition and Innovation: Establishing a regulatory framework provide a level playing field for businesses, preventing the abuse of market dominance and encouraging responsible innovation.

- Public Safety: In cases where AI is used in critical domains such as healthcare, transportation, or public infrastructure, rules are essential to ensure the safety of individuals and the general public.

The EU framework

- The legislation includes safeguards on the use of AI within the EU, including guardrails on its adoption by law enforcement agencies.

- Levels of risk: The Regulatory Framework establishes obligations for providers and users depending on the 4 levels of risk from artificial intelligence i.e. Unacceptable risk, High risk, Limited risk, Minimal or no risk.

Unacceptable risk

- Unacceptable risk AI systems are systems considered a threat to people and will be banned. They include:

- Cognitive behavioral manipulation of people or specific vulnerable groups: for example voice-activated toys that encourage dangerous behavior in children
  - Social scoring: Classifying people based on behavior, socio-economic status or personal characteristics
  - Real-time and remote biometric identification systems, such as facial recognition.
- Exception: Governments can only use real-time biometric surveillance in public areas when there are serious threats involved, such as terrorist attacks.

High risk

- AI systems that negatively affect safety or fundamental rights will be considered high risk and will be divided into two categories:
  - AI systems that are used in products falling under the EU's product safety legislation. This includes toys, aviation, cars, medical devices and lifts.
  - AI systems that will have to be registered in an EU database and fall into eight specific areas including Biometric identification and categorisation of natural persons, Management and operation of critical infrastructure, Education and vocational training, law enforcement etc.
- All high-risk AI systems will be assessed before being put on the market and also throughout their lifecycle.

Limited risk

- Limited risk AI systems should comply with minimal transparency requirements:
  - Disclosing that the content was generated by AI,
  - Designing the model to prevent it from generating illegal content,
  - Publishing summaries of copyrighted data used for training.
- User Discretion: After interacting with the applications, the user can then decide whether they want to continue using it.
- User awareness: Users should be made aware when they are interacting with AI. This includes AI systems that generate or manipulate image, audio or video content, for example deepfakes.

Minimal or no risk

- The proposal allows the free use of minimal-risk AI.
- This includes applications such as AI-enabled video games or spam filters.

What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?
• Artificial intelligence is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems.
• AI works by analyzing large amounts of labeled training data to find patterns and correlations.
• It requires specialized hardware and software, with popular programming languages like Python, R, Java, C++, and Julia often used by developers.
• AI programming focuses on cognitive skills like learning, reasoning, self-correction, and creativity to achieve specific tasks, such as generating new text, images, music, and ideas.

Source: IE

ETHANOL BLENDING IN INDIA

In News: The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution directed sugar mills and distilleries not to use sugarcane juice or syrup to produce ethanol in the ethanol year 2023-2024.

What is Ethanol and Ethanol Blending ?

- Ethanol is a biofuel naturally produced by the fermentation of sugar extracted from sugarcane and agricultural waste such as bagasse and paddy straw.
- Blending ethanol with petrol to burn less fossil fuel while running vehicles is called ethanol blending.

Present Status

- The current ethanol production capacity of 1364 crore liters is spread across most of the states of the country including in the ethanol surplus states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra & Karnataka.
- Oil Marketing Companies have achieved 10% ethanol blending during ESY 2021-22 and 12% during ESY 2022-23.

Benefits

It is important for

- India's energy security,
- curtailing dependence on imported fuel,
- conserving foreign exchange reserves,
- addressing environmental concerns and
- boosting the domestic agricultural industry.

◆ It will add extra income to the pocket of sugar cane farmers.

Challenges

- India's push for ethanol has raised concerns about its impact on the environment & food security

  ◆ Availability of sufficient raw material sustainably is required and Sugarcane is a water intensive crop, so promoting its cultivation **may deplete our groundwater.**

- It also leaves residual by-products that can corrode and damage the vehicle

- **Logistics of movement and distribution of large quantities** presents a challenge not only in terms of **cost**, but also emissions.

Initiatives

- In 2003, the Centre launched the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme, which aimed to mix ethanol with petrol, reducing the demand and consequently the consumption of fossil fuels.

- The Government, since 2014, has taken several measures to meet the ethanol blending targets which includes

  ◆ **expansion of feedstock for production of ethanol**;

  ◆ **administered price mechanism** for procurement of ethanol under the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme;

  ◆ **lowered GST rate to 5% on ethanol for EBP Programm**e;

  ◆ amendment in Industries (Development & Regulation) Act for free movement of ethanol across states for blending;

  ◆ interest subvention scheme for enhancement and augmentation of ethanol production capacity in the country;

  ◆ regular floating of Expression of Interest (EoI) by Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) for procurement of ethanol.

- Government of India has launched the scheme **"PM JI-VAN Yojana"** for providing financial support to Integrated Bioethanol Projects using lignocellulosic biomass and other renewable feedstock.

- The National Policy of Biofuels-2018 notified on 4th June, 2018 provided indicative targets of **20% ethanol blending** in petrol and **5% biodiesel blending in diesel by 2030.**

◆ The Union Cabinet approved amendments to the National Policy on Biofuels, 2018, to advance the date by which fuel companies have to increase the percentage of ethanol in petrol to 20%, from 2030 to 2025.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- Sugarcane is locally available in only some parts of India, thus the supply chain needs to be strengthened to accomplish the Interstate movement of ethanol.

- There is a need for the development of infrastructure to extract ethanol.

  ◆ It requires ethanol compliant dispensing units and additional storage tanks for ethanol at marketing terminals / depots.

  ◆ The Government recently passed an important directive asking sugar mills to not produce ethanol from sugarcane juice/syrup in the current ethanol supply season.

  ◆ This move will ensure there is sufficient sugar in the country to meet domestic consumption demand, in the light of lower sugar production in the country.

- Going forward, it will be important to see how the ethanol blending target is fulfilled in the current season, with ethanol supplied mainly from B heavy molasses, broken rice and maize,

Source: IE

═══ **NEWS IN SHORT** ═══

YUVAI INITIATIVE

In Context: 'YUVAi- Youth for Unnati and Vikas with AI' is set to be prominently featured at the upcoming Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) Summit.

About YUVAi Initiative:

- It is a collaborative initiative of National e-Governance Division (NeGD), Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India and Intel India.

- YUVAi is aimed to foster a deeper understanding of AI, to enable school students from class 8 to 12 across the nation with AI skills and empower them to become human-centric designers and users of AI.

Source: PIB

PM VISHWAKARMA SCHEME

News: The PM Vishwakarma Scheme has received over 21 lakh applications in two and a half months since its launch in September, 23.

About the PM Vishwakarma Scheme:

- **Aim:** To **support and provide skill-upgradation training to artisans and craftspeople** amid a changing economic landscape.

- **Administered by:** The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

- Around **18 trades and crafts are included under the scheme:**

  - These include carpenter, boat-maker, armourer, blacksmith, hammer and tool kit maker, locksmith, goldsmith, potter, sculptor, cobbler, mason, basket-maker, doll and toy-maker, barber, garland maker, washerman, tailor, and fishing net-maker.

- **Training:** The applicants are thoroughly vetted and then the basic training of five to seven days and advanced training of 15 days will be given.

- **Financial Assistance:** It also offers **financial assistance and creates avenues of "market linkage".**

  - **A stipend of ₹500 per day** is provided during the training.

  - Only after the training they will receive a **tool kit incentive of ₹15,000,** to purchase modern tools specific to their trade.

  - They will also **receive collateral-free loans at lower interest** rates of nearly 8% up to 1 lakh and an additional 2 lakh for setting up their business.

Source: TH

OPERATION STORM MAKERS II

Context: The international criminal police organization (Interpol), has conducted 'Operation Storm Makers II'.

About

- Operation Storm Makers II mobilized **law enforcement in 27 countries** across Asia and other regions to target human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Interpol

- **Interpol** is an intergovernmental organization, which stands for International Criminal Police Organization.

- **Background:** It was founded in **1923** at the International Police Congress in Vienna as the **International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC).** In 1956, the ICPC adopted the name Interpol.

- **Members:** It has **196 member** countries, including **India.**

- **Headquarters:** Lyon, France

- **Mandate:** It connects police around the world – both technically and in person. It is the world's largest and only organization with the mandate and technical infrastructure to share police information globally.

- **India joined** the Interpol in **1949.**

- The **CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation)** is the nodal police agency in India, which coordinates investigations on behalf of Interpol Member countries.

TYPES OF INTERPOL NOTICES

RED NOTICE: To seek the location and arrest of wanted persons with a view to extradition or similar lawful action.

YELLOW NOTICE: To help locate missing persons, often minors, or to help identify persons who are unable to identify themselves.

BLUE NOTICE: To collect additional information about a person's identity, location or activities in relation to a crime.

BLACK NOTICE: To seek information on unidentified bodies.

GREEN NOTICE: To provide warnings and intelligence about persons who have committed criminal offences and are likely to repeat these crimes in other countries.

ORANGE NOTICE: To warn of an event, a person, an object or a process representing a serious and imminent threat to public safety.

INTERPOL-UN SECURITY COUNCIL SPECIAL NOTICE: Issued for groups and individuals who are the targets of UN Security Council sanctions committees.

PURPLE NOTICE: To seek or provide information on modus operandi, objects, devices and concealment methods used by criminals.

Source: TH

ELIZA EFFECT

In News: Eliza was among the first computer programs to simulate conversation with a person like today's chatbots.

ELIZA Effect

- It refers to the phenomenon in which people think computer programs or similar systems have become capable of human emotions or functions because of the way they respond to user input.
- It is named after a **1960s** computer program which also responded to users, albeit with very basic sentences that echoed their original words.
  - This program was credited to MIT professor Joseph Weizenbaum.
- **Example:** A user who receives responses from ChatGPT may believe that they are having a meaningful or mutually beneficial interaction that is somehow comparable to a human conversation, rather than seeing ChatGPT as a large language model simply generating data.
  - This is an example of the ELIZA effect.
  - ChatGPT can now speak with users, making conversations with the chatbot more personal.

Source: TH

GREEN TURTLES

In News: As per a study in Scientific Reports, rising global temperatures could lead to an increase in the nesting range of green turtles in the **Mediterranean Sea.**

About

- **Climate Change and Sea Turtles:** Human-induced climate change has led to a global increase in sea surface temperatures.
  - Sea turtles, especially green turtles, are vulnerable as the sex of their offspring depends on incubation temperature.
- **Environmental Impacts:** Climate-induced shifts may disrupt existing ecological balances in the Mediterranean.
  - Urbanization and human activities along the expanded nesting range pose threats to both turtles and coastal ecosystems

Green Turtles

- Scientifically known as **Chelonia mydas**, are a species of sea turtle found in tropical and subtropical coastal waters around the world.
- Green turtles are **named for the greenish color** of their fat, not their shells. The coloration is due to their herbivorous diet, primarily consisting of seagrasses and algae.

- Green turtles are known for **their extensive migrations**. They travel long distances between feeding and nesting areas.

Turtles Types

- **Seven species of sea turtle:** Green Sea Turtle, Hawksbill Sea Turtle, Loggerhead Sea Turtle, Olive Ridley Sea Turtle, Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle, Leatherback Sea Turtle and Flatback Sea Turtle.
  - Five **species in Indian waters** (Leatherback, Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Green and Olive Ridley)
  - **Hawksbill turtle** is listed as **'Critically Endangered'** and **Green Turtle** is listed as **'Endangered'** on the IUCN Red List

Source: TH

BUDGETT'S FROG

In Context: A study conducted by researchers of the Indian Institute of Science has unveiled that peptides extracted from the skin of **Budgett's frog** demonstrate the **capability to counteract enzymes** produced by pathogens responsible for causing diseases.

About

- The frog's skin secretions contain LL-TIL, a specific peptide studied by the researchers.
- LL-TIL was found to inhibit two key enzymes, subtilisin carlsberg and proteinase K, which are produced by pathogens and play a crucial role in promoting infections by breaking down specific protective proteins in the host.

Budgett's Frog

- Budgett's frog, scientifically known as Lepidobatrachus laevis, is a unique and distinctive species of frog **native to South America.**
- Budgett's frog is known for its **unique vocalizations**, which can include grunts and growls.

Source: TH