

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**Supreme Court orders eviction of 1.1 mn forest families**

The Supreme Court has asked the governments of 17 states to evict an estimated one million tribal and other households living in forests after their claims of the right to live in forests were rejected under the Forest Rights Act. The court has directed the Dehradun-based Forest Survey of India to submit a satellite-image based report on the encroachments removed.

The Issue:

- About 11,72,931 (1.17 million) land ownership claims made by scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers under the Forest Rights Act have been rejected on various grounds, including absence of proof that the land was in their possession for at least three generations.
- The law provides for giving land rights to those living on forest land for at least three generations before December 31, 2005.

Criticisms:

- The Forest Rights Law itself has been criticised by both wildlife activists and those fighting for the rights of tribespeople and forest-dwellers, albeit for different reasons.
- The former believe giving people rights to live in forests will eventually harm the forests themselves and also wildlife.
- The latter believe that the implementation of the law is far from perfect and that deficiencies in this have resulted in many valid claims being rejected by the states. The latter also allege that the government didn't exactly put up an effective defence in the case, which was brought by wildlife NGOs and activists.

About Forest Rights Act (FRA):

The act was passed in December 2006. It deals with the rights of forest-dwelling communities over land and other resources. The Act grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities, partially correcting the injustice caused by the forest laws.

Rights under the Act:

- Title rights – Ownership to land that is being farmed by tribals or forest dwellers subject to a maximum of 4 hectares; ownership is only for land that is actually being cultivated by the concerned family, meaning that no new lands are granted.
- Use rights – to minor forest produce (also including ownership), to grazing areas, to pastoralist routes, etc.
- Relief and development rights – to rehabilitation in case of illegal eviction or forced displacement; and to basic amenities, subject to restrictions for forest protection.
- Forest management rights – to protect forests and wildlife.

Eligibility: Eligibility to get rights under the Act is confined to those who “primarily reside in forests” and who depend on forests and forest land for a livelihood. Further, either the claimant must be a member of the Scheduled Tribes scheduled in that area or must have been residing in the forest for 75 years.

Process of recognition of rights:

- The Act provides that the gram sabha, or village assembly, will initially pass a resolution recommending whose rights to which resources should be recognised.
- This resolution is then screened and approved at the level of the sub-division (or taluka) and subsequently at the district level.
- The screening committees consist of three government officials (Forest, Revenue and Tribal Welfare departments) and three elected members of the local body at that level. These committees also hear appeals.

Women's Livelihood Bonds

The World Bank, the Small Industries Development Bank (Sidbi) and the UN Women, along with 10 wealth management firms and leading corporates has announced the launch of a new social impact bond to offer credit to rural women entrepreneurs.

Women Livelihood Bond

- The bonds, which will have a tenure of five years, will be launched by SIDBI with the support of World Bank and UN Women.
- The proposed bond will enable individual women entrepreneurs in sectors like food processing, agriculture, services and small units to borrow around Rs 50,000 to Rs 3 lakh at an annual interest rate of around 13-14 per cent or less.
- SIDBI will act as the financial intermediary and channel funds raised to women entrepreneurs through participating financial intermediaries like banks, NBFCs or microfinance institutions.

GEOGRAPHY**Hippocamp- new Neptune moon:**

With help from NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, astronomers have confirmed the existence of Hippocamp- a tiny moon in orbit around Neptune.

With a diameter of only 20 miles, the newly characterized moon — named after a mythical half-horse, half-fish sea creature — is the smallest moon yet discovered in orbit around the outermost planet.

The discovery of Hippocamp brings to 14 the number of moons discovered in orbit around Neptune. There are seven inner moons, including Hippocamp, along with six outer moons and Neptune's largest moon, Triton.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**Indus Water Treaty**

In response to Pulwama terror attack, the Centre has decided to stop India's share of water that used to flow to Pakistan. The government would divert water from eastern rivers to Jammu and Kashmir. The government's decision will not impact Pakistan's share of water under the Indus Water Treaty between the two nations.

River sharing between India and Pakistan:

- The sharing of water of the six rivers— Indus, Chenab, Jhelum, Beas, Ravi and Sutlej— between India and Pakistan is governed by a treaty the two countries signed in 1960. The deal was brokered by the World Bank after nine years of negotiation.
- Under the treaty, India has control over water flowing in the eastern rivers— Beas, Ravi and Sutlej. Pakistan has control over the western rivers— Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.
- As per the treaty, the water commissioners of Pakistan and India are required to meet twice a year and arrange technical visits to projects' sites and critical river head works. Both the sides share details of the water flow and the quantum of water being used under the treaty.
- The treaty sets out a mechanism for cooperation and information exchange between the two countries regarding their use of the rivers.
- Of the total 168 million acre-feet, India's share of water from the three allotted rivers is 33 million acre-feet, which constitutes nearly 20 per cent. India uses nearly 93-94 per cent of its share under the Indus Waters Treaty. The rest of the water remains unutilised and goes to Pakistan.

Projects proposed to utilize the unutilised water: After the Uri attack in 2016, India has fast-tracked water projects to arrest the unutilised water. The three projects include the Shahpur-Kandi dam project, a second Sutlej-Beas link in Punjab and the UJH Dam project in Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan's water woes: An IMF study said that Pakistan is the third most affected country in the world in terms of acute water shortage. Closing the taps is likely to send a strong message that Pakistan cannot continue to perpetrate terrorism from its soil with impunity.

Why it may not be feasible to stop water- flow altogether?

So far the treaty has survived wars and phases of frosty ties between India and Pakistan. India's any move affecting the treaty would be closely watched by the international community. India cannot abrogate the treaty on a short notice. It takes years to divert the flow of a river. The government of India will have to prepare a long-term strategy if it intends to threaten Pakistan by diverting or stopping the water.

Challenges and concerns:

- The IWT has survived various wars and other hostilities between the two countries, and as such it is largely considered a success. Today, however, the treaty is increasingly faced with challenges it wasn't designed to deal with.
- For instance, India recently fast-tracked approval for several major dams along the Chenab, a 900km-long tributary of the Indus that was originally allotted to Pakistan under the IWT. This follows several other contentious dams already being built on shared rivers including Kishanganga, on the Jhelum River, which was also allotted to Pakistan.
- Under the IWT, India does indeed have a right to "limited hydropower generation" upstream on the western tributaries allotted to Pakistan, including the Chenab and the Jhelum. However, many in Pakistan worry that even though these proposed dams may individually abide by the technical letter of the treaty, their effects will add up downstream.
- Because the treaty does not provide a definitive solution, the two countries have frequently sought time-consuming and expensive international arbitration. From time to time, Pakistan has raised concerns and asked for intervention on the storage capacity of Indian dams planned on shared rivers allotted to Pakistan under the IWT.
- Basin countries have also not been forthcoming in sharing data and announcing planned hydropower projects ahead of time.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Labour Bureau files MUDRA job report

The Labour Bureau has completed its survey on employment generated by the MUDRA loan scheme, giving the Centre a potential data tool to combat other reports showing a dismal scenario on jobs.

MUDRA Scheme

- The PradhanMantri Mudra Yojana was introduced in April 2015 as an effort to extend affordable credit to micro and small enterprises.
- Loans up to Rs. 10 lakh are extended to these non-corporate, non-farm enterprises by the Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA) through last-mile financial institutions.
- So far, 15.56 crore loans worth a total of Rs. 7.23 lakh crore have been disbursed.
- In December 2017, faced with mounting criticism on the failure to create job opportunities, the Labour Ministry had asked the Labour Bureau to initiate the survey on jobs created through the MUDRA scheme.

NSSO survey

- The NSSO's findings showed that unemployment hit a 45-year high of 6.1% in 2017-18.
- Central government ministers and officials have already attempted to use the MUDRA scheme's performance to combat criticism based on the leaked NSSO job survey report.
- Some economists have advised caution in the interpretation of MUDRA data, especially as it relates to jobs.

Loan disbursement doesn't ensure Job

- Every new loan certainly doesn't imply creation of a new job.
- It is improbable that these loans are being given to those who were formerly unemployed.
- They are more likely being given to people who are moving to self employment from other jobs resulting in no new net job creation.
- Given that the average size of the loan disbursed under MUDRA is quite small, it is unlikely that the loan seekers are providing a job to anyone other than themselves.

New angel tax rules for start-ups

After the uproar among start-up investors in the last few weeks, the Centre decided to ease the conditions under which investments in start-ups will be taxed by the government.

New Rules

- Investments up to Rs.25 crore in companies that are less than 10 years old and with a total turnover of less than Rs.100 crore will be exempted from the new angel tax.
- Investments made by listed companies with a net worth of at least Rs.100 crore or a total turnover of at least Rs.250 crore will be fully exempt from the tax; so will investments made by non-resident Indians.

Problems with old rules

- In 2012, the angel tax was justified as an emergency measure to prevent the laundering of illegal wealth by means of investments in the shares of unlisted private companies at extraordinary valuations.
- But the adverse effect that it has had on investor confidence has forced the government to ease the stringent rules.

Positive effects of New Rules

- The easing of the outdated angel tax rules will definitely make life easier for start-ups, which are in desperate need for capital to fund their growth and other business requirements.
- Further, since the new rules are set to be applied retrospectively, many young companies that have received notices from the Income Tax Department in the last few years will be relieved by the latest tweak in the rules.

Negative Effects

- Companies wishing to make use of the latest exemption, for instance, will first need to be registered with the government as start-ups.
- To be classified as one, a company needs to attest to conditions such as that it has not invested in any land unrelated to the business, vehicles worth over Rs.10 lakh, or jewellery.
- These requirements, while probably aimed to prevent money-laundering, can lead to considerable bureaucratic delays and rent-seeking.
- Also, the new rules for the angel tax can cause the same old problem of arbitrary tax demands for companies that do not fall under the defined category of start-ups.
- The taxes to be paid are still supposed to be calculated by the authorities based on how much the sale price of a company's unlisted share exceeds its fair market value.
- It is impossible to know the market value, let alone the fair market value, of shares that are not openly traded in the marketplace.
- So tax authorities with ulterior motives will still possess enough leeway to harass start-ups with unreasonable tax demands.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**Green India Mission**

According to a Parliamentary committee report, Green India Mission, aimed at “protecting, restoring and enhancing India’s diminishing forest cover and responding to climate change”, is grossly underfunded.

Concerns highlighted by the report:

- Underfunded: The scheme is proposed for 10 years with an outlay of Rs 60,000 crore. During 2017-18, Rs 47.8 crore has been allocated for the scheme which is grossly insufficient as the committed liability for 2015-16 and 2016-17 is Rs 89.53 crore which is much more than the budget allocated.
- Concerns over INDC targets: The panel also raises concerns about the targets set by GIM on India’s Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. According to the NDC, India has a target to sequester 2.523 billion tonnes of carbon by 2020-30. Our current forest cover is 75 million hectare and to meet our target of carbon sequestration, 30 million hectares of additional land would be required for forests. The mission document does not mention from where will this land be arranged.
- The report also found that in 2015-16 and 2016-17, the GIM missed its targets by 34%. Instead of the targeted 67,956 hectares, only 44,749 hectares of land got green cover.
- The committee also points out that the afforestation done under the mission was only aimed at increasing tree count without considering the soil and weather conditions. Trees like eucalyptus were planted which make environmental problems worse rather than solving it. Planting of unsuitable trees may cause drought, and prevent biodiversity in the regions.

Green India Mission:

- GIM is one of the eight missions launched under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).
- GIM’s launch was supposed to coincide with the starting of the 12th five-year plan in 2012. But, owing to financial delays the mission was finally launched in 2015.
- The objective of the mission is to increase green cover to the extent of 5 million hectares (mha) and improve quality of existing green cover on another 5 mha, improve eco-system services like carbon sequestration, hydrological services and biodiversity and provisioning services like fuel, fodder, and timber and non-timber forest produces (NTFPs). It also has to increase forest-based livelihood income for about 3 million households.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC**Atmospheric Water Generator (AWG)**

Navratna Defence PSU Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) has unveiled its new product, the Atmospheric Water Generator (AWG), an innovative solution to meet the ever-increasing need for drinking water worldwide, today at Aero India 2019. The Atmospheric Water Generator is being manufactured by BEL in collaboration with CSIR-IICT and MAITHRI, a start-up company based in Hyderabad.

Functions:

- BEL’s Atmospheric Water Generator employs a novel technology to extract water from the humidity present in the atmosphere and purify it.
- It uses heat exchange for condensing the atmospheric moisture to produce pure, safe and clean potable water.
- The AWG comes with a Mineralisation Unit, which is used to add minerals which are required to make the water potable.
- The AWG is configurable in static and mobile (vehicular) versions and is available in 30 litres/day, 100 litres/day, 500 litres/day and 1,000 litres/day capacities.

Significance and benefits:

The Atmospheric Water Generator can be used to provide drinking water in community centres and public places like health care centres, schools, colleges, offices, railway stations, bus stands, airports, sea ports, off-shore oil rigs, military establishments, remote field areas and remote establishments and residential complexes.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The things you take for granted, someone else is praying for.