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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

SC STAYS RAHUL'S CONVICTION ON DEFAMATION

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court stayed the conviction of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a criminal defamation case. A three-judge Bench headed by Justice B.R. Gavai noted subordinate Court skipped addressing the issue of complete lack of reasons for giving Mr. Gandhi the maximum punishment.

BACKGROUND: The Surat Chief Judicial Magistrate served Rahul Gandhi with the maximum sentence of two years' imprisonment in a criminal defamation case for remarks allegedly made at a political rally in Karnataka in 2019. Section 8 of Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RoPA), 1951 deals with invoking / triggering disqualification upon conviction for offences with proof beyond reasonable doubt. Section 8(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RoPA), 1951 disqualifies individuals convicted of any offence and sentenced to imprisonment for not less than 2 years to hold public offices for a further period of six years since his release.

"disqualification not only affects the rights of the individual but also that of the electorate he represents in Parliament... the ramifications are wide".

- Supreme Court Bench

The interim protection of Mr. Gandhi would continue during the pendency of the appeal against the Gujarat High Court's refusal to suspend the conviction handed out by the Surat court. The stay order of August 4 would continue to operate as long as the present appeal is pending in the Supreme Court even if a Sessions Court, in the interim, goes ahead to uphold the Surat court's March 2023 conviction.

- Sections 8 (1) and 8 (2) deals with disqualification upon conviction of offences and sentencing to imprisonment for varying terms.
- Section 8 (4): Allows convicted legislators to file appeal or revision petition with a higher court and obtains any Measure of Abeyance on the Conviction and the sentence within 3 months.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

GST COUNCIL'S GAMING BETS

The casinos, horse racing and the booming online games industry have appealed to Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council to reconsider the Council's move to impose a 28% GST on the face value of bets placed by participants, not in sync with global norms that tax the gross gaming revenue (i.e., their platform fees). Such a taxation system would lead to repeat taxation on reinvested earnings.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

PAKISTAN PASSES ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING BILL

CONTEXT: The Pakistan Senate passed the National Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Authority Bill, 2023, a day after it was passed by the National Assembly.

SALIENT FEATURES: The Bill seeks to establish a central authority to curb money laundering and terror financing, bringing all institutions related to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) under one command. The authority will be headed by a chairman who will be appointed by the Prime Minister. The authority can convene meetings on the requisition of the chairman or half of its members.

SIGNIFICANCE: The Bill is expected to help the country not to be on the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) again. Pakistan was placed on the grey list of the FATF in 2018 and had to make a huge effort to get out of it in 2021.

FINANCIAL ACTION TASK FORCE (FATF)

The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) founded Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF) as an IGO in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to formulate policies to address conventional threats to protect integrity of the global financial system

- TYPE: Inter-Governmental Organisation (IGO)
- FOUNDED: 1989
- SECRETARIAT: OECD Headquarters, Paris
- COMPOSITION: 37 member jurisdictions and 2 regional organisations.
- MANDATE: "Policy-making body" which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas regarding Money Laundering and terrorist financing.

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

- Set global standards in anti-Money Laundering (ML) activities.
- Combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering since October 2001.
- Counter the financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction since April 2012
- Examine and analyse trends and techniques to effectively respond to conventional, new and emerging threats.
- Promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures to promote global financial integrity.
- Assess and monitor compliance with the FATF standards.

BLACKLIST AND GREY LIST

- BLACK LIST: Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries

or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist. These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. The FATF revises the blacklist regularly, adding or deleting entries.

- **GREY LIST:** Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.

SANCTIONS UNDER GREY LIST

- Economic sanctions from IMF, World Bank, ADB.
- Problem in getting loans from IMF, World Bank, ADB and other countries.
- Reduction in international trade.
- International boycott.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION (NRF)

CONTEXT: Union Science Minister tables NRF Bill proposing apex body for research, innovation with ₹50,000 crore budget.

HIGHLIGHTS: Union Science Minister presents NRF Bill proposing new body for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship. NRF to replace SERB, encompass various fields, and receive funding from private, philanthropic, and international sources. Prime Minister to preside over NRF Governing Board with a budget of ₹50,000 crores over five years.

The Anusandhan National Research Foundation Bill (NRF), 2023 - Updates

- The NRF aiming to promote R&D and foster a research culture in India's universities, research institutions, and laboratories.
- The NRF will be an apex body providing high-level strategic direction for scientific research, aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP), with an estimated cost of Rs.50,000 crores over five years.
- The Department of Science and Technology (DST) will administratively oversee NRF, led by a Governing Board comprising eminent researchers and professionals.
- The Prime Minister will be the ex-officio President, and the Union Ministers of Science & Technology and Education will be the ex-officio Vice-Presidents.
- NRF will encourage collaboration among industries, academia, government, and research institutions. It will create a policy framework and regulatory processes to boost industry spending on R&D.
- The bill will replace the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) and integrate it into NRF, expanding NRF's mandate beyond SERB's activities. Top of Form

Excerpts from "The Hindu - NRF proposes an expansive definition of research"



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ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

ARTIFICIAL REEFS

CONTEXT: Union government to set up artificial reefs in 3,477 fishing villages for sustainable fishing, CMFRI's support.

BACKGROUND: CMFRI reports 17-30% higher catch in locations with artificial reefs. Technology launched in 132 areas covering 3.7 lakh sq m nationwide. Workshops held in Thiruvananthapuram to educate fishermen about reef benefits. Site identification done in collaboration with KSCADC for reef installation.

What is an artificial reef?

- An artificial reef is a human-made underwater structure placed on the seabed to mimic natural habitats and enhance marine ecosystems.
- Made from various materials like concrete, old ships, and tires, these structures provide a substrate for marine life to colonize.
- Scientists strategically place artificial reefs to foster biodiversity, create fish habitats, and aid in coastal protection and erosion control.
- Artificial reefs promote sustainable fishing, boost ecotourism, and serve as research sites for studying marine ecology and conservation.
- Some artificial reefs have become popular dive sites, like the USS Oriskany off Florida, showcasing the fusion of marine life and maritime history.



Biorock technology in coral reef restoration

- Biorock technology is an innovative method for coral reef restoration that uses low-voltage electrical currents to promote the growth of coral reefs.
- A metal framework is submerged and connected to a power source, and mineral accretion occurs, providing a stable substrate for coral settlement. The electrical current accelerates the natural process of calcification, helping corals to grow faster, enhancing their resilience to climate change impacts.
- Biorock reefs can support biodiversity, protect coastlines from erosion, and offer sustainable income through ecotourism and fisheries. Biorock reefs have shown success in restoring damaged reefs, like in Indonesia's Pemuteran Bay, where coral cover and fish populations significantly increased due to this technology.

NAVAL VESSEL ATTACKED

Ukraine carried out the attack that damaged Olenegorsky Gorniyak, a landing vessel of the Russian Navy stationed at Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. The Black Sea port — which hosts a naval base, shipbuilding yards and an oil terminal and is key for exports — lies about 110 kilometres east of Crimea. Earlier, Russian drones caused significant damage and a huge fire at grain facilities in the Odesa region.

LS PASSES ISO BILL

The Lok Sabha passed the Inter-Services Organisation (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill, 2023 to empower Commander-in-Chief and Officer-in-Command of Inter-Services Organisations (ISOs) with all disciplinary and administrative powers in respect of the personnel serving in or attached to such organisations. The Bill would pave way for deeper integration and jointness amongst the three Services.

NIGER CUT TIES WITH FRANCE

Niger's military junta led by Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani severed military agreements with France, its former colonial ruler. The West African regional bloc ECOWAS set a deadline to reinstate President Mohamed Bazoum or face possible force.

NOTIFICATION SUSPENDED

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) suspended implementation of the notification restricting imports of laptops, PCs, tablets and servers to India 'with immediate effect' until November 1. The notification was part of an effort to bring in self-sufficiency in electronics production.

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

MINIMUM AGE OF CANDIDACY

CONTEXT: The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievance, Law and Justice has recommended reducing the age for contesting Lok Sabha and Assembly elections to 18 years, the minimum age of voting in India.

This Election Commission of India contested it as "unrealistic" to expect 18-year-olds to possess the necessary "experience and maturity" for being Members of Parliament and State legislative bodies.

At present, the minimum age for a person to contest Lok Sabha and Assembly polls is 25 years, while one can become a member of the Rajya Sabha or the State Legislative Council only at 30 years.

The Standing Committee cited global practices, the increasing political consciousness among young people, and the advantages of youth representation for reducing the age for candidacy. In countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, the minimum age for candidacy in national elections of 18 years demonstrate the capacity of young individuals to be reliable and responsible political participants.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

FUTURE OF US IN WEST ASIA

The current United States administration share tepid relations with leaders of both countries, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman. An extreme right-wing coalition in Israel and an indifferent Saudi regime pose a challenge.

Saudi Arabia has tactically reconciled with its arch-enemy Iran through Chinese mediation, cooperated with Russia under the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries-Plus (OPEC+) rubric for higher oil prices moving away from nearly eight decades of the U.S.-Saudi "Energy for Security" compact of 1945 and facilitated the return of Syria to the Arab fold. The US wish to re-entrench the Pax Americana over the region by bringing two traditionally pro-west regional players – Saudi Arabia and Israel together to stem the growing ingress by China and Russia in the 'Middle East'.

Saudi Arabia has put forward North Atlantic Treaty Organization-like U.S. security guarantees, access to advanced American weapons systems, approval for the acquisition of civilian nuclear technology, and an Israeli commitment to a process leading to a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

Saudi Arabia under the Saudi Crown Prince seeks to be the predominant regional player and emerge as an important global player. A reconciliation with Israel would erode the first movers' advantage enjoyed by UAE for the past three years as a member of the "Abraham Accords" to a certain degree. The Saudi Arabia could emerge as a more nationalist power than an Islamic one with a reconciliation with Israel, Iran and Syria.

A diplomatic reconciliation with Israel's integration with the Arab-Islamic world would be a major geopolitical victory, symbolising its final acceptance as a legitimate Jewish state by Saudi Arabia, the de-facto leader of the Islamic world. It would provide direct air and land access to Asia, enabling better leveraging of the economic opportunities as the economic centre of gravity shifts eastwards.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

CONTEXT: Doomsday AI stories focus on the 'singularity' where AI surpasses human cognition, threatening control and existence.

BACKGROUND: The entertainment industry faces a historic strike led by Writers Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA. AI threatens artists' livelihoods, as technology can easily appropriate their talent. Strikers seek better terms for industry appropriation of their work to ensure fair compensation and protection from AI clones.

HIGHLIGHTS: The strike by writers and artists in America reflects their existential crisis caused by AI's potential to replace their creative roles. Meanwhile, Meta's open-sourcing of AI Llama-2 aims to democratize AI and boost its growth. Open-source AI allows scrutiny and faster issue fixing. However, AI chatbots may still face challenges like 'hallucinations' of creating false facts. While democratizing AI is beneficial, the real problem lies in human misuse, leading to increased fake news creation. Technology is neutral, but rogue individuals at the

console pose potential risks. Open-sourcing can address some issues, leaving humans to deal with misinformation problems.

AI in film Industry

AI in the film industry brings opportunities and threats. It can streamline production and enhance effects, but also poses significant concerns. Job displacement may result as AI automates tasks, impacting animators and VFX artists.

AI-generated content can lead to copyright infringement and revenue loss. Voice deep fakes powered by AI can mimic actors' voices, misused for false narratives or endorsements. Integration with virtual reality may blur reality and fiction. Ethical concerns arise over AI-generated scripts, while data privacy issues emerge from collecting user data. Creativity may be challenged as AI generates content, altering traditional filmmaking notions.

* Excerpts from "The NEW INDIAN EXPRESS - The pleasure and pain of living with AI"

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