

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

❖ **SC quota for Dalit Muslims and Christians: story so far**

❖ **CONTEXT:** The Centre is likely to soon decide on setting up a national commission to study the social, economic and educational status of Dalits who converted to religions other than Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Several petitions are pending before the Supreme Court seeking Scheduled Caste (SC) reservation benefits for Dalits who converted to Christianity or Islam.

❖ **Why don't Dalits who convert to Christianity and Islam get quota benefits?**

- The original rationale behind giving reservation to Scheduled Castes was that these sections had suffered from the social evil of untouchability, which was practised among Hindus. Under Article 341 of the Constitution, the President may "specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall be deemed to be Scheduled Castes.
- The first order under this provision was issued in 1950, and covered only Hindus. Following demands from the Sikh community, an order was issued in 1956, including Sikhs of Dalit origin among the beneficiaries of the SC quota.
- In 1990, the government acceded to a similar demand from Buddhists of Dalit origin, and the order was revised to state: "No person who professes a religion different from the Hindu, the Sikh or the Buddhist religion shall be deemed to be a member of Scheduled Caste."

❖ **Does this religion-based bar apply to converted STs and OBCs as well?**

- It does not. According to The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) "The rights of a person belonging to a Scheduled Tribe are independent of his/her religious faith." Following the implementation of the Mandal Commission report, several Christian and Muslim communities have found place in the Central and state lists of OBCs.

❖ **What efforts have been made to include Muslims and Christians of Dalit origin among SCs?**

- After 1990, a number of Private Member's Bills were brought in Parliament for this purpose. In 1996, a government Bill called The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Orders (Amendment) Bill was drafted, but in view of a divergence of opinions, the Bill was not introduced in Parliament.
- The UPA government headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh set up two important panels: the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, popularly known as the Ranganath Misra Commission, in October 2004; and a seven-member high-level committee headed by former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court Rajinder Sachar to study the social, economic, and educational condition of Muslims in March 2005.
- The Sachar Committee Report observed that the social and economic situation of Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians did not improve after conversion. The Ranganath Misra Commission, which submitted its report in May 2007, recommended that SC status should be "completely de-linked from religion and Scheduled Castes [should be made] fully religion-neutral like Scheduled Tribes".
- The report was tabled in both Houses of Parliament on December 18, 2009, but its recommendation was not accepted in view of inadequate field data and corroboration with the actual situation on the ground.
- A report by a team of sociologists led by Satish Deshpande, titled Dalits in the Muslim and Christian Communities — A Status Report on Current Social Scientific Knowledge, said in January 2008 that there was a strong case for extending SC status to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. However, the study, which was commissioned by the National Commission for Minorities, was also not considered reliable due to insufficient data.

❖ **What view did the BJP take before it came to power?**

- In February 2010, the BJP national executive passed a resolution criticising the Misra Commission. It said that the "Commission cannot dictate or thrust its opinion on the Christian Pope or Muslim maulvis. Reservation would amount to a formal introduction of a caste system in Islam and Christianity, thus changing the basic tenets of these religions, which is outside the jurisdiction of both Parliament and the judiciary and also contrary to the provisions of the Koran and the Bible."
- Back in 1961, the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), the highest decision making body of the RSS, had said: "If any scheme of separate reservation of different sects is sought to be envisaged for political purposes, it will prove highly detrimental to national unity." In 1990, in response to Christian demands for reservation on the lines of neo-Buddhists, the ABPS said "the Constitution makers envisaged these concessions only to remove caste-based discrimination and inequality prevalent in Hindu society".

❖ **What happens here onward?**

- Based on the recommendations of the Ranganath Misra Commission, there are some petitions pending before the Supreme Court, seeking reservation benefits for Christians and Muslims of Dalit origin. In the last hearing on August 30 2022, a three-judge Bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul gave Solicitor

General of India Tushar Mehta three weeks' time to present the stand of the Union government on the issue. The next hearing is scheduled for October 11 2022.

EDUCATION

❖ **The controversy over NAAC's system for assessing higher education**

❖ **CONTEXT:** The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), which carries out quality checks or assessments of Indian Higher-level Educational Institutions (HEIs), courted controversy recently over the rating of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda and allegations of bribery in the process. When the NAAC released the ratings, the institute's score changed from A to A+ on the back of improvement across parameters. The allegations have surfaced at a time when the NAAC is exploring changes in its approach.

❖ **What is NAAC?**

• The NAAC, an autonomous body under the University Grants Commission (UGC), assesses and certifies HEIs with gradings as part of accreditation. Through a multi-layered process, a higher education institution learns whether it meets the standards of quality set by the evaluator in terms of curriculum, faculty, infrastructure, research, and other parameters. The ratings of institutions range from A++ to C. If an institution is graded D, it means it is not accredited.

❖ **How is the accreditation process carried out?**

• The current approach has been described as "input-based". In other words, NAAC relies heavily on self-assessment reports of applicant institutions.

• The first step has an applicant institution submitting a self-study report of information related to quantitative and qualitative metrics. The data is then validated by NAAC expert teams, followed by peer team visits to the institutions. This last step has sparked controversy.

| GRADE-WISE | | | | TOP FIVE STATES (Accredited) | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------------------|----|---------------|-------|
| Grade | Universities | Colleges | Total | UNIVERSITIES | | COLLEGES | |
| A | 224 | 1,778 | 2,002 | Tamil Nadu | 43 | Maharashtra | 1,834 |
| B | 165 | 5,831 | 5,996 | Uttar Pradesh | 37 | Karnataka | 881 |
| C | 17 | 1,077 | 1,094 | Maharashtra | 35 | Tamil Nadu | 829 |
| Total | 406 | 8,686 | 9,092 | Karnataka | 33 | Uttar Pradesh | 604 |
| | | | | Rajasthan | 31 | Gujarat | 492 |

❖ **What is the latest controversy about?**

• NAAC had reportedly withheld the grading of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda after receiving an anonymous complaint that the university unduly tried to influence the peer review team with gold, cash and other favours.

• However, on September 15 2022, NAAC released the improved grading, terming the allegations as "false". Interestingly, the controversy has surfaced at a time when the council is considering reducing the role of the peer team visits in the overall scheme of things. "The process of Peer Team Visits adds substantial effort on the part of both NAAC and the HEIs. Hence, it recommend that the role of Peer Team visits be facilitatory in nature and not have a significant weightage in assessment and accreditation.

❖ **What are the alternatives being explored?**

• From the prevailing "input-based" approach, the NAAC plans to adopt an "outcome-based approach". The current system is akin to accepting the claim of a PhD candidate that his thesis is of high quality. Instead, it suggests that emphasis should be on finding out if students are equipped with relevant skills and academic abilities.

• Rather than relying exclusively on the self-study reports of the HEIs, the NAAC should ask institutions to provide evidence such as samples of learning materials, continuous assessment tasks and final examinations to show they have outcomes of learning specified in the syllabus.

❖ **How many institutions in India are accredited?**

• There are 1,043 universities and 42,343 colleges listed on the portal of the All India Survey on Higher Education. As per the latest data from June 21, there were 406 universities and 8,686 colleges that were NAAC-accredited.

• Among the states, Maharashtra accounts for the highest number of accredited colleges at 1,869 – more than twice as many as Karnataka's 914, the second highest. Tamil Nadu has the most accredited universities at 43.

❖ **Can all higher educational institutes apply for accreditation?**

- Under the rules, only higher education institutions that are at least six years old, or from where at least two batches of students have graduated, can apply. The accreditation is valid for five years. Aspiring institutes need to be recognised by the UGC and have regular students enrolled in their full-time teaching and research programmes.
- There are only 19 universities and 121 colleges that have been reviewed by the NAAC four times, with a gap of five years between each grading. When an institution undergoes the accreditation process for the first time it is referred to as Cycle 1, and the subsequent five-year periods as Cycles 2, 3 and so on.
- ❖ **Why are so few institutes accredited?**
- According to current and former officials of the NAAC, the fear of obtaining a poor grade or no accreditation at all holds back higher education institutes from voluntarily applying for evaluation. This is despite accreditation having been made mandatory through the UGC (Mandatory Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2012.
- Earlier 2022, NAAC explored the possibility of a new system of Provisional Accreditation for Colleges (PAC) under which even one-year-old institutions could apply for accreditation. The provisional certificates would be valid for two years, it suggested. But the committee that drew up the white paper, which also underwent multiple rounds of revisions, observed that such a system can lead to compromise with quality.
- The PAC proposal implies a lowering of standards so that a greater number of colleges can gain Provisional Accreditation. Instead, it would be wiser on the part of NAAC to help the colleges improve the quality of education they provide, such that they can be successful in meeting the standards that NAAC accreditation calls for.

PRELIMS

1. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)

❖ **CONTEXT: The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has amended its regulations to allow sale of one or more assets of an entity undergoing insolvency proceedings.**

❖ **IBBI**

- It was established on 1st October, 2016 under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (Code).
- It is a key pillar of the ecosystem responsible for implementation of the Code that consolidates and amends the laws relating to reorganisation and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals in a time bound manner for maximisation of the value of assets of such persons, to promote entrepreneurship, availability of credit and balance the interests of all the stakeholders.

➤ **Functions**

- It has regulatory oversight over the Insolvency Professionals, Insolvency Professional Agencies, Insolvency Professional Entities and Information Utilities.
- It writes and enforces rules for processes, namely, corporate insolvency resolution, corporate liquidation, individual insolvency resolution and individual bankruptcy under the Code.
- It has recently been tasked to promote the development of, and regulate, the working and practices of, insolvency professionals, insolvency professional agencies and information utilities and other institutions, in furtherance of the purposes of the Code.
- It has also been designated as the 'Authority' under the Companies (Registered Valuers and Valuation Rules), 2017 for regulation and development of the profession of valuers in the country.

2. International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)

❖ **CONTEXT: Shri Narendra Singh Tomar inaugurates the 9th Session of Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. The theme of the meeting is 'Celebrating the Guardians of Crop Diversity: Towards an Inclusive Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework'.**

- The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (also known as ITPGRFA, International Seed Treaty or Plant Treaty), is a comprehensive international agreement in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) is a comprehensive agreement that aims to establish a global system which provides farmers, plant breeders, and scientists with access to plant genetic resources.
- The treaty provides solutions to achieve food and nutritional security as well as climate resilient agriculture.
- It aims at guaranteeing food security through the conservation, exchange and sustainable use of the world's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA), the fair and equitable benefit sharing arising from its use, as well as the recognition of farmers' rights.

- ITPGRFA is a legally binding comprehensive agreement adopted in November, 2001 at Rome during the 31st session of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which entered into force on June 29, 2004
- There are 149 contracting parties to the Plant Treaty (147 Member States and 1 intergovernmental organization, the European Union). India is a party too.
- Countries are inter-dependent for PGRFA and consequently a global order is essential to facilitate access and benefit sharing.
- Thus, conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA are essential to achieving sustainable agriculture and food security, for present and future generations.
- It is indispensable for crop genetic improvement to adapting to unpredictable environmental changes and human needs.
- Because countries are interdependent in their reliance on PGRFA and the management of PGRFA is at the meeting point between agriculture, the environment and commerce, the International Treaty has established a multilateral system that facilitates continuous exchange of PGRFA (Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing).

3. **Red Sanders**

❖ **CONTEXT: Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has recovered 10.23 MT of Red Sanders, estimated at Rs 6 crore in the international market, from an export consignment that was destined for Singapore**

- The species, *Pterocarpus santalinus*, is an Indian endemic tree species, with a restricted geographical range in the Eastern Ghats.
- The species is endemic to a distinct tract of forests in Andhra Pradesh.
- Red Sanders usually grow in the rocky, degraded and fallow lands with Red Soil and hot and dry climate.
- Illicit felling for smuggling, forest fires, cattle grazing and other anthropogenic threats.
- Red Sanders, known for their rich hue and therapeutic properties, are high in demand across Asia, particularly in China and Japan, for use in cosmetics and medicinal products as well as for making furniture, woodcraft and musical instruments.

➤ **Protection Status:** The International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) recently categorised the Red Sanders (or Red Sandalwood) again into the 'endangered' category in its Red List. It was classified as 'near threatened' in 2018.

- CITES: Appendix II
- Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972: Schedule II

➤ **Sandalwood Spike Disease**

- It is an infectious disease which is caused by phytoplasma.
- Phytoplasmas are bacterial parasites of plant tissues — which are transmitted by insect vectors and involved in plant-to-plant transmission.
- There is no cure as of now for the infection.
- Presently, there is no option but to cut down and remove the infected tree to prevent the spread of the disease.
- The disease was first reported in Kodagu, Karnataka in 1899.
- More than a million sandalwood trees were removed in the Kodagu and Mysore region between 1903 and 1916.

4. **Healthy Child Award**

❖ **CONTEXT: A total of 306 children of 33 Districts of 14 Lok Sabha Constituencies in Assam have been awarded healthy child award**

- Malnutrition among under-five is an important concern all over India. Considering the initiative towards building a healthy nation, Assam shared the goal of "Malnutrition free Assam". 20 healthy children from Anganwadi Centres were to be awarded as "Healthy Child" prize at the level of Lok Sabha Constituency.
- Growth monitoring was done all over the State for the measurement of weight and height of children to identify healthy children in age group of 6 months -3 years and 3-5 years and to generate awareness and conduct campaigns for growth measurement of children held from 21st March- 27th March, of POSHAN Pakhwada-2022. Twenty healthy children were identified from each Lok Sabha Constituency covering all the ICDS project from respective district during POSHAN Pakhwada. It is an imperative intervention taken by Chief Minister of Assam aimed to improve nutrition through enhanced social awareness .

❖ **Objective of the healthy child award is**

- To identify healthy children in age group of 6m-3 years and 3-5 years and to generate awareness and conduct campaigns for growth measurement of children.

- To promote a sense of constructive competition among parents for their child's health and well being, to encourage the parents of healthy children.
- To sensitize the community on children health and to improve the nutrition of infants/children through increased social awareness such as importance of diet diversity and age appropriate feeding.
- To mobilize community participation for health and nutritional wellness in the State.
- ❖ **Method for Identifying a healthy child**
- Measuring weight and height/length of children in the target group with weighing scale and stadiometer or infantometer by Anganwadi Worker (AWW)/Helper (AWH).
- After measuring the weight of the children, healthy children were identified by plotting appropriately in the WHO growth chart.
- The concerned supervisors/block POSHAN team guided the AWW/AWH in the entire process.
- The identified healthy children were listed along with their details in the prescribed format.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Discuss the multi-dimensional implications of uneven distribution of mineral oil in the world.

Petroleum is not distributed evenly around the world. Slightly less than half of the world's proven reserves are located in the Middle East (including Iran but not North Africa). Following the Middle East are Canada and the United States, Latin America, Africa, and the region made up of Russia, Kazakhstan, and other countries that were once part of the Soviet Union.

This uneven distribution of mineral oil across the globe has many multi-dimensional implications.

- **Economic:** Uneven distribution of the mineral oil across the world, affects the balance of trade between the importing and the exporting countries. This in turn affects the foreign exchange reserves of the country. It also leads to economic consequences like inflation, for the importing country.
- **Political:** Many historical and present-day conflicts involve nations trying to control resource-rich territories. For example, the desire for diamond and oil resources has been the root of many armed conflicts in Africa. USA's interference in the geopolitics of West Asia is also one of the reasons for uneven distribution of oil minerals.
- **Employment & Migration:** Availability of oil reserves leads to more job opportunities in the Middle east. That is the reason why India has a large diaspora in the Middle East.
- **Uneven Growth:** Uneven distribution of mineral oil has also led to uneven growth across the globe. Rise in import prices directly hamper the capabilities of the government to spend on welfare objectives.
- **Energy Security:** The uneven distribution of the mineral oil resource is the reason for energy insecurity in the oil deficient countries. It also directly affects their strategic autonomy.

The uneven distribution of the mineral oil resources leads to various implications ranging from economic to energy security. This highlights the need for India to diversify its energy basket both in terms of content and geography.

MCQs

1. Consider the following international agreements:
 1. The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
 2. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
 3. The World Heritage Convention
 Which of the above has/have a bearing on the biodiversity?
 - a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) 3 only
 - c) 1 and 3 only
 - d) **1, 2 and 3**
2. With reference to 'Red Sanders', sometimes seen in the news, consider the following statements:
 1. It is a tree species found in a part of South India.
 2. It is one of the most important trees in the tropical rain forest areas of South India.
 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
3. Consider the following statements about Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI):
 1. It functions under Ministry of Finance.
 2. It was given statutory powers through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.
 3. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code does not cover individuals.
 Which of the above statement/s is/are incorrect?
 - a) 1 and 2 Only

- b) 2 and 3 Only
c) **1 and 3 Only**
d) All of the above
4. Consider the following statements with reference to International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.
1. It is also known as Seed Treaty as it is a comprehensive international agreement for ensuring food security through the conservation, exchange and sustainable use of the world's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
 2. India is a signatory to the treaty.
 3. The treaty recognizes farmers' rights.
- Choose the correct statement using the codes given below
- a) 1 and 2 only
 - b) 2 and 3 only
 - c) 1 and 3 only
 - d) **All of the above**
5. Consider the following pairs
1. Ranganath Misra - Commission National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities
 2. Rajinder Sachar - to study the social, economic, and educational condition of Muslims
 3. Khusro committee - agricultural credit system
- How many above pair/s is or are correctly matched
- a) Only one pair
 - b) **Only two pairs**
 - c) All the three pairs
 - d) None of the above pairs
6. Healthy child Award recently seen in news is related to which of the following state?
- a) **Assam**
 - b) Meghalaya
 - c) Kerala
 - d) Karnataka
7. Consider the following statements with regards to National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)
1. It is not a statutory body
 2. NAAC is an autonomous body that is funded by the University Grants Commission (UGC).
- Choose the correct statement/s using the codes given below
- a) 1 only
 - b) 2 only
 - c) **Both 1 and 2**
 - d) Neither 1 nor 2
8. International Finance Corporation (IFC) is an arm of which of the following organization?
- a) United Nations (UN)
 - b) International Monetary Fund (IMF)
 - c) **World Bank**
 - d) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
9. Which of the following countries are part of G-4 nations
1. Germany
 2. South Africa
 3. India
 4. Japan
- Select the correct answer from the codes given below:
- a) **1, 3 and 4 only**
 - b) 1 and 3 only
 - c) 2, 3 and 4 only
 - d) 2 and 4 only
10. INSPIRE Award, recently seen in news is aligned with which of the following initiative?
- a) Swachha bhara mission
 - b) **Start up India Scheme**
 - c) ODF Status
 - d) Atal innovation mission