



## News Analysis (10 Dec, 2018)

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### International Human Rights Day

On **December 10**, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) observes Human Rights Day. The day is celebrated every year to commemorate the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1948** as the shared standard yardstick to protect human rights across the globe. This year marks the **70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of adoption of UDHR**.

The five-yearly "**United Nations Prize in the field of Human Rights**", constituted in 1966, is also awarded on this day.

#### Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- Proclaimed under **UNGA resolution 217 A in Paris**, the declaration sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected.
- It states that **'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.'**
- It entitles everyone to all the rights and freedoms and prohibits slavery and slave trade in all forms.
- Other rights recognized under the declaration are right to a nationality, right against arbitrary arrest, detention or exile, right to seek asylum from prosecution, right to freedom of movement and residence, etc.
- The Universal Declaration is **not a treaty**, so it does **not directly create legal obligations** for countries. However, it is an **expression of the fundamental values** which are shared by all members of the International community.
- Human rights are at the heart of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, as in the absence of human dignity, sustainable development cannot be achieved. Human Rights are driven by progress on all SDGs, and the SDGs are driven by advancements on human rights.

- Most of the rights listed in the **Constitution of India are in two parts**: The **Fundamental Rights** and the **Directive Principles of State Policy**.

## National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

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- The NHRC was established in 1993 under the statute of **Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993**.
- The Commission consists of:
  - **A Chairperson** who has been a **Chief Justice of the Supreme Court**.
  - One Member who is or has been, a **Judge of the Supreme Court**.
  - One Member who is, or has been, the **Chief Justice of a High Court**.
  - **Two Members** to be appointed from amongst persons having knowledge of, or practical experience in, matters relating to human rights.
  - **The Chairpersons of four National Commissions (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Women and Minorities) serve as ex officio members.**
- As per the act, NHRC is a **recommendatory body** vested with the powers of a civil court trying a suit under the **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908**.
- Though it is **empowered to take suo moto** cognizance of the human rights violation cases, it **cannot entertain cases that are older than 1 year**.
- Apart from looking into the complaints of the human rights violations, it reviews safeguards provided under the Constitution or any Law, makes recommendations for effective implementation of International Conventions/ Covenants, undertakes research and organises seminars and discussion programmes on human rights issues.

## Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2018

- Recently, the **Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2018** was introduced in Lok Sabha which seeks to amend the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993. The salient features of 2018 amendment Bill are:
  - Not only a person who has been Chief Justice of India, but **also a Judge of the Supreme Court** can be the chairperson of the NHRC. This will **enlarge the scope of eligibility and scope of selection** of Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission.
  - **Three members** to be appointed (from two), of which at **least one will be a woman**. It also seeks to include the chairpersons of the **National Commission for Backward Classes, the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, and the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities as members of the NHRC**.
  - The Bill **reduces the term of office to three years (from five years)** or till the age of seventy years, whichever is earlier.
  - The Act provides for a **Secretary-General of the NHRC and a Secretary of a**

**SHRC**, who exercise powers as may be delegated to them. The Bill allows the Secretary-General and Secretary to exercise all administrative and financial powers (except judicial functions), subject to the respective chairperson's control.

- The Amendment will **strengthen the Human Rights Institutions of India** further for effective discharge of their mandates, roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the amendment will make National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) more **compliant with agreed global standards and benchmarks** concerning its autonomy, independence, pluralism and wide-ranging functions in order to effectively protect and promote human rights.

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## Bioplastics Have Less Positive Effect than Expected: Study

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A recent study from the **University of Bonn** suggests that shifting to bioplastics may have less positive effects than previously expected.

The study also found that it will take a lot of time to switch to bioplastics from single-use plastics.

### What is Bioplastic?

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- **Bioplastic refers to plastic made from plants like maize, wheat or sugarcane or other biological material instead of petroleum.** Bio-plastics are biodegradable and compostable plastic materials.
- It can be made by extracting sugar from plants like corn and sugarcane and converting it into polylactic acids (PLA). It can also be made from polyhydroxyalkanoates (PHA) from microorganisms.
- PLA plastic is commonly used in food packaging, while PHA is often used in medical devices like sutures and cardiovascular patches.

### How it is better than Single-Use Plastics?

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- Bioplastics, or plant-based plastics, are promoted as a **climate-friendly alternative to petroleum-based plastics.**
- Plastics are usually made from petroleum. They have impacts in terms of **fossil fuel depletion and climate change.**
- It is estimated that by 2050, plastics will be responsible for 15% of the global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- Plants get carbon dioxide from the air through their leaves; producing bioplastics from plants, therefore, consumes carbon dioxide, which compensates for the amount that is later released when bioplastic is decomposed. Overall, the net greenhouse gas

balance of bioplastic is assumed to be zero.

- The carbon embodied in petroleum-based plastic is suddenly released into the atmosphere by degradation or burning, contributing to global warming. Bioplastics, on the other hand, are climate-neutral.

## Impact of Bioplastics

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- **Cropland Expansion:** Increase in use of bioplastics may trigger cropland expansion on the global scale, which will further increase greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Deforestation:** The production of bioplastics in large amounts might change land use globally. This could lead to an increase in the conversion of forest areas to arable land for agriculture. As forests absorb more carbon dioxide than maize or sugar cane field annually.
- **Food Scarcity:** Using a substance like corn for plastic instead of food may cause food constraints in an increasingly food-scarce world.
- **Industrial composting required:** Industrial composting is necessary to heat the bioplastic to a high enough temperature that allows microbes to break it down. Without that intense heat, bioplastics will not degrade on their own either in landfills or in the compost heap. If they end up in marine environments, they'll function similarly to petroleum-based plastic.

Thus, establishing large-scale plants for Industrial composting of bioplastics may not be economically and environmentally feasible.

## Environment Day 2018

- The theme of United Nations Environment Day 2018 celebrated on June 5 was **Beat Plastic Pollution**.
- UN Environment Day in 2018 was hosted by India.

## Greenwashing

Greenwashing is the practice of making an **unsubstantiated or misleading claim about the environmental benefits of a product**, service, technology or company practice. Greenwashing can make a company appear to be more environmentally friendly than it really is.

[More About Plastic Pollution](#)

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## Important Facts for Prelims (10th December 2018)

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### Sonepur Fair

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- The Sonepur Mela also known as Malegaon Mela or Harihar Kshetra Mela is held on

Kartik Purnima (full moon day) in the month of November in **Sonepur, Bihar**, on the **confluence of river Ganga and Gandak**.

- It is the **biggest cattle fair of Asia** and stretches on from fifteen days to one month.
- It has its origins during ancient times. The fair used to attract traders from places as distant as Central Asia.
- The famous Harihar Nath temple in Sonpur was built by Raja Ram Narain, an influential person during the late Mughal period.

## Yellow Vest Protest

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- **France** has witnessed four consecutive weekends of **demonstrations against fuel tax rises**, high living costs and other issues.
- The protest became known as the "**yellow vest**" or "**gilets jaunes**" movement because protesters took to the streets wearing the high-visibility yellow jackets that are required to be carried in every vehicle by French law.
- The original "Yellow Vest" protests were dominated by working-class people who were upset over fuel tax increase and their declining living standards.
- Protests have also erupted over other issues, including calls for higher wages, lower taxes, better pensions and easier university entry requirements.
- The widely supported movement's core aim is to highlight the economic frustration and political distrust of poorer working families.

## Exercise Aviaindra 2018: India-Russia

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- Exercise Aviaindra is being held at Air Force Station Jodhpur from 10-21 Dec 2018.
  - Exercise Aviaindra is an Air Force level exercise between India and Russia was conducted for the first time in 2014.
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