

2020



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CURRENT AFFAIRS

POLITY AND NATION

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BusinessLine



1. SC upholds changes to SC/ST atrocities law

Why in News?

The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutional validity of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2018.

Background

- In Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra 2018, the Supreme Court had diluted the stringent provisions of SC/ST Act.
 - SC has ruled that there is no absolute bar against grant of anticipatory bail under the anti atrocities law if no prima facie case is made out or if judicial scrutiny reveals the complaint to be prima facie malafide.
- However, Parliament introduced an amendment in the SC/ST(Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, barring persons accused under Prevention of Atrocities law from getting anticipatory bail.
 - The Amendment Act, 2018 added Section 18A to the original Act.
 - It enumerates specific crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as atrocities and describes strategies and prescribes punishments to counter these acts.
- The SC has now upheld this amendment.

2. Arth Ganga Project

Why in News?

Minister of State for Shipping (Independent Charge), Chemical, and Fertilizers while addressing the press conference highlighted that Inland Waterways is one of the most important pillars of “Arth-Ganga” project.

- The Ministry of Shipping is developing Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) Freight Village and Sahibganj (Jharkhand) Industrial Cluster-cum-Logistics Park with an objective of creating synergy with Inland Waterways at the cost of Rs. 200 crores.

Key Points

- Arth Ganga implies a sustainable development model with a focus on economic activities related to Ganga.
- Arth-Ganga will channelize economic activity along the bank of Ganga River.
- It will improve “Ease of Living” and “Ease of Doing Business.”
- This project will result in inclusive growth and play a key role in the generation of enormous employment opportunities in the National Waterways stretch.
- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is deploying small floating jetties and ten (10) Ro-Ro vessels for easier and cost-effective transportation of goods/cargo.

- The income generated from encouraging ecotourism and Ganga wildlife conservation and cruise tourism etc. would help to generate sustainable income streams for cleaning of Ganga.
- Inland Waterways are maintained by the Inland Waterways Authority of India.

Inland Waterways Authority of India

- The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) came into existence on 27th October 1986 for development and regulation of inland waterways for shipping and navigation.
- The Authority primarily undertakes projects for development and maintenance of Inland Water Transport (IWT) infrastructure on national waterways through a grant received from the Ministry of Shipping.
- The head office of the Authority is at Noida.

3. Reservation Issue in Andhra Pradesh

Why in News?

The Supreme Court has questioned the Andhra Pradesh government's decision of 1988 to provide a 100% reservation to Scheduled Tribes for the post of teacher in Scheduled Areas.

Key Points

- The Supreme Court has mentioned that the 100% reservation would deprive other backward communities (including SCs, OBCs) of availing reservation benefits.
- The Supreme Court also questioned the availability of data based on which the Governor of Andhra Pradesh decided that ST is the only deprived group in the area.
 - Article 16 (4) of the Constitution empowers the state to make any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the state, is not adequately represented in the services under the state.
- The Supreme Court ruled that the Governor's decision can't be above the law while referring to its judgment in the Indira Sawhney case of 1992 which mentioned that the reservation limit should not exceed 50% except in exceptional circumstances.

4. Medical Devices (Amendment) Rules, 2020

Why in News?

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has notified Medical Devices (Amendment) Rules, 2020 to regulate medical devices on the same lines as drugs under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

- It has also notified that medical equipment would qualify as “drugs” under Section 3 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

- The decision will come into effect from April 1, 2020.
- The move comes in the wake of years of controversy about faulty hip implants of J&J.

Medical Devices (Amendment) Rules, 2020

- These are applicable to devices intended for internal or external use in the diagnosis, treatment, mitigation or prevention of disease or disorder in human beings or animals (as notified by the ministry).
- The devices must be registered online with the Central Licensing Authority through an identified online portal established by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation for this purpose.
- Manufacturers have to upload a certificate of compliance along with other details like name and address in the portal.
- Manufacturers shall mention the registration number, which is generated after furnishing the above information, on the label of the medical device.
 - This would mean that every medical device, either manufactured in India or imported, will have to have quality assurance before they can be sold anywhere in the country.
- The notification calls for a voluntary registration within a period of 18 months from April 2020

Medical Equipments notified as drugs

- Medical equipment under this definition include implantable medical devices such as knee implants, CT scan, MRI equipment, defibrillators, dialysis machine, PET equipment, X-ray machine etc.
- This will ensure that this equipment follows quality standards.
- The manufacture, import and sale of all medical devices will now need to be certified by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation.

5. Criminalisation of Politics

Why in News?

The Supreme Court ordered political parties to publish the entire criminal history of their candidates for the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections along with the reasons that goaded them to field suspected criminals over decent people.

Highlights of the Order

- The information should be published in a local and national newspaper as well as the parties social media handles.
- The judgement is applicable to parties both at central and state level.
- It is mandatory for political parties to upload on their website detailed information regarding individuals with pending criminal cases.
 - It shall also include the nature of their offences, charges framed against them, the court concerned, case number, etc.

- Additionally, the political parties need to offer an explanation as to why candidates with pending criminal cases are selected as candidates in the first place.
 - The candidate's 'mere winnability at the polls' shall not be the sole reason for handing over a ticket to the candidate to contest elections.
- The information is mandatory to be published either within 48 hours of the selection of candidates or less than two weeks before the first date for filing of nominations, whichever is earlier.
- The political parties need to submit compliance reports with the Election Commission of India within 72 hours.
 - If a political party fails to submit then the Election Commission shall bring such non-compliance by the political party concerned to the notice of the Supreme Court as being in contempt of this Court's orders/directions.

Significance of the Order

- Over the last four general elections, there has been an alarming increase in the incidence of criminals in politics.
- The increasing criminalisation of politics threatens the law-making process and thus lawmakers should be above any kind of serious criminal allegation.
 - In 2004, 24% of the Members of Parliament (MPs) had criminal cases pending against them. This number has increased to 43% of MPs in 2019.
- The direction of SC to legislate parliamentary legislation to curb criminalisation of politics may help to deliver constitutional governance.

6. National Institute of Smart Government

Why in News?

- Recently, Punjab's Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration (MGSIPA) and National Institute of Smart Government (NISG) signed a Memorandum of Understanding for capacity building on e-government services.
- The agreement will boost e-government services in Punjab.

National Institute of Smart Government

- The National Institute for Smart Government (NISG) is a not-for-profit company incorporated in 2002 by the Government of India and NASSCOM.
- It is headquartered at Hyderabad.
- **Objective**

- To take e-Governance to the doorstep of the citizens and help in their pursuit of happiness.
- To facilitate the application of public and private resources to e-Governance in the areas of:
 - a) Strategic Planning
 - b) Project Consulting
 - c) Capacity Building
 - d) Research and Innovation

7. **Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF)**

- Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF) has been established under provision of the Companies Act, 2013.
- It is under the aegis of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
- It aims to promote investors' awareness and protect the investors interest.
- The fund is monitored by a trust, which decides how the money will be utilised for specific activities of investor awareness and education.
- The Secretary in the Ministry of Corporate Affairs is the Chairperson of IEPF.

8. **'Apiary on Wheels'**

Why in News?

- For the easy upkeep and migration of Bee Boxes a unique concept - 'Apiary on Wheels' designed by Khadi and Village Industries Commission has been launched by the Union Minister of Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Key Points

- Apiary on Wheels is a platform which can carry 20 Bee Boxes from one place to another.
- It uses Solar panel system as a source of energy.
- It is designed so as to reduce the labour and cost of maintaining and upkeeping Bee Boxes and live bee colonies across India.
- It is like an attachment which can be easily connected with a Tractor or a Trolley and may be pulled to any suitable destination

Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)

- KVIC is a statutory body established under the Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act, 1956.
- The KVIC is charged with the planning, promotion, organisation and implementation of programmes for the development of Khadi and other village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.
- It functions under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

9. International Day of Women and Girls in Science

Why in News?

- The International Day of Women and Girls in Science is celebrated every year on the 11th February since 2015.
- The day is implemented by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UN-Women, in collaboration with institutions and civil society partners.
- The day recognizes the critical role women and girls play in science and technology.
- The theme for 2020 is “Investment in Women and Girls in Science for Inclusive Green Growth”.

Key Points:

Researchers and Achievers

- According to a 2018 fact sheet prepared by UNESCO on women in science, just 28.8% of researchers are women.
 - In India, this drops to 13.9%.
- Only 20 Nobel Prizes out of 334 have been won by women between 1901 and 2019 in Physics, Chemistry and Medicine.
- In 2019, the American mathematician Karen Uhlenbeck became the first woman to win the Abel Prize, following 16 male mathematicians.

Women in Science Courses

- Around 30% of female students select STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)-related fields in higher education.
- Female enrolment is particularly low in information technology (3%), natural science, mathematics and statistics (5%) and engineering and allied streams (8%).
- At master’s and doctoral levels, female enrolment remained lower than overall enrolment.
- In premier institutions such as IITs, DRDO the presence of women was 20.0% among Scientific and Administrative Staff, 28.7% among Post-Doctoral Fellows, and 33.5% among PhD scholars.

Way Forward

- Interventions geared to popularising subjects such as Engineering or the Physical sciences or Chemistry among female students at the school level in both urban and rural areas might be helpful in changing mind-set.
- Gender equality in science and technical fields is necessary to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 worldwide.
 - SDG 5 aims for gender equality worldwide.

10. Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill

Why in News?

The Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Bill was announced by the Union Finance Minister in Union Budget 2020.

- The idea behind the scheme is to reduce litigation in the direct tax arena.

Key Points

- The scheme aims to settle the huge number of pending direct tax cases.
- It provides waivers on interest and penalty if the dispute tax was paid before 31st March, 2020.
- It also increases the deadline to June 30, 2020 for those who have not paid their taxes by March 31, 2020.
 - However, such taxpayers will have to pay 10% more tax.
- Those who avail this scheme after March 31, 2020 will have to pay some additional amount.
- The bill widened its scope to cover litigation pending in various Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs).
- According to the Finance Ministry, at present there are 4.83 lakh pending direct tax cases worth Rs.9 lakh crore in the courts.
 - Through this scheme, the government wants to recover this money in a swift and simple way.

11. Quota not a Fundamental Right in Promotions: SC

Why in News?

The Supreme Court has recently ruled that the states are not bound to provide reservation in appointments and promotions.

- The court also ruled that reservation in promotions is an enabling provision and not a fundamental right.

Article 16:

- The article forms the basis of reservation policy in India.
- Article 16 (4) empowers the state to make any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the state, is not adequately represented in the services under the state.

Key observations of SC:

- Article 16 of the Constitution is an enabling provision.
- State governments have the discretion to consider providing reservation, if the need arises.
- The state government, however, cannot be directed to provide reservation for appointment in public posts.

- Similarly, the state is not bound to make reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in matters of promotions.
- Article 16 does not confer individuals with a fundamental right to claim reservations in promotion.
- However, if a State wishes to exercise its discretion and make reservations in promotions, it has to first collect quantifiable data showing inadequacy of representation of a class or community in public services and does not affect the efficiency of administration.



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