News Analysis (29 Aug, 2018)

drishtiias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/29-08-2018/print

Punjab Assembly Passes Bills to Curb Sacrilege

The Punjab Assembly unanimously passed a Bill which proposes life imprisonment for the desecration of Guru Granth Sahib, Gita, Quran and Bible in Punjab.

- The Indian Penal Code (Punjab Amendment) Bill, 2018, seeks to amend Indian Penal Code (IPC) by inserting Section 295AA.
- Under the existing Section 295A, punishment is for a maximum of three years imprisonment with or without fine.
- It also enhances the punishment under section 295 IPC (Injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class) from two to ten years of imprisonment.

Background

- In March, 2016, the then government had passed The Indian Penal Code (Punjab Amendment) Bill, 2016, and The Code of Criminal Procedure (Punjab Amendment) Bill, 2016, recommending life sentence for **desecration of Guru Granth Sahib only.**

- The Centre had returned the Bill saying all religions needed to be **treated equally** as per the secular nature of the Constitution and that it could not single out religion to propose life imprisonment for defiling Guru Granth Sahib.
- The Centre had asked the Punjab government to **either withdraw the Bill or include all religions** in the proposed amendment if it wanted the Bill to be looked at afresh.
- As a result, the Punjab Assembly withdrew the 2016 Bill, and passed the new Bill proposing life imprisonment for desecration of **religious scriptures of all the four religions**.

- The new Bill **retains all the earlier amendment** proposed in 2016 Bill.

Section 295(A) of Indian Penal Code

- It says that whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of [citizens of India], [by words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise], insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to [three years], or with fine, or with both.
- It seeks to preserve harmony in a multi-religious society by sanctioning penal action against those attempting to disturb the peace.
- In 1957, even a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court upheld its constitutionality.

Concerns

- However, IPC already has several other provisions to deal with those attempting to breach communal harmony, it may be wise to consider watering down or doing away with Section 295A altogether.
- Section 295, which has been the Indian version of anti-blasphemy law since its introduction during the colonial rule, continues even after blasphemy being abolished in the UK.
- It has chilling effect on freedom of speech and expression.
- Section 295A deters even honest attempts to fight against superstition and prejudices, the broad ambit of the offence had sometimes even put the government and courts in difficult situations.
- The wide ambit of Section 295A has not spared even pure artistic and literary expressions and has often startled even the votaries of the provision with unintended consequences. The biggest example of which is imposition of this section on MF Hussein's Paintings.

Way Forward

- These sections of the IPC are a big impediment to reasoned debate in India. Free speech, when exercised by individuals, challenges the orthodoxies of minds and empowers the progress of societies.
- Free speech is the engine of democracies. Article 19-1(a) of the Constitution guarantees a fundamental right that "all citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression." Moreover, the framers of the Constitution chose not to make blasphemy a restriction on free speech.
- Recently, India has witnessed a wave of violence in the name of religion. A challenging task, therefore, for opinion makers, legislators, social workers and writers is to curtail the role of religion in society.
- The proposed law seeks to do two things. One, it arms religious forces that seek to curb free speech in Indian society, enabling them to threaten and harass individuals in the name of so-called hurt religious sentiments.

- Two, it gives more muscle to the police and politicians to harass critics for political purposes, thereby undermining the secular morality of the Constitution.
- Holy scriptures of various religions need to be examined, critiqued and challenged so that the followers of those religions can move on a path of enlightenment, away from religion into the embrace of science and rational thinking.
- The recent announcement by the PM on Independence Day to send an Indian into space by 2022 is a bold step to inject among Indian minds an attitude to look forward.

Nutrition Deficiency due to Rising CO2

According to a study led by the Harvard Chan School of Public Health, high amounts of CO_2 in the atmosphere decrease the concentrations of vital vitamins and minerals such as protein, iron, and zinc in crops which can put millions of people at risk for nutritional deficiencies.

How CO_2 Affects Nutrients in Crops?

- The mineral nutrient and trace element makeup of a plant is referred to as its **ionome**.
- Many of these elements come from the soil but they also come from the process of photosynthesis that converts CO_2 into carbohydrates and energy.
- When there are higher levels of CO_2 in the atmosphere, the plant's ionome suffers an imbalance, thus reducing the concentration of vital nutrients.

Importance of Nutrients

- Protein, iron and zinc are essential nutrients.
- Essential nutrients are not produced in the body and must be derived from the diet.
- Wheat, rice, and maize together account for roughly 40% of protein, zinc and iron supply in the diet worldwide.
- We get roughly 60% of our protein, 80% of our iron and 70% of our zinc from crops.

Impact of Deficiency in Nutrients

- Protein deficiency adversely affects the human growth and development and causes **Kwashiorkor** which is a severe form of malnutrition.
- Zinc deficiency affects the immune system and makes children, particularly, more vulnerable to malaria, lung infections and deadly diarrhoeal diseases.
- A lack of iron increases the likelihood of mothers dying during childbirth, can lower IQ, and causes anaemia, or a drop in red blood cells.

Impact of CO$_2$ Induced Nutritional Deficiencies

- When carbon dioxide readings hit 550ppm, as they're expected to by 2050, about two percent of the global population - or 175 million people - could be zinc deficient.
- About 1.3 percent of the population - approximately 122 million people - could be protein deficient.
- Around 1.4 billion women who are of childbearing age and children under five years old are at risk of iron deficiency.
- Over 2 billion people worldwide are estimated to be deficient in one or more nutrients.
- Hundreds of millions of people could become newly deficient in these nutrients primarily in Africa, South East Asia, India and the Middle East.
- India would bear the greatest burden, with an estimated 50 million people becoming zinc deficient, 38 million people becoming protein deficient and 502 million women and children could be vulnerable to diseases associated with iron deficiency.

Conclusion

India is working on mitigating and adapting the climate change through its comprehensive Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) based on Paris Agreement and multipronged approaches to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Ban on e-cigarettes

The Union Health Ministry has instructed all the States to put a ban on sale of e-cigarettes and other Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) under their jurisdiction.

- Since health is a state subject, the Union ministry issued this instruction as an advisory.
- The move comes after the Delhi HC recently took strong exception to the Centre for delay in coming up with regulatory measures to tackle emerging threat of e-cigarettes in India.
- Following the advisory Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) including e-Cigarettes, Heat-Not-Burn devices, Vape, e-Shisha, e-Nicotine Flavoured Hookah, and the like devices that enable nicotine delivery (including online sale), manufacturing, distribution, trading , import and advertisement will be banned.
- Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala, Mizoram, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have already prohibited the use of e-cigarettes,Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS).

- Thirty countries including Australia, Singapore and Sri Lanka have already brought in such bans.

What are e-Cigarettes ?

- E-cigarettes are battery powered devices that work by heating a liquid into an aerosol that the user inhales and exhales.
- The e-cigarette liquid typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol, glycerin, flavorings, and other chemicals.

Concerns

- These products are not registered as nicotine replacement therapy products in India.
- E-cigarettes usually contain nicotine which makes product addictive.
- E-cigarettes cause health hazards for youth, young adults, and pregnant women.
- A number of metals, including lead, chromium, and nickel, and chemicals like formaldehyde have been found in aerosols of some ENDS, with concentrations equal to or greater than traditional cigarettes, work as 'tumor promoters'.
- Traditional cigarette manufacturing companies are having parallel e-cigarette like device making industries. This growing hub in India is under-regulated.
- Lack of knowledge about negative effects of nicotine and easy accessibility of these products make the youth prone to addiction.

CPCB Lists Cities With No Clean Up Plan

Of the 102 cities singled out by the Central Government for their alarming pollution levels, under National Clean Air Program, only 73 have submitted a plan of remedial action to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

Background

- Clean Air Campaign was launched in Delhi on February 10-23, 2018. Later, this Campaign was replicated in about 100 'non-attainment cities.'
- 'Non-attainment cities': The non-attainment cities are those that have fallen short of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for over five years. These 'non-attainment cities' were marked by CPCB and was asked to implement 42 measures aimed at mitigating air pollution as part of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

In order to deal with the issue of air pollution in a comprehensive manner at national level, the government came up with National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) with the goal to meet

average ambient air quality standards at all location in the country.

NCAP objectives

- To have effective and efficient ambient air quality monitoring network.
- Public participation in both planning and implementation of the programmes and policies of government on air pollution.
- To have a management plan for prevention, control, and abatement of air pollution.

Major Initiatives under NCAP

- Augmenting Air quality monitoring network
  - Manual monitoring Stations: 1000 manual monitoring stations will be set up in 303 cities from current 691 stations.
  - Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations: Recognizing the need to monitor real time and peak concentration levels of critical pollutants avoiding the time lag,
  - Rural Monitoring Network: Since rural areas have not been covered under National Air Quality Monitoring Programme (NAMP) 50 such stations are proposed to be set up in rural areas under NCAP.
  - Setting up of 10 city Super Network: This network may capture overall air quality dynamics of the nation impact of interventions, trends, investigative measurements, etc. It should generate high quality controlled data and will represent national air quality dynamics.
- Air Quality Forecasting System: AQFS is a state of the art modelling system which will forecasts the following day's air quality.
- Setting up Air Information Centre- An Air Information Center will be responsible for data analysis, interpretation, dissemination including through GIS platform.
- Three tier mechanism for review of monitoring, assessment and inspection for implementation: A three-tier system will include real time physical data collection and archiving and data analytics infrastructure, and action trigger system.
- National Emission Inventory: An emission inventory is an accounting of the amount of pollutants discharged into the atmosphere. An emission inventory will contains the total emissions for one or more specific air pollutants, originating from all source categories in a certain geographical area and within a specified time span.
- Technology Assessment Cell- TAC will evaluate the technologies having significance in reference to prevention, control and abatement of pollution.

- Other Initiatives
  - Review of ambient air quality standards and emission standards.
  - International Cooperation including sharing of International Best Practices on Air Pollution.
  - Intensive Awareness, Training and Capacity Building Drive.
  - Technology Support.
  - Issuance of Notification on Dust Management (Road dust and C&D).
  - Indoor Air Pollution Monitoring & Management.
  - Air Pollution Health Impact Studies.
  - Extensive Plantation Drive.
  - A network of Technical Institutions- Knowledge Partners.
  - Certification system for monitoring instruments.
  - Technology Assessment Cell.
  - Institutional Framework.
  - Air Quality Management Plan for 100 Non-Attainment Cities.

National Ambient Air Quality Standards

National Ambient Air Quality Standards are the standards for ambient air quality with reference to various identified pollutant notified by the Central Pollution Control Board under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

List of pollutants under NAAQS: PM10, PM2.5, SO2, NO2, CO, NH3, Ozone, Lead, Benzene, Benzo-Pyrene, Arsenic and Nickel.

Important Fact for Prelims (29 August 2018)

Navalekha Project

Google announced Navalekha Project at the fourth edition of the Google For India event which will help vernacular newspaper and magazine digitalize and go online really fast and with minimum resources.

Features

- This will be a new feature of Google Go(a tailor-made app for Google Search for India) which was launched last year. It will read web pages while highlighting the text word-by-word in real-time.
- This new feature is accessible in 28 languages including English, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, and Tamil, and will be available in all countries where Google Go has been launched.

- It uses artificial intelligence to detect and read the most important information on a webpage in a natural-sounding voice.
- AI also helps determine which parts of a page to read and which to leave out. It even works on 2G connections and does not consume much data.
- The other major announcement was the rebranding of Google's Tez payment app as Google Pay with deeper integration with online and offline retailers as well as access for instant loans via the Bhim UPI.

Russia Biggest War Games: Vostok 2018

- Russia in September will hold its largest war exercise since the fall of the Soviet Union.
- More than 300,000 troops will participate in war games.
- The Vostok-2018 exercise will take place across Far East Russia and Siberia.
- China and Mongolia will also participate in this exercise.

Lakhwar Multipurpose Project

- Union Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has signed MoU with Chief Ministers of 6 states for construction of Lakhwar Multipurpose project in Upper Yamuna Basin.
- Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi are the six Upper Yamuna Basin states.
- The Lakhwar project was initially approved in 1976 but work on the project was suspended in 1992.
- The Lakhwar project envisages construction of a 204 m high concrete dam across river Yamuna near Lohari village in Dehradun district of Uttarakhand.
- The problem of water shortage in all six States will be resolved once the project is complete as water flow in River Yamuna will improve in the dry season from December to May/June every year.
- The project is to be executed by Uttarakhand Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (UJVL).

Hastsal Minar

- Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has prepared a detailed project report of Hastsal Minar for its restoration. Hastsal Minar is situated in village Hastsal in New Delhi.
- It resembles the Qutub Minar in design and is also built with red sandstone and bricks.
- It is also known as 'Mini Qutub Minar' and it is believed to be built by Mughal emperor Shahjahan.
- It stands tall at 17 meters on a raised platform having three storeys, each with a reducing diameter.

- Each storey is surrounded by an octagonal ring with red sandstone chajjas, like the Qutub Minar.

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)

- It is a non-profit charitable organisation registered under the Societies' Registration Act, 1860.
- It was founded in 1984 in New Delhi with the vision to spearhead heritage awareness and conservation in India.
- It has pioneered the conservation and preservation of not just our natural and built heritage but intangible heritage as well.
- In 2007, the United Nations awarded INTACH a special consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Budhamal Festival

- It is a harvesting festival celebrated once in five years in the state of Assam.
- People from different communities take part in the festival for the well being of the society and also for a good harvest.

African Swine Fever Outbreak

- UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) is warning an outbreak of African Swine Fever from China to Southeast Asia or the Korean Peninsula.
- China has reported four outbreaks of the highly contagious disease in four provinces in less than a month.

African Swine Fever

- African Swine fever is a highly contagious acute hemorrhagic (means bleeding) disease of domestic pigs.
- This disease is transmitted by ticks.
- There is no antidote or vaccine, and the only known method to prevent the disease from spreading is a mass cull of the infected livestock.
- African swine fever poses no direct threat to humans.