

INDIAN POLITY

Uniform Civil Code

Recently, a petition has been filed in Supreme Court against Uniform Civil Code (UCC) on divorce and alimony.

Key Points

- UCC is one that would provide for one law for the entire country, applicable to all religious communities in their personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption etc.
- Article 44 of the Constitution lays down that the state shall endeavour to secure a UCC for the citizens throughout the territory of India.
- Article 44 is one of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP).
- DPSP as defined in Article 37, are not justiciable (not enforceable by any court) but the principles laid down therein are fundamental in governance.

Status of Uniform Codes in India:

- Indian laws do follow a uniform code in most civil matters such as Indian Contract Act 1872, Civil Procedure Code, Transfer of Property Act 1882, Partnership Act 1932, Evidence Act, 1872 etc.
- States, however, have made hundreds of amendments and, therefore, in certain matters, there is diversity even under these secular civil laws.
- Recently, several states refused to be governed by the uniform Motor Vehicles Act, 2019.

Implications of Uniform Civil Code on Personal Laws:

Protection to Vulnerable Section of Society:

- The UCC aims to provide protection to vulnerable sections as envisaged by Ambedkar including women and religious minorities, while also promoting nationalistic fervour through unity.

Simplification of Laws:

- The code will simplify the complex laws around marriage ceremonies, inheritance, succession, adoptions making them one for all. The same civil law will then be applicable to all citizens irrespective of their faith.

Adhering to Ideal of Secularism:

- Secularism is the objective enshrined in the Preamble, a secular republic needs a common law for all citizens rather than differentiated rules based on religious practices.

Gender Justice:

- If a UCC is enacted, all personal laws will cease to exist. It will do away with gender biases in existing laws.

Challenges:

Communal Politics:

- The demand for a uniform civil code has been framed in the context of communal politics.
- A large section of society sees it as majoritarianism under the garb of social reform.

Constitutional Hurdle:

- Article 25 of Indian constitution, that seeks to preserve the freedom to practise and propagate any religion gets into conflict with the concepts of equality enshrined under Article 14 of Indian Constitution.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Human Rights Report 2020: USA

The US State Department, in its 2020 Human Rights Report, pointed out several Human Rights Issues in India.

- The report, which is submitted each year to the US Congress, is retrospective and contains a country wise discussion of the state of human rights.
- Earlier in March 2021, Freedom in the World 2021 report had downgraded India's status from 'Free' to 'Partly Free'.
- India has also been classified as an "electoral autocracy" in the annual report named Autocratisation Goes Viral of Sweden-based Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute.

Key Points

Harassment of Journalists:

- The harassment and detention of journalists critical of the (Indian) government in their reporting and on social media, has continued, although the government generally respected the freedom of expression.

- It mentioned restrictions on the press, including violence, threats of violence, or unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists.

Accessing Private Data:

- Government's requests for user data from Internet companies had increased dramatically.
- The government made 49,382 user data requests in 2019 from Facebook, a 32% increase from 2018. Over the same period, Google requests increased by 69%, while Twitter requests saw a 68% increase.

Arbitrary Deprivation of Life:

The report highlighted the case of custodial deaths in Tamil Nadu.

Unreasonable Detentions:

- The report takes note of the April 2020 detention of protesters against the citizenship laws and various other incidents under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act 1967.
- Detention of politicians under the Jammu & Kashmir's Public Safety Act 1978, was also mentioned.
- Improvement in Human Rights Situation in Jammu & Kashmir:
- The government continued taking steps to restore normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir by gradually lifting some security and communications restrictions.
- The government partially restored internet access, however, high-speed 4G mobile internet remained restricted in most parts of Jammu & Kashmir for the year 2020.

Restrictive Rules and Lack of Investigation:

- Overly restrictive rules on non-governmental organisations, restrictions on political participation, widespread corruption at all levels in the government, lack of investigation of and accountability for violence against women, and forced and compulsory child labour, as well as bonded labour.

Religious Freedom:

Tolerance of violations of religious freedom; crimes involving violence and discrimination targeting members of minority groups including women based on religious affiliation or social status.

INDIAN ECONOMY

4% Inflation Target Retained by Government

The Government of India has decided to retain the inflation target of 4%, with a tolerance band of +/- 2 percentage points for the Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for the coming five years.

Earlier, the RBI in its Currency and Finance (RCF) report for the year 2020-21 also recommended the inflation target to be kept same as 4% +/-2% for next 5 years.

Key Points

- To control the price rise, the Centre in 2016 gave a mandate to the RBI to keep the retail inflation at 4% with a margin of 2% on either side for a five-year period ending 31st March, 2021.
- The Consumer Price Index (CPI) tracks the change in retail prices of goods and services which households purchase for their daily consumption.
- The inflation target for the period 1st April, 2021 to 31st March, 2026 under the Reserve Bank of India Act 1934 has been kept at the same level as was for previous 5 years.

Background:

- The central bank and the government agreed in 2015 on a policy framework that stipulated a primary objective of ensuring price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth.
- The Flexible Inflation Target (FIT) was adopted in 2016. The Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 was amended to provide a statutory basis for a FIT framework.
- The amended Act provides for the inflation target to be set by the Government, in consultation with the RBI, once every five years.

Inflation Targeting:

- It is a central banking policy that revolves around adjusting monetary policy to achieve a specified annual rate of inflation.
- Inflation targeting is known to bring more stability, predictability, and transparency in deciding monetary policy.

Strict Inflation Targeting:

- It is adopted when the central bank is only concerned about keeping inflation as close to a given inflation target as possible, and nothing else.
- Flexible Inflation Targeting:
- It is adopted when the central bank is to some extent also concerned about other things, for instance, the stability of interest rates, exchange rates, output and employment.

INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Trade Between India and Pakistan

Pakistan will allow the import of cotton and sugar from India, partially reversing a two-year old decision to suspend all trade with India.

The decision to cancel trade was taken by the Pakistan government in August, 2019, days after the Indian government amended Article 370 and reorganised Jammu and Kashmir.

Key Points

- Pakistan's decision to suspend bilateral trade with India in August 2019 was a fallout of the constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir.
- However, an underlying reason for suspending trade was the 200% tariff imposed by India on Pakistani imports earlier that year after India revoked Pakistan's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status in the aftermath of the Pulwama terrorist attack.
- Trade between the two countries suffered greatly.
- India's exports to Pakistan dropped nearly 60% to USD 816.62 million, and its imports fell 97% to USD 13.97 million in 2019-20.

India-Pakistan Trade

- Over the years, India has had a trade surplus with Pakistan, with much less imports than exports and trade has always been linked to politics.
- India's exports to Pakistan fell around 16% to USD 1.82 billion in 2016-17 as compared to 2015-16 after relations deteriorated in the aftermath of the Uri terror attack and the Indian Army's surgical strikes on militant launchpads in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in 2016.
- Despite continuing tensions, trade between the two countries grew marginally in subsequent years.
- Indian exports rose nearly 6% to USD 1.92 billion in 2017-18, and then by around 7% in 2018-19.
- Imports from Pakistan, though much less in volume, also increased by 7.5% to USD 488.56 million in 2017-18 as compared to 2016-17.

Major Products Traded:

- Pakistan was among India's top 50 trade partners in 2018-19, but was pushed out of the list in 2019-20.
- It had been anticipated that a trade ban between the countries would affect Pakistan more, since it relied heavily on India for key raw materials for its textiles and pharmaceuticals industries.

Indian Export to Pakistan:

- In 2018-19, cotton and organic chemicals accounted for around half of Indian export to Pakistan.
- Other major items included plastic, tanning/dyeing extracts, and nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, and mechanical appliances.
- After the ban, imports of many items fell drastically, while cotton imports stopped altogether.
- The only increase has been in pharmaceutical products. Pakistan has so far imported drug products and organic chemicals to ensure sufficient supplies of medicines during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Indian Import From Pakistan:

- India's major imports from Pakistan in 2018-19 were mineral fuels and oils, edible fruits and nuts, salt, sulphur, stone and plastering materials, ores, slag and ash and raw hides and leather.

Removal of Trade Ban by Pakistan:

- Shortage in Raw Material: Pakistan decided to lift the ban on cotton imports as there is a shortage in raw material for Pakistan's textile sector, which has suffered due to low domestic yields of cotton.
- Cheaper Imports from India: Cotton and sugar imports from countries like the USA and Brazil are costlier and take longer to arrive.

- High Domestic Demand and Prices: The decision on sugar was dictated by high demand and high domestic prices.
- The decision to import from India is a measure to stabilize the market prices.

Implications:

- The decision by Pakistan to allow trade in the selected items will gradually lead to restoration of normalcy in India-Pakistan trade.
- This might be a good time for India to explore a reduction in its 200% import duties on products that its industries can benefit from.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Double Mutant Coronavirus Variant in India

A unique “double mutant” coronavirus variant — with a combination of mutations not seen anywhere else in the world — has been found in India.

Key Points

- However, it is still to be established if this has any role to play in increased infectivity or in making COVID-19 more severe.
- Genome sequencing of a section of virus samples by a consortium of 10 laboratories across India, (Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics – INSACOG), revealed the presence of two mutations, E484Q and L452R together, in at least 200 virus samples.
- Mutations in the virus per se are not surprising.
- Mutations that eliminate the effect of vaccines or the immune system or lead to increased cases are bigger causes of concern.
- These two mutations have been individually identified in other variants of SARS-CoV-2 globally
- They are also associated with a reduction in vaccine efficacy.
- Their combined effect and biological implications have not yet been understood.
- In the days ahead, the INSACOG will submit details of this variant to a global repository called GISAID and, if it merits, classify it as a “variant of concern” (VOC).

Do you know?

So far, only three global VOCs have been identified: the U.K. variant (B.1.1.7), the South African (B.1.351) and the Brazilian (P.1) lineage.

NATIONAL INNOVATION

Launch of AIM-PRIME

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aayog launched AIM-PRIME (Program for Researchers on Innovations, Market-Readiness & Entrepreneurship).

It is an initiative to promote and support science-based deep-tech start-ups & ventures across India.

Key Points

- In this regard, AIM has joined hands with Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) to launch this nationwide program.
- It will be implemented by Venture Center – a non-profit technology business incubator.
- The first cohort of the program is open to technology developers with strong science-based deep tech business ideas.
- It is also open to CEOs and Senior incubation managers of AIM Funded Atal Incubation Centers that are supporting deep tech entrepreneurs.

Do you know?

- Deep technology is an outcome of very intense research and development (R&D) with high knowledge content.
- The benefits of this program are aimed at addressing specific issues through training and guidance over a period of 12 months.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

Place in news: Zabarwan Range

The tulip garden, located at the foothills of Zabarwan range in Jammu and Kashmir will be thrown open to public on March 25, 2021.

The Zabarwan Range is a short sub-mountain range between Pir Panjal and Great Himalayan Range



DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns what is the System of Rice Intensification (SRI). Discuss its pros and cons. (150 words)

Ans:

The System of Rice Intensification involves cultivating rice with as much organic manure as possible, starting with young seedlings planted singly at wider spacing in a square pattern; and with intermittent irrigation that keeps the soil moist but not inundated, and frequent inter cultivation with weeder that actively aerates the soil.

SRI is not a standardised, fixed technological method.

It is rather a set of ideas, a methodology for comprehensively managing and conserving resources by changing the way that land, seeds, water, nutrients, and human labour are used to increase productivity from a small but well-tended number of seeds.

SRI is initially labour intensive

- Needs 50% more man-days for transplanting and weeding.
- Mobilises labour to work for profit.
- It offers an alternative to the resource poor, who put in their family labour.
- Once the right skills are learnt and implemented, the labour costs will be lesser.

Benefits of SRI

- Higher yields – Both grain and straw
- Reduced duration (by 10 days)
- Lesser chemical inputs
- Less water requirement
- Less chaffy grain %
- Grain weight increased without change in grain size
- Higher head rice recovery
- Withstand cyclonic gales
- Cold tolerance
- Soil health improves through biological activity

Disadvantages

- Higher labour costs in the initial years
- Difficulties in acquiring the necessary skills
- Not suitable when no irrigation source available

DAILY QUIZ

1. With reference to Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), consider the following statements:

1. It is a multi-national forum for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in Asia.
2. The idea of convening the CICA was first proposed by India at the United Nations General Assembly.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

2. Which of the following statements regarding Brucellosis is NOT correct?

- a) Brucellosis is a bacterial zoonotic disease.

- b) Brucellosis mainly infect cattle, swine, goats, sheep and dogs.
- c) Humans generally acquire the Brucellosis disease through direct contact with infected animals.
- d) **Brucella abortus S19 delta per vaccine is developed by National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).**

3. The Global Biodiversity Outlook report is published by which of the following?

- a) World Wildlife Fund (WWF)
- b) Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)
- c) **Convention on Biological Diversity**
- d) Conservation International

4. With reference to Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), consider the following statements:

- 1. It is a statutory body.
- 2. Supporting basic research in emerging areas of Science & Engineering is its primary mandate.
- 3. It offers JC Bose National Fellowship for brilliant scientists and engineers from all over the world to take up scientific research positions in India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

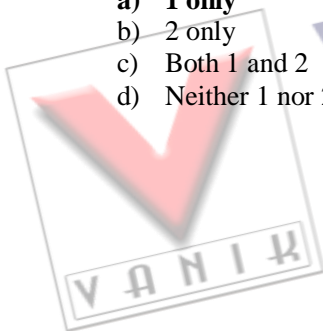
- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) **1 and 2 only**
- d) 1, 2 and 3

5. Consider the following statements regarding National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations (NIDHI) programme:

- 1. It is an umbrella program pioneered by the Department of Science & Technology (DST).
- 2. It supports aspiring entrepreneurs for pursuing a promising technology business idea with a subsistence grant up to Rs 2 lakh per month to each Entrepreneur in Residence.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) **1 only**
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2



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