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Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020

Why in News

Recently, the Parliament has passed the Mineral Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

- The Bill replaces the ordinance for amendment of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) and the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015 (CMSP Act) which was promulgated on 11th January 2020.
- The Bill is expected to open a **new era in Indian coal & mining sector especially to promote Ease of Doing Business**.

NOTE:

- The **MMDR Act** regulates the **overall mining sector in India**.
- The **CMSP Act** provides for the auction and allocation of coal mines whose allocation was cancelled by the Supreme Court in 2014.
 - **Schedule I** of the Act provides a list of all such mines; Schedule II and III are sub-classes of the mines listed in the Schedule I.
 - **Schedule II** mines are those where production had already started before the Supreme court's order in 2014 and Schedule III mines are ones that had been earmarked for a specific end-use.

Key Points

- **Removal of restriction on end-use of coal:**
 - Currently, companies acquiring Schedule II and Schedule III coal mines through auctions can use the coal produced **only for specified end-uses such as power generation and steel production.**
 - The Bill removes this restriction on the use of coal mined by such companies. And thus companies will be allowed to carry on coal mining operation for own consumption, sale or for any other purposes, as may be specified by the central government.
- **Eligibility for auction of coal and lignite blocks:**

The Bill clarifies that the companies **need not possess any prior coal mining experience in India in order to participate in the auction of coal and lignite blocks.**
- **Composite license for prospecting and mining:**
 - The Bill adds a **new type of license**, called **prospecting license-cum-mining lease**. It will be a composite license providing for both prospecting and mining activities.
 - **Currently, separate licenses** are provided for prospecting and mining of coal and lignite, called prospecting license, and mining lease, respectively. Prospecting includes exploring, locating, or finding mineral deposit.
- **Advance action for auction:**
 - The Bill provides that **state governments** can take **advance action for auction of a mining lease before its expiry.**
 - Under the MMDR Act, mining leases for specified minerals (minerals other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) are auctioned on the expiry of the lease period.
- **Transfer of statutory clearances to new bidders:**
 - The Bill provides that the various approvals, licenses, and clearances given to the previous lessee will be **extended to the successful bidder for a period of two years.**
 - During this period, the new lessee will be allowed to continue mining operations. However, the new lessee **must obtain** all the required clearances within this two-year period.
 - Currently, upon expiry, mining leases for specified minerals (minerals other than coal, lignite, and atomic minerals) can be transferred to new persons through auction. This **new lessee is required to obtain statutory clearances before starting mining operations.**

- **Prior approval from the central government:**
 - The Bill provides that **prior approval of the central government will not be required** by the state government in granting licenses for coal and lignite, in certain cases.
 - These include cases where the allocation has been done by the central government, and the mining block has been reserved to conserve a mineral.
 - Under the MMDR Act, state governments **require prior approval of the central government** for granting reconnaissance permit, prospecting license, or mining lease for coal and lignite.

Source: PIB

Nuclear Power Plants in India

Why in News

Recently, the government provided details related to various nuclear power plants in the country.

- Presently, **India has 22 operating nuclear power reactors**, with an installed capacity of 6780 MegaWatt electric (MWe). Among these eighteen reactors are **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)** and four are **Light Water Reactors (LWRs)**.

The **nuclear energy programme** in India was launched around the time of independence under the leadership of Homi J Bhabha.
- **Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR)** is being implemented by the **Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited (BHAVINI)**, a wholly owned Enterprise of the Government of India under the administrative control of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE).

Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor

- PHWR is a nuclear power reactor, commonly using **unenriched natural uranium** as its fuel. It uses **heavy water (Deuterium oxide D₂O)** as its coolant and moderator.
- The **heavy water coolant is kept under pressure**, allowing it to be heated to higher temperatures without boiling, much as in a typical pressurized water reactor.
- While heavy water is significantly more expensive than ordinary light water, it yields **greatly enhanced neutron economy**, allowing the reactor to operate without fuel enrichment facilities.

Light Water Reactor

- The light water reactor is a type of **thermal- neutron reactor** that **utilizes normal water** as opposed to heavy water.
- It is fuelled by **Low Enriched Uranium**.
- It uses water as both a coolant method and a neutron moderator.
- It **produces heat by controlled nuclear fission**.

Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor

- A breeder reactor is a nuclear reactor that **generates more fissile material than it consumes**. These are designed to **extend the nuclear fuel supply** for electric power generation.
- Breeder reactors achieve this because their neutron economy is high enough to create more fissile fuel than they use, by irradiation of a fertile material, such as **Uranium-238** or **Thorium-232** that is loaded into the reactor along with fissile fuel.
- **PFBR is a 500 MWe fast breeder nuclear reactor** presently being constructed at the **Madras Atomic Power Station in Kalpakkam (Tamil Nadu)**.
- It is fuelled by **Mixed Oxide (MOX) Fuel**.

Mixed Oxide (MOX) Fuel

- MOX fuel is **manufactured from plutonium recovered from used reactor fuel, mixed with depleted uranium**.
- Mixed oxide (MOX) fuel provides almost 5% of the new nuclear fuel used today.
- MOX fuel also provides a means of burning weapons-grade plutonium (from military sources) to produce electricity.

Depleted Uranium

- In order to produce fuel for certain types of nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons, uranium has to be "enriched" in the U-235 isotope, which is responsible for nuclear fission.
- During the enrichment process the fraction of U-235 is increased from its natural level (0.72% by mass) to between 2% and 94% by mass.
- The **by-product uranium mixture (after the enriched uranium is removed)** has reduced concentrations of U-235 and U-234. This by-product of the enrichment process is known as depleted uranium (DU).

Source: PIB

Foreigners Tribunals

Why in News

Amnesty International has raised **allegations over the functioning of the Foreigners Tribunals (FTs) in Assam.**

Key Points

- In a report titled '**Designed to Exclude**', Amnesty International has asserted that the Supreme Court and Gauhati High Court had enabled the FTs to create a statelessness crisis in Assam.
There appear to be **aberrations in some cases to the policy of assessing the performance of a FT member.**
- The organization has observed that the FTs that determined the paramount right to citizenship in Assam were often dismissive, used derogatory language, controlled their own procedures and applied them in arbitrary ways.
- It has also called for a **review of the existing legislative regime governing the determination of nationality** in India.

Foreigners Tribunals in Assam

- The tribunals are **quasi-judicial bodies**, to determine if a person staying illegally is a "foreigner" or not.
- Every individual, whose name does not figure in the **final National Register of Citizens (NRC)**, can represent his/her case in front of the appellate authority i.e. Foreigners Tribunals (FT).
Assam has set up FTs, specifically to handle the cases of 19.06 lakh people left out of the updated NRC.
- Under the provisions of **Foreigners Act 1946** and **Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964**, only Foreigners Tribunals are empowered to declare a person as a foreigner.
- The **Assam Police Border Organisation**, a wing of the State police tasked with detecting foreigners, readies the cases for the tribunals to decide who is a foreigner and who is not.

Foreigners Tribunal Member

- Each FT member is appointed under the Foreigners Tribunal Act, 1941, and Foreigners Tribunal Order, 1984, as per the guidelines issued by the government from time to time.
- A member can be a retired judicial officer of the Assam Judicial Service, a retired civil servant not below the rank of secretary and additional secretary with judicial experience, or a practising advocate not below the age of 35 years and with at least seven years of practice.

- A member is also required to have a fair knowledge of the official languages of Assam (Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and English) as well as be conversant with the historical background to the foreigners' issue.

Amnesty International

- AI is an **international Non Governmental Organization (NGO)** founded in **London** on May 28, 1961,
- It seeks to publicize violations by governments and other entities of rights recognized in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)**, especially freedom of speech and of conscience and the right against torture.
- It also works with intergovernmental human rights bodies to expand and enforce human rights protections in international law.
- In 1977 AI was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Peace**.

Source: TH

Methanotrophic Bacteria for Methane Mitigation

Why in News

Recently, scientists at the **Agharkar Research Institute (ARI), Pune** have enriched, isolated and cultivated 45 different strains of **methanotrophs (methane-utilising bacteria)** and created the **first indigenous** methanotroph culture.

ARI is an **autonomous institute** under the **Department of Science & Technology**.

Key Points

- Scientists used some of the isolated strains of methanotrophs as **bio-inoculants** in rice plants.
- They found that there was a **decrease in methane emissions in inoculated plants with a positive or neutral effect** on the growth of the rice. This finding could lead to the development of microbial inoculants for methane mitigation in rice.
- Methanotrophs **metabolise and convert methane into carbon-di-oxide enabling them to reduce methane emissions** from rice plants.
 - In rice fields, methanotrophs are active near the roots or soil-water interfaces.
 - **Rice fields are human-made wetlands** and are waterlogged for a considerable period.
 - **Anaerobic degradation of organic matter** results in the **generation of methane**.
 - Rice fields contribute to nearly **10% of global methane emissions**.

Inoculation

- In microbiology, inoculation is defined as **introducing microorganisms into a culture where they can grow and reproduce**. More generally, it can also be defined as introducing a certain substance into another substance.
- Bio-inoculants are living organisms containing strains of specific bacteria, fungi, or algae. These are also known as **microbial inoculants**.

Significance

- Methanotrophs can **effectively reduce the emission of methane**, which is the **second most important greenhouse gas (GHG)** and 26 times more potent as compared to carbon-di-oxide.
- Native methanotrophs isolated from rice fields can be excellent **models to understand the effect of various factors on methane mitigation**.
- Besides methane mitigation studies, methanotrophs can also be used in **methane value addition (valorization) studies**.

Bio-methane generated from waste can be used by the methanotrophs and can be **converted to value-added products such as single-cell proteins , biodiesel**, and so on.

Source: PIB

Increased Manpower at SFIO

Why in News

The government is set to more than double the manpower at the **Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO)** to nearly 350 as the office continues efforts to curb corporate wrongdoings.

Serious Fraud Investigation Office

- It is a **multi-disciplinary organization** under the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs**, consisting of experts in the field of accountancy, forensic auditing, law, information technology, investigation, company law, capital market and taxation for detecting and prosecuting or recommending for prosecution **white-collar crimes/frauds**.
- It is **headquartered in New Delhi**.
- The **Computer Forensic and Data Mining Laboratory (CFDML)** was set up in **2013 to provide support** and service to the officers of SFIO in their investigations.

- SFIO was initially set up by the Government of India by way of a resolution dated 2nd July 2003. At that time SFIO did not enjoy a formal legal status.
 - **Section 211 of the Companies Act, 2013** has accorded **statutory status** to the SFIO. SFIO has powers to arrest people for the violation of the Company law.
 - SFIO can initiate an investigation into the affairs of a company under the following circumstances:
 - On **receipt of a report of the Registrar or inspector** under section 208 (Report on Inspection made) of the Companies Act, 2013.
 - On **intimation of a special resolution** passed by a company that its affairs are required to be investigated.
 - In the **public interest**.
 - On **request from any department** of the central government or a state government.
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Nidhi Companies

Why in News

Recently, The Central Government has amended the provisions related to Nidhi companies under the Companies Act, 2013 and the Rules.

- The amendments have been made to make the regulatory regime for Nidhi Companies more effective.
- This will accomplish the objectives of transparency & investor friendliness in the corporate environment of the country.

Key Points

- Under **Nidhi Rules, 2014**, Nidhi is a company which has been incorporated as a Nidhi with the object of cultivating the habit of thrift and saving amongst its members, **receiving deposits from, and lending to, its members only, for their mutual benefit**.
- It is a company **registered** under the **Companies Act, 2013**.
- It works on the principle of mutual benefits that are regulated by the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs**.
- Nidhi Company is a class of Non-Banking Financial Company(NBFC) and Reserve Bank of India(RBI) has powers to issue directives for them related to their deposit acceptance activities.

- However, since these Nidhis deal with their **shareholder-members only**, RBI has exempted them from the core provisions of the RBI Act and other directions applicable to NBFCs.

Source: PIB

35th Inception Day Of NCRB

Why in News

Recently, on the occasion of 35th Inception Day of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Crime Multi Agency Centre and National Cybercrime Training Centre has been launched.

Key Points

- **Crime Multi-Agency Centre (Cri-MAC)** has been launched for sharing the information on heinous crime and other issues related to inter-state coordination.
- **National Cybercrime Training Centre (NCTC)** has been launched for professional quality eLearning services on cyber crime investigation on large scale to police officers, judges, prosecutors and other stakeholders.
- **Few important initiatives/roles of NCRB:**
 - Coordination and networking among the police stations and police offices across India.
 - **National Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS)** provides a huge database of fingerprints helping in solving crimes faster. It is a network based pan India system for recording and sharing of fingerprints of criminals in various crimes
 - Important publications including '**Crime in India**', '**Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India**', '**Prison Statistics India**' and '**FingerPrint in India**' is released by NCRB.
 - It organised **CCTNS Hackathon & Cyber Challenge 2020** which helped in gathering innovative ideas for improving CCTNS.

National Crime Record Bureau

- NCRB was **set-up in 1986 under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** to function as a repository of information on crime and criminals so as to assist the investigators in linking crime to the perpetrators.
- It is headquartered in New Delhi.
- It was set up based on the recommendations of the **National Police Commission (1977-1981) and the MHA's Taskforce (1985)**.

- It was constituted by merging the Directorate of Coordination and Police Computer (DCPC), Inter-State Criminals Data Branch of CBI, Central Finger Print Bureau of CBI and Statistical Branch of BPR&D.
- NCRB brings out the annual comprehensive statistics of crime across the country through 'Crime in India' report.
Being published since 1953, the report serves as a crucial tool in understanding the law and order situation across the country.
- It **developed CCTNS in 2009** which interconnects approximately 15000 police stations and 6000 higher offices across the country.
CCTNS digitises data related to FIR registration, investigation and charge sheets in all police stations leading to the development of a national database of crimes and criminals.

Source: PIB

National Sports Development Fund

Why in News

Security Printing & Minting Corporation of India Limited (SPMCIL) has contributed ₹1 crore to the **National Sports Development Fund** under the **corporate social responsibility (CSR)** initiatives.

The contribution has been made in line with the **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)** for the top athletes of India, selected for the Tokyo Olympics, 2020 and beyond.

National Sports Development Fund

- It was established in **1998** under the **Charitable Endowments Act, 1890**.
- Purpose of its creation was to **impart momentum and flexibility** in assisting the cause of sports.
- The Fund helps sportspersons excel by **providing them opportunities to train** under coaches of international repute with technical, scientific and psychological support and giving them exposure to international competitions.
- It also **provides financial assistance** for the development of infrastructure and other activities for the promotion of sports.
- The Fund is **managed by a Council constituted by the Central Government**.
 - **Chairperson:** Union Minister in charge of Youth Affairs and Sports.
 - **Members:** Senior Officers of the Department of Sports, Chairman & Managing Directors of Private and Public Sector Companies/Corporations, representatives of Sports Promotion Boards, etc.

Security Printing & Minting Corporation of India Limited

- It is a **wholly-owned Schedule 'A' Miniratna Category-I company of Government of India**, incorporated on 13th January 2006.
- The **Ministry of Finance exercises its administrative control** over SPMCIL through Board of Directors.
- SPMCIL is **engaged in** the manufacture/ production of Currency and Bank Notes, Security Paper, Non-Judicial Stamp Papers, Postal Stamps & Stationery, Travel Documents viz. Passport and Visa, Security certificates, Cheques, Bonds, Warrant, Special Certificates with security features, Security Inks, Circulation & Commemorative Coins, Medallions, Refining of Gold & Silver, and Assay of Precious Metals.

Source: PIB

Bear and Bull Markets

Why in News

Recently, the many Indian indices including NSE Nifty index have entered into **'bear market' territory** in the backdrop of the declaration of the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Bear Market

- A bear market refers to the market where **share prices are continuously declining**.
- Its downward trend makes **investors believe** that the **trend will continue**, which, in turn, perpetuates the **downward spiral**.
- It is considered **riskier to invest** in a bear market, as many equities lose value. Thus, most investors **withdraw their money from the markets**.
- During a bear market, the **economy slows down** and **unemployment rises** as companies begin laying off workers.

Bull Market

- A bull market refers to a market that experiences a **sustained increase in market share prices**.
- It **ensures investors** that the **uptrend will continue** over the **long term**.
- It signifies that the country's **economy is strong** and **employment levels are high**.

Source:ET
