NEXT IAS

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

Time: 45 Min

Date: 30-07-2024

Table of Content

PROHIBITION OF UNLAWFUL CONVERSION OF RELIGION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

Context

- The Uttar Pradesh Government has tabled the Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2024 to make **anti-conversion law more stringent.**

Uttar Pradesh's Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021

- The law prohibits the **religious conversion of a person** by the use of **"misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means".**
    - **Conversion by solemnization of marriage or relationship** would also qualify as **illegal conversion under the Act.**
- **Any aggrieved person or their relatives** can **lodge an FIR for illegal conversion.**
- **Punishment:** The standard punishment is 1-5 years imprisonment, and a fine of at least Rs. 15,000.
    - If the victim is a woman, a minor or a person belonging to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, the punishment increases to 2-10 years with a fine of at least Rs. 25,000.
    - In cases of mass conversion, the punishment becomes 3-10 years, and a fine of at least Rs. 50,000.
- **Process for Conversion:** This requires the person converting to **submit two declarations to the District Magistrate.**
    - The first declaration must contain a statement that the individual wishes to convert their religion without any force, coercion, undue influence, or allurement.
    - The Magistrate will then ensure that a police enquiry is conducted to **determine the "real intention" of the religious conversion.**
    - The second declaration will include personal, religious details and the details of the conversion ceremony.
    - After the second declaration is submitted, the District Magistrate will post a copy of it to the notice board, for the **public to record objections to the conversion, if any.**

Key Amendments Proposed

- Increasing the maximum punishment from **10 years to life imprisonment;** widening the ambit to allow any person to file a complaint; making bail more difficult — these are among the key changes proposed.

Arguments Against the Law

- **Constitutional Concerns:** The law violates fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, such as the right to freedom of religion and the right to privacy.
    - The state does not have the authority to regulate an individual's choice of religion.
- **Ambiguity in Definitions:** The Act has been criticized for its vague and ambiguous definitions of terms such as "coercion," "fraud," and "allurement," which can lead to arbitrary interpretation and misuse by law enforcement agencies.
- **Impact on Interfaith Relationships:** The law could be misused to target interfaith couples, particularly those involving Hindu-Muslim relationships, by accusing one party of converting the other through coercion or fraud.
- **Burden of Proof:** The Act places the burden of proof on the accused, requiring them to prove that conversion was not done through coercion, fraud, or allurement.
    - This reversal of burden of proof is seen as unfair and against the principles of natural justice.
- **Social Polarization:** The enactment of such laws has the potential to exacerbate social tensions and polarize communities along religious lines, leading to increased communal disharmony.

Arguments in Favour of the Law

- **Prevention of Forced Conversions:** The primary objective of the Act is to prevent forced conversions carried out through coercion, fraud, or allurement.
    - Such conversions often exploit vulnerable individuals, particularly women and members of marginalized communities, and the law is necessary to protect their rights and autonomy.
- **Preservation of Social Harmony:** Regulating religious conversions helps to maintain social harmony and prevent tensions between different religious communities.

- **Deterrence Against Conversion Rackets:** The Act serves as a deterrent against conversion rackets and fraudulent religious organizations that exploit individuals for financial or other gains.

- **Promotion of Religious Freedom with Responsibility:** The Act is viewed as a balanced approach to safeguarding religious freedom while preventing abuses and ensuring that conversions are conducted ethically and transparently.

- **Backing from Public Opinion:** The enactment of the law reflects the sentiments and concerns of a significant portion of the population in Uttar Pradesh, where issues related to religious conversions have been contentious.

Way Ahead

- Despite these challenges and criticisms, the Uttar Pradesh government has defended the law, arguing that it is **necessary to prevent forced conversions and protect the rights of individuals** to practice their religion freely.

- The ultimate resolution of these challenges may depend on **judicial interpretation and potential amendments to the Act.**

Source: IE

DIGITALISATION AND ITS IMPACTS

Context

- In the **Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) for 2023-24,** the RBI said **digitalisation-induced changes in the behaviour of consumers** and financial intermediaries can have implications for monetary policy.

India's Digital Payments Market

- India's digital payments market is **one of the fastest-growing** in the world.

- As of 2023, the market size was estimated to be around **$3 trillion,** reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of approximately **27% from 2018.**

- **Growth Enablers:** The surge in digital payment adoption can be attributed to **various initiatives and reforms** introduced by the government and the private sector.

  - **The Unified Payments Interface (UPI),** a real-time payment system developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), has been a game-changer.

  - The UPI has seen a **tenfold increase in volume** over the past four years, increasing from 12.5 billion transactions in 2019-20 to 131 billion transactions in 2023-24 – 80 percent of all digital payment volumes.

  - Other digital payment modes such as **mobile wallets, net banking, and card payments** are also contributing significantly to this growth.

- **Significance:** Digitalisation can provide a **strong boost to India's external trade in goods and services**.

  - Digitalisation in international payment systems has the potential **to reduce the cost of receiving remittances,** thereby **leading to higher remittances and income or savings for the recipients.**

> **Project Nexus**
> - Earlier this month, the RBI joined Project Nexus, **a multilateral international initiative** to enable **instant cross-border retail payments** by interlinking **domestic Fast Payments System (FPS).**
> - As part of the project, the country's **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** and **FPSs of Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand** will be interlinked through Nexus.

Concerns

- Digitalisation raises concerns related to **impulsive spending, herd behaviour and data security.**

- **Digital platforms enable quick dissemination of financial trends and choices,** allowing information about investments, spending habits, and financial products to spread rapidly across social networks.

  - When customers observe large groups engaging in certain financial activities, **such as mass buying or selling of stocks during a market frenzy,** they are more likely to follow the crowd.

- Similarly, driven by herd behaviour, **depositors may withdraw their money** from banks, leading to **potential bank runs or failures.**

- The average cost of **data breaches in India stood at $2.18 million in 2023,** a **28 percent increase** since 2020.

  - The most common attacks in India are **phishing (22 percent)**, followed by **stolen or compromised credentials (16 percent)**.

- Digitalisation can **impact inflation and output dynamics,** and **monetary policy transmission** in diverse manners and the overall impact could vary over time given the fast pace of developments.

Way Ahead

- The RBI has been undertaking **proactive policy measures** to harness the benefits of digitalisation while mitigating the emerging risks of digitisation in the financial sector.

- The **cross-border digital trade policies** would play a crucial role in harnessing new opportunities, building trust, and facilitating coordination **on regulatory aspects like data security and cybersecurity.**

- The **internationalisation of the rupee** is also progressing backed by a comprehensive and integrated policy approach.

Source: IE

PROJECT TIGER WILL DISPLACE 5.5 LAKH TRIBALS: REPORT

In News

- Project Tiger is expected to displace at least 550,000 Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers.

About Project Tiger

- India has made significant strides in protecting its national animal, the Bengal tiger , through initiatives like Project Tiger which was launched in 1973 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme in nine reserves of different States (Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) .

- The project focuses on the selection and preservation of areas which are specially managed to conserve the tiger population and their associated ecosystems

- Project Tiger has put the endangered wild tigers of India on an assured path of recovery and has completed 50 years of successful implementation.

- India's Project Tiger has made tremendous progress in tiger conservation over the past five decades.

Impact on tribes

- **Displacement**:the establishment of tiger reserves often leads to the displacement of local communities.

  - Since 2021, displacement has significantly increased, with an average of 48,333 people displaced from each reserve, a 967% rise compared to pre-2021 figures.

- **Loss of Livelihood:** When tribal communities are uprooted from their ancestral lands, they lose their livelihoods.

  - Traditional practices like hunting, fishing, and gathering food become impossible.

  - Victims face severe human rights abuses including extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and other forms of violence.

- **Cultural Disruption**: Displacement disrupts cultural practices, access to sacred sites, and burial grounds. Indigenous knowledge about forests and wildlife is also lost.

- **Lack of Consent:** the lack of free, prior, and informed consent from affected communities before designating areas as tiger reserves.

  - Consent is only sought after displacement, not before.

Recent Recommendations

- **Policies should prioritize coexistence** rather than displacement. Involving local communities in conservation efforts can lead to better outcomes.

- **Seek consent** from affected communities before designating an area as a tiger reserve.

- **Provide alternative livelihood** options to displaced families.

- Striking a **balance between tiger protection** and **human** well-being is crucial.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- India's tiger conservation policy must evolve to protect both tigers and the people who share their habitat.

- By addressing displacement, respecting indigenous rights, and fostering community participation, we can achieve a harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife.

  - For example ,In Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve (Karnataka),The Soliga tribal people successfully coexist with tigers, with the tiger population increasing significantly from 35 to 68 between 2010 and 2014.

Source: TH

INDIA'S STEEL PRODUCTION TO SURPASS 300 MILLION TONNES BY 2030

In News

- Steel production in India, driven by robust demand for government infrastructure projects, is projected to surpass 300 million tonnes (MT) by 2030.

Status

- India currently ranks as the World's 2nd Largest Producer of Crude Steel, surpassing Japan in 2018
  - Current steel demand remains strong with an infrastructure push from the government and expects a growth of about 10 percent.
- The steel industry stands as one of the most significant pillars of India's economic and industrial framework.

Importance

- **Growth** : The steel industry contributes significantly to the country's GDP and serves as a major source of employment.
  - Directly employing millions and supporting many more indirectly, it provides jobs across a range of skills, from high-tech engineering roles to manual labour.
- **Infrastructure Development:** The construction of bridges, highways, railways, and buildings relies heavily on steel due to its strength, durability, and versatility.
- **Industrial Expansion and Technological Advancements:** India's steel industry is characterized by its continuous efforts to enhance production efficiency, reduce costs, and develop high-quality steel products.
  - The industry also supports the growth of other high-tech sectors, including automotive, aerospace, and defense.
- **Collaboration with international partners :** India's steel industry has a significant presence in global trade, contributing to the country's export revenue.
  - By participating in international markets, India enhances its economic influence and establishes itself as a key player in global steel production.

- **Strategic Importance:** Steel is essential for the production of defense equipment, infrastructure critical to national security, and emergency response capabilities.

Challenges

- **Raw material availability:** There is volatility in the supply and pricing of raw materials, particularly iron ore and coal.
- **The inefficiencies in logistics increase** operational costs and impact the competitiveness of Indian steel producers in the global market.
- **Competition :** India remained a net importer of steel during the first, second and third quarters of FY24 because of price differentials between international and domestic prices of finished steel.
- **Environmental concerns:** Steel production is energy-intensive and generates substantial greenhouse gas emissions
  - India's steel sector accounts for **12% of India's greenhouse gas emissions** with an emission intensity of 2.5 tonnes of CO_2 per tonne of crude steel compared to the global average of 1.9 tonnes of CO_2 per tonne of crude steel

Initiatives

- The Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries launched **SIMS 2.0 portal,** the upgraded Steel Import Monitoring System, to provide actionable intelligence to stakeholders for effective decision-making and strategic planning.
- **National Steel Policy 2017 (NSP 2017):** India aims to achieve a crude steel capacity of 300 MTPA and a crude steel demand/production of 255 MTPA by 2030-31.
- **Productivity Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme:** 57 MoUs with 27 companies have been signed under the PLI Scheme.
- **'Brand India' Labeling:** The Ministry of Steel is promoting a "Made in India" brand for domestic steel.
- **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan:** The Ministry of Steel has identified 22 critical infrastructure gaps and is coordinating with other ministries (Road Transport and Highways, Railways, Ports, Shipping, and Waterways) to address them.

- **The Union Budget for 2024-25** gives India's steel industry several reasons to cheer, including import duty cuts on several raw materials and indirect benefits from increased spending on infrastructure and affordable housing.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- The steel industry in India requires coordinated efforts and strategic planning to overcome. From raw material supply and environmental regulations to global competition and technological advancements, addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring the sector's continued growth and sustainability.

- By embracing innovation, improving infrastructure, and navigating regulatory landscapes effectively, India's steel industry can continue to play a vital role in the nation's economic and industrial development.

- Economic Survey 2023-24 highlighted green steel's vital role amidst global climate challenges

  ◆ Green steel will play an important role in reshaping the future of the industry as the world moves towards a low-carbon economy

Source:Air

INDIA EMPLOYMENT REPORT 2024: DISCREPANCIES IN DATA AND NATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Context

- Recently, India, a founding member of the International Labour Organization (ILO), raised concerns about the ILO's India Employment Report 2024.

  ◆ The report sheds light on the employment scenario in India, but the Indian government contends that the model used by the ILO does not accurately reflect the Indian context.

About ILO Report: Key Findings

- The India Employment Report 2024, jointly prepared by the ILO and the Institute of Human Development (IHD), paints a vivid picture of the labour market.

- **Youth Unemployment:** The report highlights that India's youth constitute nearly 83% of the unemployed workforce.

  ◆ Moreover, the share of young people with secondary or higher education among the

total unemployed youth has nearly doubled from 35.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2022.

- **Changing Employment Landscape**: The concept of employment in India has been evolving. On one hand, more people are venturing into entrepreneurship, while on the other, formal employment is gaining momentum.

  ◆ Subscriptions to **schemes like the Employees Provident Fund Organization and the Employees State Insurance Corporation** reflect this trend.

- **Data Discrepancies:** The crux of the issue lies in data disparities. **The ILO's data diverges from the data used within India.**

  ◆ The Union Labour Ministry contends that the **Periodic Labour Force Surveys** provide a more accurate picture of the employment situation in the country.

India's Objections

- **Inconsistencies in Data:** The Indian government has expressed concerns about the inconsistencies in the data sets used by the ILO.

  ◆ When it comes to assessing employment, context matters, and India believes that the ILO's model doesn't fully capture the intricacies of its labour market.

- **Misinterpretation of Youth Employment:** While the ILO report emphasises the high youth unemployment rate, India argues that the declining trend in youth unemployment is a more accurate representation.

  ◆ The **Minister of State for Labour** recently stated that employment generation and improving employability remain the government's priority.

- **A Comprehensive Data Model:** In response to these discrepancies, the Union Labour Ministry has decided **to create a comprehensive data model** on employment and unemployment.

  ◆ The goal is to integrate various employment data sources and develop a holistic system that captures the true dynamics of employment generation in India.

Conclusion

- The clash between the ILO's global perspective and India's localised assessment underscores the complexity of understanding employment dynamics. As the nation grapples with economic

shifts, policymakers must navigate these nuances to create effective policies that benefit all segments of the workforce.

• In the end, perhaps the real challenge lies not just in numbers but in ensuring that every young Indian finds meaningful work, regardless of statistical debates.

Source: TH

═══ NEWS IN SHORT ═══

HUMAYUN'S TOMB WORLD HERITAGE SITE MUSEUM

Context

• Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, inaugurated the **Humayun's Tomb World Heritage Site Museum** at the Humayun's Tomb, a UNESCO World Heritage site in New Delhi.

About

• It is the **country's first sunken museum** that displays over **500 never-before-seen artefacts.**

• The layout is inspired by the **medieval 'baolis',** or **traditional water tanks,** showcases the legacy of Mughal emperor Humayun.

• **Background:** It is an UNESCO recommendation that interpretation centres/ site museums be provided at the entrance zone of significant World Heritage Sites to provide the **cultural context of the heritage site** and thus significantly enhance the visitor experience.

  ◆ The Museum is **designed to be underground** so as to retain the visual integrity of the monuments located in the complex.

Humayun's Tomb

• The tomb of Humayun, **second Mughal Emperor** of India, was built by his widow, **Biga Begum (Hajji Begum)**, in **1569-70,** 14 years after his death.

• The architect was **Mirak Mirza Ghiyath.**

• Humayun's garden-tomb is also called the **'dormitory of the Mughals'** as in the cells are buried over 150 Mughal family members.

• The tomb stands in an extremely significant archaeological setting, centred at the Shrine of the 1**4th century Sufi Saint, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.**

• It was the **first garden-tomb** on the Indian subcontinent.

• It inspired several major architectural innovations, culminating in the **construction of the Taj Mahal.**

Source: TH

OROPOUCHE FEVER

Context

• Recently, **Brazil** has reported the first-ever deaths from **Oropouche Fever**, a **mosquito-borne disease** with symptoms **similar to dengue.**

About the Oropouche Fever

• It is caused by the **Oropouche virus**, which belongs to the **Orthobunyavirus genus.** It was **first detected in Trinidad and Tobago** back in 1955.

• **Transmission:** The Oropouche virus primarily spreads through the bite of a tiny insect called the **Culicoides Paraensis Midge.**

  ◆ These minuscule midges are **stealthy and efficient carriers of this virus**.

  ◆ However, **there's no evidence of human-to-human transmission**.

• **Symptoms:** Symptoms are eerily **similar to dengue**—think fever, chills, muscle pain, and joint discomfort*.*

Source: IE

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM ANNOUNCED IN BUDGET 2024

Context

• **The industries and the academia** are waiting for the **details of the internship programme** announced in the **Union Budget by the Finance Minister** recently.

About

• The details of the internship programme are not yet out.

• The Budget announcement says that the government **will bear a large part of the cost** and companies will have to **fund 10% from their corporate social responsibility (CSR) fund.**

• It will make it very easy for the companies. Internships and apprenticeships are strategic **tools of up-levelling skills and building the right talent for the company.**

Source: TH

QUAD AND INDO-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP FOR MARITIME DOMAIN AWARENESS (IPMDA)

Context

- Recently, the **Foreign Ministers of the Quadrilateral Group (QUAD)** intended to expand the **Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA)** into the **Indian Ocean Region.**

About the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA)

- It is a strategic initiative, launched during the 2022 Tokyo Quad Leaders' Summit, that **emerged from the Quad**—a collaborative framework involving four democratic nations: **Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.**
- It aims to enhance maritime security and awareness in the Indo-Pacific region, and focusing on monitoring and understanding maritime activities in near-real-time.
  - It specifically targets **'dark shipping'** which refers to vessels that operate without proper identification or tracking systems.
- It aims to build a comprehensive maritime picture by integrating data from three critical regions—the **Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR).**

Expanding Geographically

- **Initially**, the IPMDA was centred around the **Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia.** However, recent developments indicate an expansion to the **Indian Ocean region.**
- It reinforces the commitment of Quad nations to a **free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific.**
- The **Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre in Gurugram** aims to play a crucial role in extending the IPMDA's reach to the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR).**.

Quad's Broader Ambitions

- Beyond the IPMDA, the Quad Leaders have set their sights on several other critical areas, like Infrastructure Development, Quad Infrastructure Fellowship, Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience, Quad Investors Network (QUIN) and Space, Health, and Emerging Technologies etc.

Source: TH

STURGEON

In News

- The WWF report documented 395 cases of illegal sturgeon fishing and trade affecting 1,031 sturgeon individuals from 2016 to 2023.

About Sturgeon

- Sturgeons are the most endangered species group on earth.

- These gentle giants have been around since the age of the dinosaurs.
- They usually live in freshwater, coastal waters and inner seas throughout Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, China, Iran , Kazakhstan, Romania, Russia, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Ukraine, other European countries and North America.
- **Importance :**They award a cultural, economic and natural value to many rivers of the Northern hemisphere and have become symbols for healthy and free flowing river systems.
- **Global Exploitation:** They are heavily exploited for caviar and meat, leading to global population declines.
- **Status:** Stellate sturgeon, Russian sturgeon, and beluga sturgeon are Critically Endangered.
  - Sterlet sturgeon is listed as Endangered.

Source: DTE

GLOBAL INDUSTRIAL WOOD PRODUCTION PEAKS

In News

- Global wood production reached a record high of 4 billion tonnes in 2022 and is expected to increase by 2050.

About Roundwood

- Roundwood or unprocessed wood is often simply called wood, consisting of logs, pulpwood and other industrial roundwood and woodfuel.

- **Use:** About 4 billion cubic metres of roundwood are removed annually.
  - Half of this is used for fuel (fuelwood, charcoal, pellets), and the other half for industrial purposes (saw-wood, wood-based panels, wood pulp).
- **Status:** Roundwood removals grew from 1961-1990 and stabilized at around 3.5 billion cubic meters annually for the next two decades.
- Production of roundwood increased by 13% from 1990 to 2022, while the world population grew by 50% and GDP per capita rose by 174%.
- **Importance of Woodfuel:** Woody biomass, especially fuelwood and charcoal, provides energy for 2.3 billion people (29% of the global population), primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
- The share of woodfuel in global roundwood production has decreased from 60% to 49.4% from 1961 to 2022.
- 82% of woodfuel is consumed in Africa, Asia, and South America.
- Europe, North America, and other regions consume the remaining 18%.
- **Future Projections:** Global roundwood production is expected to increase by 4-8% from 2022 to 2030 and by 6-32% from 2022 to 2050.
  - Woodfuel consumption is projected to increase by 17-37% from 2022 to 2050.
  - However, woodfuel use may decrease slightly due to factors like population growth, renewable energy adoption, and efficient stoves.

Source:DTE

■■■■