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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

BRICS IS A PLATFORM FOR GLOBAL SOUTH, SAYS MODI

- BRICS is an acronym that stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It represents an association of five major emerging economies from different regions of the world. The primary goal of BRICS is to promote economic cooperation, development, and political dialogue among its member nations.
- The 15th BRICS summit is the first in-person meet since 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic, the first since the Russian war in Ukraine, and the first time that Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi will take part in such a restricted gathering of just four leaders since the



LAC stand-off began in 2020.

- BRICS has been pursuing a strong cooperation agenda across various sectors. We value that BRICS has become a platform for discussing and deliberating on issues of concern for the entire Global South, including development imperatives and reform of the multilateral system.
- The Johannesburg meeting has additional significance as it will discuss expansion of the grouping by including countries like Iran, Bangladesh and other developing economies.

Challenges & Global Impact:

- Despite its potential, BRICS faces challenges such as differing political systems, economic disparities, and varying development stages among its member countries. Coordinating efforts and priorities can sometimes be challenging due to these differences.
- BRICS serves as a platform for emerging economies to voice their concerns and perspectives on global issues. The group often advocates for reforms in international institutions like the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund to better reflect the changing global power dynamics.
- BRICS represents an important alliance of major emerging economies that aims to enhance cooperation, development, and dialogue among its member nations. While it has achieved notable successes, it also grapples with internal and external challenges that require ongoing collaboration and negotiation.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

CAUSING FLOODS A TERRORIST OFFENCE IN PROPOSED LAW

- The proposed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill (BNS) says that causing "floods" is a terrorist offence.
- The Bill that seeks to replace the British-era Indian Penal Code defines terrorism as a separate offence for the first time as part of a general law. Section 111 (6) (a) of the Bill says that a "terrorist" refers to any person who "develops, manufactures, possesses, acquires, transports, supplies or uses weapons, explosives, or releases nuclear, radiological or other dangerous substance, or cause fire, floods or explosions."
- The proposed law lacks procedural safeguards against false implication as available under the UAPA and the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA).
- The UAPA has often been criticised for draconian provisions. Under the anti-terror law, 4,690 persons were arrested between 2018 and 2020, but only 3% were convicted. Its constitutional validity has been challenged in the Supreme Court.

Flood jihad

- In 2022, Silchar in Assam was affected by a massive flood claiming more than 120 lives. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said the floods were "man-made", adding that the embankment along the Barak river was breached by some people. A criminal case was registered and four Muslim residents were arrested. This led to a barrage of social media posts accusing the members of the community of waging "flood jihad".
- Section 111 proposes a minimum five-year imprisonment and the death sentence as maximum punishment for a terrorist offence.
- Under the MCOCA and the UAPA, there is a provision that before filing of FIR there has to be an approval by a senior police officer. Secondly, the investigation can only be carried out by an officer of a particular rank and there is a bar on the court to take cognisance of the case without government sanctions. If these safeguards are not there, the trial cannot proceed. Such safeguards are missing in the proposed law.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

A STRONG CASE TO RESTORE SECTION 8(4) OF THE RP ACT

GIST : Rahul Gandhi of the Congress party was disqualified on being convicted and sentenced to two years imprisonment in a 2019 defamation case. The disqualification was instant because of the Supreme Court of judgment

Lily Thomas vs Union of India (2013)

Through this judgment, the Court invalidated Section 8(4) of the Representation of People Act 1951, which had allowed a three-month period within which to appeal. Disqualification was not to take effect during this period; when the appeal is admitted, disqualification would depend on the final outcome of the appeal.

The top court said that Article 102(1) does not create any difference between the sitting member and a candidate so far as disqualification is concerned. It held that Parliament has no power to grant exemption to sitting members for three months and thus struck down Section 8(4) as ultra vires the Constitution.

The scheme of Section 8(3) seems to be that when a sitting member is convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more, he shall be disqualified with effect from the date of conviction. Further, it is the President who shall disqualify him under Article 103. The Secretariat of the House to which the member belongs has no recognisable authority to declare that a member stands disqualified as soon as he is convicted by a court of law.

It must be remembered that disqualification arises only when the sentence is imprisonment for two or more years.

As the Court observed in its recent order in Rahul Gandhi's case, if the period of imprisonment was less by one day the disqualification would not have occurred. It would mean that disqualification is directly relatable to the quantum of sentence and not conviction.

But this is a point the lawmakers and the judiciary will have to deal with.

The issue of instant disqualification needs to be addressed urgently as it may affect the career of legislators. The Supreme Court struck down Section 8(4) on the ground that Parliament has no power to provide for a special dispensation for convicted legislators because Article 102(1) does not permit such differentiation between them and the candidates. But so far as differentiation goes, the Constitution in fact permits it under Article 103 which provides that in the case of sitting legislators, the question of disqualification under Article 102(1) will be decided by the President. Perhaps a suitable amendment can be made in Article 102 to enable Parliament to restore the invalidated Section 8(4).

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

INFLATION WOES

CONTEXT : The sharp surge in the Headline retail inflation in July to a 15-month high of 7.44 % is expected to be transitional with core inflation at a 39-month low of 4.9 % and food inflation hovering at a 13-month high of 11.5 %

Disruption in domestic production, interruptions in the supply chain and monsoon anomalies have led to a surge in food prices. Domestic consumption and investment demand are expected to continue driving India's growth. The disruptions in wheat supply with termination of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, concern over the production outlook of soybeans and rapeseed with prolonged dry conditions in Canada and the U.S., subdued production growth of oil palm in Malaysia led to a spike in vegetable oils price has upset wheat and edible oil supplies

"Cereals, pulses and vegetables exhibited double-digit growth... [but] only 48 % of food items have inflation of above 6 %, and this includes 14 food items with inflation in double digits. Items like tomato, green chilli, ginger and garlic witnessed inflation of more than 50 %."

- Union Finance Ministry

The onion farmers at Nashik market of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) stopped trading after the announcement to impose 40% duty on onion exports. The National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF) and the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) started procuring onions from farmers at a "historically high" rate of ₹2,410 a quintal.

The global uncertainty and domestic disruptions may keep inflationary pressures elevated for the coming months, warranting greater vigilance from the government and the central bank, the review

stressed, underlining the need to bring the focus back on maintaining macroeconomic stability.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

PROCUREMENT OF RICE

CONTEXT : The Union Food Ministry has set a target to procure 521 lakh tonnes of rice this kharif season. The Ministry will release additional quota of two lakh tonnes of sugar, over and above the 23.5 lakh tonnes already allocated for August, in view of the "strong demand" for the upcoming festivals of Onam, Raksha Bandhan and Krishna Janamashtami.

The Ministry was on track to achieve the target of 100% distribution of fortified rice across all rice-consuming districts in the country by March 2024. The third phase of the programme was in progress with five kilograms of fortified rice supplied to a person every month, which is 160 grams of fortified rice per day containing 7 mg of iron through the public distribution system. Approximately, 238 lakh tonnes of 250 lakh tonnes of rice with the Food Corporation of India is fortified.



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