

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**TECHNOCRATIC INITIATIVES IN GOVERNANCE OF MGNREGA AND ICDS**

CONTEXT: Recently, the issues related to Technocratic initiatives in governance of MGNREGA & ICDS have been highlighted in some studies. A recent article by Tapasya of The Reporters' Collective highlights some alarming technocratic proposals for ICDS

About Initiatives

- **Poshan Tracker**
 - In 2021, the Union government launched the Poshan Tracker, a centralised platform, to monitor all nutrition initiatives, including Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).
 - Rolled out by : the Ministry of Women and Child Development through National e-Governance Division (NeGD).
 - Technology under Poshan Tracker is being leveraged for dynamic identification of stunting, wasting, under-weight prevalence among children and last mile tracking of nutrition service delivery.
 - **Significance**
 - The Poshan Tracker is a job-aid to the Anganwadi worker for efficient delivery of services along with reflection of their efforts. It is a critical and beneficiary-centric service delivery
 - Poshan Tracker is an important governance tool.
 - **Issues**
 - As per Union government circulars, the updating of Aadhaar of ICDS rights-holders, including children, on the Poshan Tracker is mandatory, and subsequent Central funds for supplementary nutrition to States is being made contingent on this.
 - Nearly three-fourths of children between the ages of 0 to 5 years do not have Aadhaar cards, and Supreme Court orders specify that children cannot be denied their rights for lack of Aadhaar.
 - The government has responded saying that only the Aadhaar of mothers need to be authenticated at Anganwadis.
 - However, it does not provide any data or evidence to show how many “fake” or “ghost” children there are.
 - Study reported that biometrics of 42% of the users don't work on the first attempt.
 - As per the recent National Family Health Survey, 36% of children under the age of five are stunted and nearly one-third of children in this age group are underweight.
 - These are pre-pandemic numbers and this would have worsened since the pandemic.
 - In such light, creating new hurdles for children — migrants or otherwise — and young mothers to access food in the name of digitisation appears cruel.
 - It is also unclear what impact such a move will have on the psyche of a child whose mother's Aadhaar authentication fails.
 - National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS)
 - It was launched by the Minister of Rural Development in 2021.
 - It permits taking real time attendance of workers at Mahatma Gandhi NREGA worksites along with geo-tagged photographs.
 - As per the order, the app will record “two time-stamped and geo-tagged photographs of the workers in a day” which “increases citizen oversight of the programme besides potentially enabling processing of payments faster.”
 - The app helps in increasing citizen oversight of the programme.
- It is aimed at bringing more transparency and ensuring proper monitoring of the schemes.
It is applicable for the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA workers for all the States/ Union Territories.

Other Concerns

- Both these technocratic initiatives point to a digital avatar of panopticon with no evident positives for the rights-holders.
 - The sense of being constantly watched induces fear among people.
 - This normalizes and exacerbates the power asymmetry between the rights-holders and the government as the rights-holders begin to internalize and accept this form of coercion.
- Moreover, the rights-holders will be made to take the blame for technical reasons blocking their participation.
- This further alienates and erodes the political capacities of rights-holders who usually get addressed in patronising terms such as “beneficiaries.”

- In the process, violations of dignity get buried in the calculus of technocracy and opacity of government actions.
- The right to live with dignity is a constitutional imperative. However, it rarely manifests in discussions surrounding digital initiatives in governance.
 - Centralised data dashboards have become the go-to mode for assessing policies, relegating principles such as human dignity and hardships in accessing rights to its blind spots.
 - Often when technological glitches prevent one from accessing rights, there is a tendency to make the rights-holder feel responsible for it.
- NMMS failures plus other impediments such as unstable network connectivity are likely to discourage women from MGNREGA work.

Conclusion & Way Forward

- The Indian state has put so much weight behind ‘seeing’ its people, the majority are unable to see and scrutinise government actions.
 - Democratic dictum suggests that people should be able to ‘see’ the state clearly, not the other way around. It is the dignity and trust of people at stake otherwise.
- The cases of corruption in MGNREGA need to be addressed. But for that, social audits need strengthening instead of making already overburdened women struggle more.
 - Reasons for poor utilisation of funds should be analysed and steps must be taken to improve them. In addition, actions should be initiated against officers found guilty of misappropriating funds.
 - The participation of women and backwards classes must be increased by raising awareness and making it more inclusive.

PRELIMS

1. Droupadi Murmu: 15th President of India

CONTEXT: Recently, former Jharkhand Governor and National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidate Droupadi Murmu was elected as the 15th President of India.

About Droupadi Murmu

- She is from Odisha’s Mayurbhanj district.
- She is also the first tribal woman to be elected to the position and the youngest as well.
- She hails from the Santhal tribe.
- She holds the record of being the only Governor of Jharkhand till date to complete a full tenure.

President of India

- Under the Constitution of India, there shall always be a President of India (Article 52 of the Constitution).
- He holds the highest elective office in the country and is elected in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the Presidential and vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952.
 - The said Act is supplemented by the provisions of the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Rules, 1974, and the said Act under Rules form a complete Code regulating all aspects of conduct of elections to the Office of the President.

Election

- The President is elected by an electoral college consisting of MPs of both Houses of Parliament and MLAs of the states of Delhi and Puducherry.
- Nominated members of Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, and members of state Legislative Councils, are not part of the Electoral College.

Authority to conduct elections

- Under Article 324 of the Constitution of India, the authority to conduct elections to the Office of President is vested in the Election Commission of India.

Term

- The President shall hold office for a term of 5 years from the date on which he enters upon his office.
- He shall, however, continue to hold office notwithstanding the expiry of his term, until his successor enters upon his office. [Article 56 of the Constitution of India]

2. Simultaneous Elections

CONTEXT: Recently, the issue of holding simultaneous parliamentary and Assembly polls has been referred to the Law Commission so that a practicable roadmap and framework can be worked out.

Historical Background

- Simultaneous polls to states and Lok Sabha is not a newly conceived norm.
- In fact, simultaneous elections have previously been conducted in India in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967.
 - Soon after, this norm was discontinued following the dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies between 1968 -69.

- The idea of reverting to simultaneous polls was mooted in the annual report of the Election Commission in 1983.
- The Law Commission's Report also referred to it in 1999.
- The BJP government, after coming to power in 2014, had put forward a strong pitch for the conduct of simultaneous elections in the country.
- In 2018, the Law Commission submitted a draft report endorsing the implementation of simultaneous polls, recommending changes to the electoral laws and Articles pertaining to the same.
 - It examined legal and constitutional constraints and solutions related to the conduct of simultaneous elections.
 - The Law Commission has suggested that simultaneous elections can only be held through appropriate amendments to the Constitution.
 - The Commission further opined that at least 50% of the states must ratify the constitutional amendments.

What is the Simultaneous elections/'One Nation One Election' system?

- The current electoral system of the country holds separate polls for the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies in a gap of five years, i.e. when the tenure of the Lower House or the state government concludes, or either of them is dissolved prematurely.
- The term of state assemblies may not necessarily be in sync with one another or that of the Lok Sabha.
 - As a result, the mammoth task of conducting elections goes all round the year.
- One Nation One Election proposes that simultaneous elections be held in all states and the Lok Sabha in a gap of five years.
 - This will involve the restructuring of the Indian election cycle in a manner that elections to the states and the centre synchronise.
 - This would mean that the voters will cast their vote for electing members of the LS and the state assemblies on a single day, at the same time (or in a phased manner as the case may be).

3. National Flag of India

CONTEXT: Three-quarters of a century ago on 22nd July 1947, the Constituent Assembly of India adopted the National Flag.

More about the news

- Ahead of India's 75th Independence Day anniversary, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged the citizens to participate in the 'Har Ghar Tiranga' (Tricolour at every home) movement by hoisting the national flag in their homes between August 13-15.

The National Flag of India:

- **Origin:**
 - The National Flag of India was adopted in its present form during the meeting of the Constituent Assembly held on 22 July 1947, a few days before India's independence from the British on 15 August 1947.
 - It served as the national flag of the Dominion of India between 15 August 1947 and 26 January 1950 and that of the Republic of India thereafter.
 - In India, the term "tricolour" refers to the Indian national flag.
 - Designed by:
 - Pingali Venkayya.
- **Description :**
 - The National flag of India is a horizontal tricolour of deep saffron (Kesari) at the top, white in the middle and dark green at the bottom in equal proportion.
 - The ratio of the width of the flag to its length is two to three.
 - In the centre of the white band is a navy blue wheel which represents the chakra.
 - This Dharma Chakra depicted the "wheel of the law" in the Sarnath Lion Capital made by the 3rd-century BC Mauryan Emperor Ashoka.
 - The chakra intends to show that there is life in movement and death in stagnation.
 - Its design is that of the wheel which appears on the abacus of the Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka.
 - Its diameter approximates the width of the white band and it has 24 spokes.

Rules and Acts governing the display of the national flag of India:

- The earliest rules for the display of the national flag were originally governed by the provisions of The Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950 and The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.
 - It mentions that the tricolour cannot be used for commercial purposes, and cannot be dipped in salute to any person or thing.
 - The flag should not be used as a festoon, or for any kind of decoration purposes.

- Any paper flags, which are used on occasions of national and cultural occasions or sporting events, should not be casually discarded and must be disposed of in private.
- For official display, only flags that conform to the specifications as laid down by the Bureau of Indian Standards and bearing their mark can be used.
- The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971 prohibits the desecration of or insult to the country's national symbols, including the national flag, the Constitution, the national anthem and the Indian map.
 - Section 2 of the Act says, "Whoever in any public place or in any other place within public view burns, mutilates, defaces, defiles, disfigures, destroys, tramples upon into contempt the Indian National Flag or the Constitution of India or any part thereof, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.
- **Flag Code of 2002:**
 - In 2002, the Flag Code of India came into effect which allowed the unrestricted display of the Tricolour as long as the honour and dignity of the flag were being respected.
 - The flag code did not replace the pre-existing rules governing the correct display of the flag; it was, however, an effort to bring together all the previous laws, conventions and practices.
 - The Flag Code of 2002 is divided into three parts:
 - A general description of the tricolour.
 - Rules on the display of the flag by public and private bodies and educational institutions.
 - Rules for the display of the flag by governments and government bodies.
 - A recent revision to the flag code has stated that the National Flag shall be made of hand spun and hand woven or machine made, cotton, polyester, wool, silk khadi bunting.

4. India Antarctic Bill 2022

CONTEXT: Recently, the Indian Antarctic Bill, 2022, which seeks to extend the jurisdiction of Indian courts to the icy continent, was cleared by the Lok Sabha.

Key Points

- The bill is set to become the first domestic legislation with regard to Antarctica in India.
- Aim: Promoting Antarctica as a natural reserve that is devoted to science and peace, and to ensure that Antarctica does not become the scene of international discord.
- Purpose of the Bill: The Bill seeks to give effect to the Antarctic Treaty, which was signed in 1959 by 12 countries.
 - a. It was implemented in 1961, and India, which has two permanent scientific stations Matri and Bharti in the continent, became a signatory to it in 1983.
- **Need of the Bill:**
 - a. There is growing concern over preserving the pristine Antarctic environment and ocean around Antarctica from the exploitation of marine living resources and human presence in Antarctica.
 - b. In the future, the private ship and aviation industry will also start operations and promote tourism and fishing in Antarctica, which needs to be regulated.
- **Importance of global warming and melting glaciers for India:**
 - a. India is a coastal country. Goa, Mumbai, Kolkata, Kochi, Chennai and many such places are located along the coast.
 - b. Any rise in the sea level due to melting of glaciers may cause damage through flooding.
 - c. That's why it is essential to understand the impact of global warming on Antarctica.

5. Warmhole

CONTEXT: The wormhole theory can provide shortcuts for enormous distances between two points in curved spacetime.

Warmhole

- **Discovered by:**
 - Ludwig Flamm in 1916,
 - Soon after Einstein proposed his General Theory of Relativity — a theory that describes the gravitational field.
- **About:**
 - A wormhole can be visualised as a tunnel with two ends at separate points in spacetime.
 - A wormhole can act as a bridge or a shortcut between two points in curved spacetime which are well separated in practical terms to the inhabitants of the universe.
 - Wormholes are consistent with the general theory of relativity.
- **No Evidences Yet:**

- The presence of wormholes has not yet been established through observation or inference by astronomers.
- There is gathering support for the existence of entities such as the wormhole and others that have not yet been “seen”.

ANSWER WRITTING

Q. How far is it justified to say that the problem of communalism in modern India is a product of legacy?(150 words)

Introduction

Communalism is a term used to denote attempts to construct religious/ethnic identity or incite strife between people identified as different communities. In modern Indian society communalism often translates into violence, animosity and prevents social cohesion amongst different religious communities. India since its ancient times remained a multi religious, plural society free from religious pogroms and violence but the advent of colonialism unsettled this social harmony.

Body

- In many ways, the roots of present-day communalism could be traced back to the colonial days. The diversity of India offered British and other colonial powers an opportunity to divide and rule. The major plank of this policy was to create a rift between the two largest religious groups i.e. Hindus and Muslims. For this purpose they resorted to different techniques like the misinterpretation of history, communal appeasement, language policies, etc.
- The English presented a distorted version of Indian History, where ancient India was Hindu dominated negating Buddhism and Jainism and medieval history was marked by the rule of tyrannical Muslim rulers. The British also created ‘Hindi-Urdu’ controversy which led to the establishment of Hindi as the language of Hindus and Urdu as Muslim tongue.
- Through partition of Bengal and the introduction of the separate electorate on the basis of religion, British rule tried to break the political unity of the two major religious communities. Finally, all this culminated in their acceptance of the “two-nation theory” and subsequent partition of India in 1947.

Conclusion

Despite having a secular, democratic nation the seeds of communalism sown by the British in the Indian psyche continues to manifest in social conflicts today. Thus, the eradication of communalism from Indian society requires the strengthening of our constitutional ideals. Indian masses also need to be made aware of their syncretic culture and assimilative past which led to flourishing dialogues in the society and borrowing from each other’s traditions.

MCQs

- 1) Consider the following statements about Elections:
 1. Simultaneous polls to states and Lok Sabha were conducted for the first time in 2019.
 2. Article 172 and Article 83 deal with the duration of the Houses of Parliament, and guarantee a five-year term to both the elected Lok Sabha and state assemblies
 3. Article 85 of the Indian Constitution deals with the powers of the President to summon Parliamentary sessions, not exceeding a gap of more than six months.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

 - a. 1 and 2 only
 - b. 2 and 3 only
 - c. 1 and 3 only
 - d. 1, 2 and 3
- 2) Consider the following statements regarding National Flag of India
 1. It was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 22 July 1947.
 2. It was designed by Pingali Venkayya.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

 - a. 1 only
 - b. 2 only
 - c. Both 1 and 2
 - d. Neither 1 nor 2
- 3) Consider the following statements regarding Jawaharlal Nehru Port:
 1. Jawaharlal Nehru Port(JNP) has become the first major port of the country to become a 100% Landlord port having all berths being operated on PPP model.
 2. It is ranked 26th among the top 100 global ports as per Lloyds List.
 3. Currently, five container terminals are operated at JNP, of which only one is port owned.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

 - a. 1 and 2 only
 - b. 2 and 3 only
 - c. 1 and 3 only
 - d. 1, 2 and 3
- 4) Consider the following statements about Warmhole:
 1. It was discovered by Flamm in 1916.
 2. It be visualised as a tunnel with two ends at separate points in spacetime.

