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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

SHOULD CONSTITUTION BE AMENDED TO MAKE ARTICLE 370 PERMANENT, ASKS CJI

GIST: Supreme Court is examining the challenge to the dilution of Article 370 of the Constitution annulling the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

No concept of Referendum in India : In a constitutional democracy, seeking the opinions of the people should be through established institutions. Any recourse to public opinion has to be sought through the established institutions.

We cannot envisage a Brexit-type referendum and not possible within a Constitution like ours, there is no question of a referendum," the Chief Justice observed.

Not a Permanent nature

Chief Justice asked how it could be assumed that Article 370 had assumed a permanent character in the Constitution.

"Was a constitutional amendment required in the Indian Constitution to drop the 'temporary' nature of 370 and make it permanent or can it be deemed permanent merely on the basis that the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly did not abrogate it before dissolving in 1957," he asked.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

SEEDING WITH AADHAAR

GIST: North-eastern States lag behind in the process of linking bank accounts under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to Aadhaar cards. Approximately, 1.13 Cr. bank accounts under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) are yet to be seeded with Aadhaar cards. Accounts of over 42% MGNREGA workers in Assam, 23% in Arunachal Pradesh, over 70% in Meghalaya, and 37% in Nagaland are not yet seeded with Aadhaar numbers.

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SOCIAL JUSTICE

DISAGGREGATED DATA ON TRIBAL POPULATIONS

CONTEXT: Parliamentary committee criticizes Union government for lacking tribal health data, seeks improved allocation and planning.

BACKGROUND: Parliamentary committee criticizes Union government's lack of tribal health data, calls for comprehensive collection. Suggests empowering Tribal Affairs Ministry for resource planning in health, education, nutrition, skill development. Committee led by Heena Gavit highlights health issues among tribal women, mentions higher prevalence of diseases.

HIGHLIGHTS: Parliamentary committee highlights rising genetic conditions, communicable diseases, and high anaemia rates among tribal populations. Lack of disaggregated health data for tribal women concerns committee. Ministries lack action plans without proper maternal mortality ratio data. Tribal Affairs Ministry initiates central database creation with Piramal Swasthya for monitoring tribal health in 117 districts.

Status of Tribal Population in India

- **Tribal Population and Diversity:** Census 2011 reveals 8.9% tribal population in India, diverse with unique cultures and historic movements.
- **Constitutional Safeguards:** Indian Constitution ensures tribal culture protection, education, economic security, and political empowerment, recognizing their contribution.
- **Ministry of Tribal Affairs:** Established in 1999, this ministry focuses on holistic socio-economic development of Scheduled Tribes, bridging gaps and supporting various initiatives.
- **Integrated Approach:** Ministry's programs complement Central Ministries, State Governments, and NGOs, addressing critical gaps in tribal institutions and development efforts.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Constitution and ministry efforts aim to conserve tribal languages, scripts, and cultural elements, fostering their role in nation-building.

CHINA'S EXPORT PLUNGES

China's exports plunged to \$281.8 billion in July, 2023 by 14.5 % compared to July, 2022. Imports plunged to \$201.2 billion in July, 2023 by 12.4 % compared to July, 2022. China's global trade surplus narrowed to \$80.6 billion by 20.4 % from a record high a year earlier. Exports to the U.S. fell 23 % to \$42.3 billion after the Federal Reserve started raising interest rates last year to cool inflation.

EARTH'S HOTTEST MONTH ON RECORD

The Copernicus Climate Change Service recorded a global average temperature of 16.950 C for July, a third of a degree Celsius higher than the previous record set in 2019.

PENDING CLAIMS UNDER PMFBY

The crop insurance claims under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) pending till 2021-22 is ₹ 2,761.1 Cr., with maximum pendency of claims in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

WHEAT PRICES SURGE

Indian wheat prices surged to a six-month high due to limited supplies and robust demand ahead of the festival season. Rising wheat prices can contribute to food inflation and potentially complicate the efforts of both the government and the central bank to contain inflation. The rising prices may prompt New Delhi to eliminate import duties on the cereal to bolster supplies and control prices.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

MORE STUDENTS USING SMARTPHONES FOR ENTERTAINMENT THAN STUDY: SURVEY

Aspiring for higher education

The table shows parental expectations of a child's educational attainment. About 78% of parents aspire for their girls to attain graduation or higher degrees



Dropping out: Parents of a section of girls said their daughters dropped out of school to help out in the family's earnings R. RAGU

| Expected level of education of child | Boy (%) | Girl (%) | Total (%) |
|--------------------------------------|---------|----------|-----------|
| Up to elementary | 4.4 | 3.9 | 4 |
| Up to secondary | 2.4 | 2.8 | 3 |
| Higher secondary | 11.1 | 15.2 | 13 |
| Graduation | 49.6 | 50.3 | 50 |
| Postgraduation/Ph.D. | 32.5 | 27.8 | 30 |

- About 80% of parents aspire for their children to become graduates or attain higher degrees
- The survey included responses of 6,229 parents across 21 States of India.

Source: State of Elementary Education in Rural India report

GIST: Gist: Report based on responses of 6,229 parents of schoolchildren in rural communities across 21 States; 49.3% of students have access to gadgets but only 34% of that number use them for studies

A pan-India survey of 6,229 parents of schoolchildren aged six to 16 in rural communities across 21 States revealed that more children used smartphones for entertainment rather than for studies.

Access to gadgets

The survey revealed that 49.3% of students in rural India have access to smartphones. However, among parents whose children have access to gadgets, 76.7% said the latter primarily used mobile phones to play video games.

Of the students with access to gadgets, 56.6% used the devices for downloading and watching movies, while 47.3% used them to download and listen to music, the survey said. Only 34% use the gadgets for downloading study material, and 18% accessed online learning through tutorials.

The survey showed that only 40% of parents have conversations with their children around learning in school every day, while 32% have such conversations with their children a few days a week.

The survey also sought to know the reasons for children dropping out of school from a subset of 56 respondents.

As much as 36.8% of the parents of girls who had dropped out said it was because they were needed to help out with the family's earnings.

Critical Analysis

While smartphones offer numerous benefits, their use among students can also have negative consequences:

Distraction: Smartphones can easily become a source of distraction during class, affecting students' attention spans and academic performance.

Reduced Face-to-Face Interaction: Excessive smartphone use can lead to a decline in face-to-face social interactions, hindering the development of strong interpersonal skills.

Addiction: Overuse of smartphones can lead to addiction-like behaviors, impacting students' ability to focus on studies and other important activities.

Health Issues: Prolonged smartphone use may contribute to physical problems such as poor posture, eye strain, and disrupted sleep patterns.

Cyberbullying and Online Harassment: Students can be vulnerable to cyberbullying and online harassment, which can negatively impact their mental well-being.

Privacy Concerns: Sharing personal information and engaging in risky online behavior can expose students to privacy breaches and potential dangers.

Academic Integrity: Smartphones facilitate cheating during exams or plagiarizing assignments, undermining the principles of academic integrity.

Reduced Outdoor Activities: Excessive smartphone use might discourage students from engaging in physical activities and outdoor play, affecting their overall health.

Balancing smartphone use and encouraging responsible usage among students is essential to mitigate these negative effects and ensure they harness the technology's benefits without compromising their well-being and academic growth.

INTERNAL SECURITY

MAYA TO BE INSTALLED IN DEFENCE SYSTEMS

CONTEXT: The cyber and malware attacks on defence as well as critical infrastructure are increasing across the country.

More than 91 % of the Indian organisations experienced ransomware attacks in 2022 while 55 % of the affected organisations reported paying up twice or more to allow recovery, signalling that they were likely victims of double extortion campaigns.

The Union Defence Ministry decided to replace the Microsoft Operating System (OS) in all computers connected to the Internet with a new OS, Maya, based on open-source Ubuntu developed locally by National Informatics Centre. In addition, an 'end point detection and protection system', 'Chakravyuh', is also being installed in these systems. Maya would prevent malware attacks and other cyberattacks which had seen a steep increase.

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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

RACE FOR DOMINANCE IN SEMI-CONDUCTORS

CONTEXT: The United States' Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors and Science Act of 2022 (CHIPS Act) authorises \$52.7 billion over five years to boost American competitiveness, innovation and national security in semiconductors.

Whole of Government Approach

The Act focus on a collaborative approach between several arms of the government. Four separate funds have been created for the execution of the Act.

- **MANUFACTURING AND RESEARCH:** The Department of Commerce, the lead agency administers the \$50 billion CHIPS for America Fund to accelerate semiconductor manufacturing and research.
 - a. The CHIPS Act created a CHIPS Program Office (CPO) to lay down the guidelines for assessing the financial viability of a project to catalyse private sector investments.
 - b. The Department of Commerce envisaged a \$11 billion plan focused on future research. The National Advanced Packaging Manufacturing Program (NAPMP) would focus upon advanced packaging techniques that combine multiple semiconductors in a multi-dimensional arrangement on a single substrate with downscaling transistors becoming difficult. Packaging was considered a labour-intensive and low-margin component of the supply chain only a few years ago.
- **NICHE TECHNOLOGIES:** The Department of Defence

manages the \$2 billion fund for financing defence-unique technologies

- **GLOBAL PARTNERHIPS:** The Department of State manage \$0.5 billion to coordinate with foreign partners on semiconductor supply chain security
- **SKILL DEVELOPMENT:** The National Science Foundation manages \$0.2 billion fund to promote the growth of the semiconductor workforce.
 - a. Companies seeking funding under the CHIPS Act are required to submit workforce development plans. A nodal agency, the National Semiconductor Technology Center (NSTC), has been created to collaborate with industry and educational institutions.

Approach in siloes

The Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) manages the India's semiconductor industrial policy. India Semiconductor Mission (ISM), a non-profit company set up by MeitY comprising of bureaucrats from MeitY manage schemes for manufacturing, assembly, displays and compound semiconductors. C-DAC, an R&D organisation again under the MeitY administered the policy for chip design.

The MeitY has begun a Chips2 Startup (C2S) programme, collaborating with over 100 universities and colleges to scale up workforce expansion by supporting existing quality training programmes. The certification of Private training centres preparing chip designers outside the conventional university system is important.


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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

DOWNGRADING SOVEREIGN CREDIT RATINGS

CONTEXT: On August 1, rating agency Fitch downgraded the Sovereign Credit rating of US to 'AA+' from 'AAA' — a rating that it had been holding at the agency since 1994.

Rating agencies assess the creditworthiness of a region, country, its institutions or individual organisations based upon the ability to meet future payment obligations. Fitch rates credit quality from 'AAA' (its highest rating) to 'D' (lowest rating). 'AAA' is assigned to entities with "exceptionally strong capacity for payment of financial commitments". The downgrade in discussion, that is 'AA', denotes "very low default risk", in other words, "very strong capacity for payment of financial commitments".

Standard & Poor's (S&P) downgraded Sovereign Credit rating of US in 2011. Fitch cited the expected fiscal deterioration over the next three years, "high and growing" general government debt burden and the "erosion of governance" in comparison to similarly rated peers over the last two decades for the downgrade. There is a lack of medium-term fiscal framework with complex budgeting process, combined with several economic shocks, tax cuts and new spending initiatives led to successive increases in debt over the last decade.

1. Fitch expects the general government deficit (balance of income and expenditure) to rise from 3.7 % in 2022 to 6.3 % of the GDP in 2023 from cyclically weaker federal revenues, new spending initiatives and a higher interest burden. The U.S. Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects that interest costs will double to 3.6% of the GDP by 2033.
2. Fitch observed steady deterioration in standards of governance over the last 20 years, including on fiscal and debt matters with "repeated debt-limit political standoffs and last-minute resolutions have eroded confidence in fiscal management."
3. Fitch noted an ageing population and rising healthcare costs would require more spending on the elderly absent fiscal policy reforms.
4. Fitch project U.S. annual real GDP growth slowing to 1.2% this year from 2.1% in 2022, with weakening business investment and a slowdown in consumption would push the U.S. economy into mild recession in Q4 of current year and Q1 of next year.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

RS AGAIN PASSES FOUR BILLS IN THE ABSENCE OF THE OPPOSITION

GIST: The Rajya Sabha discussed and passed four Bills in the absence of Opposition members, who walked out over the Manipur violence.

- In the ongoing Monsoon Session of Parliament, the Rajya Sabha has passed about a dozen Bills without contributions

from the Opposition side as it boycotted the proceedings raising the Manipur crisis, except during the debate on the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill

- On Tuesday, the House passed four Bills — the Inter-services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill; the Indian Institutes of Management (Amendment) Bill; the National Dental Commission Bill; and the National Nursing and Midwifery Commission Bill.

Role of Opposition:

The opposition's role in parliament is pivotal to a healthy and effective democratic system. It acts as a key watchdog, scrutinizing the actions and policies of the ruling party or coalition. Through questioning, debates, and discussions, the opposition holds the government accountable for its decisions and ensures transparency in governance.

Moreover, the opposition provides an essential platform for diverse viewpoints and voices within the legislature. It represents segments of the population that may hold contrasting opinions, contributing to a well-rounded and inclusive legislative process. This diversity of perspectives enriches debates and deliberations, leading to more comprehensive and thoughtful policy outcomes.

By offering alternative policy proposals and amendments, the opposition promotes thorough analysis and consideration of legislative measures. It stimulates healthy competition of ideas, compelling the ruling party to justify and refine its policies. This dynamic interaction fosters a more rigorous legislative process and results in well-informed and balanced laws.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

LOK SABHA PASSES JAN VISHWAS (AMENDMENT OF PROVISIONS) BILL, 2023

A total of 183 provisions are being proposed to be decriminalized in 42 Central Acts Decriminalization is proposed to be achieved in the following manner: -

- I. Both Imprisonment and/or Fine are proposed to be removed in some provisions.
- II. Imprisonment is proposed to be removed and fine retained in few provisions.
- III. Imprisonment is proposed to be removed and Fine enhanced in few provisions.
- IV. Imprisonment and Fine are proposed to be converted to Penalty in some provisions.
- V. Compounding of offences is proposed to be introduced in few provisions.

For effective implementation of the above, the bill proposes measures such as

- a. pragmatic revision of fines and penalties commensurate to the offence committed;
- b. establishment of Adjudicating Officers;

- c. establishment of Appellate Authorities; and
- d. Periodic increase in quantum of fine and penalties

It is also ensured that degree and nature of punishment is commensurate with the severity of the offence.

The benefits of the Amendment Bill are outlined as under:

1. The Amendment Bill will contribute to rationalizing criminal provisions and ensuring that citizens, businesses and the government departments operate without fear of imprisonment for minor, technical or procedural defaults.
2. This bill establishes a balance between the severity of the offence/violation committed and the gravity of the prescribed punishment. The proposed amendments ensure the adherence to law by businesses and citizens, without losing the rigor of the law.
3. Some of the amendments proposed in the Bill are to introduce suitable administrative adjudication mechanisms, wherever applicable and feasible.
4. Decriminalization of provisions which affect citizens and certain categories of government employees will help them live without the fear of imprisonment for minor violations.
5. The enactment of this legislation would be a landmark in the journey of rationalizing laws, eliminating barriers and bolstering growth of businesses.



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SOCIAL JUSTICE

ECONOMIC BOYCOTT OF MINORITIES

CONTEXT: Violence and calls for boycott against Muslim businesses in Haryana raise communal tensions and concerns.

BACKGROUND: After violent clashes and a rally by Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in Haryana's Gurugram, Muslim traders fear reopening shops due to boycott calls by local Hindu groups. Similar incidents, like a Chhattisgarh village's oath to boycott Muslims, reflect growing communal tensions, prompting calls for anti-discrimination measures.

SO FAR: The caste-based Hindu hierarchy used purity-pollution ideology to enforce ritual hierarchy and maintain power. Untouchability, like boycotts, oppressed Dalits. Freedom struggle and Constitution aimed to eradicate untouchability via fundamental rights. Article 17 abolished untouchability but its scope remained debated. Conservatives limit it to caste, progressives extend it. Consensus is acts influenced by purity-pollution ideology, like social-economic boycotts, are considered untouchability.

Economic boycott as modern form of untouchability

Economic boycott mirrors social exclusion by denying goods or services based on identity, akin to historical untouchability.

- Context in India: Caste-based untouchability has parallels in

economic boycotts, like Dalits facing discrimination in shops or services.

- Facts: Certain communities, like Dalits, tribals, or religious minorities, experience economic exclusion, hindering their progress.
- Challenges: Deep-rooted biases perpetuate economic boycotts, affecting livelihoods, reinforcing inequalities, and impeding social harmony.
- Addressing: Education and awareness campaigns, strict anti-discrimination laws, and inclusive economic policies can counteract economic boycotts.

Minority communities in the country

- Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jain and Zorastrians (Parsis) have been notified as minority communities under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992.
- As per the Census 2011, the percentage of minorities in the country is about 19.3% of the total population of the country.
- The population of Muslims are 14.2%; Christians 2.3%; Sikhs 1.7%, Buddhists 0.7%, Jain 0.4% and Parsis 0.006%.



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