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DAILY NEWS DIARY

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FOR PRELIMS AND MAINS

Warm Greetings.

- DnD aims to provide every day news analysis in sync with the UPSC pattern.
- It is targeted at UPSC – Prelims & Mains.
- Daily articles are provided in the form of Question and Answers
- To have a bank of mains questions.
- And interesting to read.
- Providing precise information that can be carried straight to the exam, rather than over dumping.

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ESSAY PAPER

Editorial

Q- In the fast expanding digital markets, stress upon the need for an umbrella law for platforms?

INTRODUCTION = One consequence of lockdowns imposed across the world to cope with Covid was the quickening pace of economic transactions shifting from physical to digital marketplaces. Eighteen months since the pandemic hit societies have irrevocably moved towards more engagements online. However, regulatory architecture hasn't kept pace. It has large gaps when it comes to dealing with digital markets. This isn't new. The regulatory architecture always lagged technological advances. But now we have reached a stage where the slow pace of regulatory retooling may have an adverse impact on the nature of digital markets.

Unique features of Digital markets:

Digital markets have a set of unique features that make the need for a new regulatory architecture essential. They offer hitherto unavailable economies of scale where following a high initial cost, incremental customers can be added at practically no cost. This makes for the so-called network effect: Increase in the number of participants concurrently enhances the value of a service. Also, the ability to accumulate huge amounts of data on users offers economies of scope inconceivable for a dominant firm in a traditional industry like steel or cement. To illustrate, Amazon started as an online bookstore less than three decades ago and is now among the world's top five firms by sales.

Impact on Digital Markets:

If unique features of digital markets allow for a remarkable pace of growth, they also confer a set of advantages to first movers that can potentially choke competition. In this context, the danger comes from large digital platforms that start off as mere intermediaries but later also compete against businesses using their platform. There's an inherent conflict of interest in simultaneously being player and referee. These platforms, or digital gatekeepers as they are referred to, have been the focus of standalone laws. It's an area where India's regulatory architecture is non-existent.

There's one key piece of the architecture that's in limbo. The Personal Data Protection Bill was introduced in Parliament in December 2019 and referred to a joint committee of both Houses. After 66 sittings, a report still hasn't come in. The inaction in regulatory space means that early-mover advantages accruing to some firms may weaken the competitive nature of the market. Ad hoc regulations covering platforms in standalone areas such as e-commerce may create new distortions.

Conclusion:

A sector-specific approach is a bad idea. What India needs is a comprehensive umbrella legislation to cover digital platforms. A delay could lead to irreversible distortions.

GS 2❖ **Governance****Q- Discuss the key NGOs under the Prior Reference Category list and the reasons behind it.**

BACKGROUND = Five years after it cancelled the registration of international non-governmental organisation (NGO) Greenpeace to receive foreign funds, the government has moved to restrict the funding for a group of 10 American, Australian and European NGOs dealing with environmental, climate change and child labour issues.

An internal Reserve Bank of India note, dated July 1, 2021, which was sent to all banks, said the government had specified a number of foreign entities to be placed on the “Prior Reference Category” (PRC list) using the stringent Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 2010, which was tightened in September 2020, making both banks and chartered accountants accountable for any unauthorised funds that come through.

The NGOs are:

- The European Climate Foundation
- The U.S.-based Omidyar Network International
- Humanity United and Stardust Foundation
- The Australia-based Walk Free Foundation and Minderoo Foundation
- The U.K.-based Children’s Investment Fund Foundation, Freedom Fund and Laudes Foundation
- The U.K./ UAE-based Legatum Fund.

They add to the more than 80 international voluntary agencies now on the PRC list of the government.

RBI Stance:

“The RBI has instructed that any fund flow from the (specified) donor agencies to any NGO/Voluntary organisation/ persons in India should be brought to the Ministry of Home Affairs so that the funds are allowed to be credited to the recipients only after clearance/ prior permission from the MHA’s Foreigners Division of the FCRA wing,” the notice sent out recently by a private bank to its branches, which The Hindu obtained a copy of, said. The RBI did not respond to a request for a comment, but officials confirmed informally that the note had been sent out, in line with previous such circulars sent to banks warning them of NGOs banned or suspended from acquiring or disbursing foreign funds.

Significantly all the NGOs on the latest list work on climate change and environmental projects and/or child rights and slavery projects, subjects where the government has been sensitive to international criticism.

Focus on coal:

When asked why so many environmental NGOs are on the list, given the government's stated international commitments on fighting climate change, an official said that despite India's record in complying with the Paris agreement, "global pressures are intensifying on India to raise the Nationally Determined Contributions".

"In order to create noise in the media, several pro-climate NGOs are focusing on advocacy against coal, which is considered a violation of FCRA provisions," the official added.

In 2017, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had also objected strongly to the International Labour Organisation's Global Slavery Index, "questioning the credibility of data" which had ranked India 53rd of 167 countries where "modern slavery" was prevalent, and as the country with highest number of people in forced labour, according to a reply in Parliament.

The index is part of the Australian Walk Free Foundation's annual survey that is used by other NGOs working in the field. Both the Walk Free Foundation, and its founding agency Minderoo Foundation did not respond to emails from The Hindu requesting a response.

Ministry of Home Affairs on PCR:

The MHA too declined to comment on the PCR listing, which is not made public, although the government has released numbers of NGOs under the scanner of security agencies.

According to the MHA responses in Parliament, between 2016 and 2020, the government cancelled the FCRA licences of more than 6,600 NGOs and suspended those of about 264.

A U.K.-based NGO Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) has now taken the government to court for suspending its FCRA licence, and won temporary relief in the Delhi High Court in allowing it to access 25% of its funds. A final order is expected in October.

Snippets

❖ International Relations

Q- Explain the role of drone technology in the battlefield with reference to Israel.

BACKGROUND = An Israeli defence contractor on Monday unveiled a remote-controlled armed robot it says can patrol battle zones, track infiltrators and open fire. The unmanned vehicle is the latest addition to the world of drone technology, which is rapidly reshaping the modern battlefield.

Proponents say such semi-autonomous machines allow armies to protect their soldiers, while critics fear this marks another dangerous step toward robots making life-or-death decisions.

The four-wheel-drive robot presented on Monday was developed by the state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries' "REX MKII."

Operation of armed robot:

It is operated by an electronic tablet and can be equipped with two machine guns, cameras and sensors, said Rani Avni, deputy head of the company's autonomous systems division. The robot

can gather intelligence for ground troops, carry injured soldiers and supplies in and out of battle, and strike nearby targets.

It is the most advanced of more than half a dozen unmanned vehicles developed by Aerospace Industries' subsidiary, ELTA Systems, over the past 15 years.

The Israeli military is currently using a smaller but similar vehicle, called the Jaguar, to patrol the border with the Gaza Strip.

GS 3

❖ Environment

Q- "The potency of climate to induce migration within countries". Comment.

BACKGROUND = Climate change could push more than 200 million people to leave their homes in the next three decades and create migration hot spots unless urgent action is taken to reduce global emissions and bridge the development gap, a World Bank report has found.

Groundswell Report:

The second part of the Groundswell report published on Monday examined how the impacts of slow-onset climate change, such as water scarcity, decreasing crop productivity and rising sea levels, could lead to millions of what it describes as "climate migrants" by 2050 under three different scenarios with varying degrees of climate action and development.

Under the most pessimistic scenario, with a high level of emissions and unequal development, the report forecasts up to 216 million people moving within their own countries across the six regions analysed. Those regions are Latin America; North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Eastern Europe and Central Asia; South Asia; and East Asia and the Pacific.

In the most climate-friendly scenario, with a low level of emissions and inclusive, sustainable development, the world could still see 44 million people being forced to leave their homes.

The findings "reaffirm the potency of climate to induce migration within countries," said Viviane Wei Chen Clement, a senior climate change specialist at the World Bank and one of the report's authors.

Most vulnerable region

In the worst-case scenario, Sub-Saharan Africa — the most vulnerable region due to desertification, fragile coastlines and the population's dependence on agriculture — would see the most migrants, with up to 86 million people moving within national borders.

North Africa, however, is predicted to have the largest proportion of climate migrants, with 19 million people moving, equivalent to roughly 9% of its population, due mainly to increased water scarcity in northeastern Tunisia, northwestern Algeria, western and southern Morocco, and the central Atlas foothills, the report said.

In South Asia, Bangladesh is particularly affected by flooding and crop failures, accounting for almost half of the predicted climate migrants, with 19.9 million people, including an increasing number of women, moving by 2050 under the pessimistic scenario.

Conclusion:

“This is our humanitarian reality right now and we are concerned this is going to be even worse, where vulnerability is more acute,” said Prof. Maarten van Aalst, director of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, who wasn’t involved with the report.

Many scientists say the world is no longer on track to the worst-case scenario for emissions. But even under a more moderate scenario, Mr. van Aalst said many impacts are occurring faster than expected, “including the extremes we are experiencing, as well as potential implications for migration and displacement.”

❖ Environment

Q- Discuss the effectiveness of the bio-decomposer technique to curb the stubble burning.

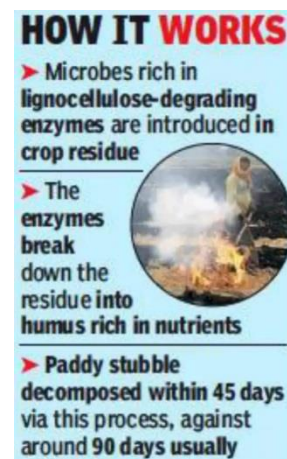
BACKGROUND = The bio-decomposer technique utilised by the Delhi government last winter had turned out to be highly effective in dealing with agricultural stubble, he said. Mr. Kejriwal claimed the farmers were “very happy” and the neighbouring States should also implement the technique with winter around the corner and the city’s air quality expected to deteriorate during the months of October and November.

Even as the Chief Minister announced he would meet Union Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav to seek his intervention regarding the same, the Delhi BJP accused Mr. Kejriwal of utilising the technique only to garner publicity at the cost of the taxpayers’ money.

“ From October 10 onwards, we will start witnessing rising pollution levels till the end of November. A big reason behind this is the smoke that is generated due to stubble burning in Delhi’s neighbouring States,” Mr. Kejriwal said during a digital briefing.

End blame game

“Till now, all the governments used to blame each other on this issue. State governments would accuse the Centre of not releasing funds, the Centre would claim that the States are doing nothing. But no one’s going to earn anything out of this blame game,” he said.



In October, Mr. Kejriwal explained, farmers harvest their paddy crop. When they cut the crop to harvest it, they leave a significant portion of the lower stem behind. This leftover part is called stubble or 'Paraali'.

Post the harvest season, a farmer barely has 20-25 days to sow the next crop of wheat. During this time, the farmers need to get rid of the stubble to clear their fields. The most convenient method to do this is to burn the stubble, he added.

"Till now, all the governments did was to target the farmers. They'd penalise the farmers burning stubble. But what did the governments actually do? The entire problem is a mistake of the governments," Mr. Kejriwal alleged.

The Delhi government, however, had found a solution to the problem in the Pusa Institute's bio-decomposer which was both cost-effective and had proven highly effective, Mr. Kejriwal said.

According to him, the government had sprayed the solution on 1,935 acres of land in 39 villages.

"The Delhi government approached the Commission for Air Quality Management with the solution. The Delhi government got WAPCOS — a PSU of the Jal Shakti Ministry of the Centre — to do an audit of our solution. WAPCOS conducted a full-fledged investigation. They surveyed 79 farmers in 15 villages spread across four districts," he said.

"After completing the process they have very clearly stated that farmers are extremely happy with the performance of the bio-decomposer. I reiterate, WAPCOS is a company of the Centre which has independently investigated the solution," he added.

Less time taken

According to findings of the WAPCOS audit, Mr. Kejriwal said, 90% of the farmers said that the stubble decomposed within 15-20 days, whereas it would previously take 40-50 days. The soil needed to be ploughed 6-7 times earlier, after using the spray the soil needs to be ploughed only once or twice.

The organic carbon, nitrogen, bacterial and fungal content in the soil increased after using the bio-decomposer and the stubble essentially ended up becoming a manure for the soil, he said.

"Just like how the farmers and the people of Delhi are happy with this solution, the same can happen in other States. All that the State governments have to do is to adopt the bio-decomposer method. All that the Centre needs to do is to mandate the States to use this solution," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"I appeal to the Centre to intervene and ask the States to implement it. This is how all of us will get freedom from pollution. I will meet with the Union Environment Minister with this report and urge him to take up the solution," he said.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Harish Khurana, citing an RTI response on the bio-decomposer technique, alleged corruption in the process which was undertaken last year.

"According to the RTI response, the cost of the decomposer solution was just ₹75,780 while ₹22,84,150 was spent on spraying it; only 310 farmers reaped the so-called benefits of the initiative on which crores were spent on publicity," Mr. Khurana alleged.

Snippets

❖ Economic Development

Q- Assess the ease of India's retail inflation.

BACKGROUND = India's retail inflation cooled to 5.3% in August from 5.6% in July, thanks to food price inflation falling to 3.11% from nearly 4% in July, and the effect of a high base last August.

This marks the second month of marginal moderation in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), keeping retail inflation below the central bank's upper tolerance threshold of 6% after hitting 6.3% in May and June this year. The Reserve Bank of India is expected to continue with its accommodative monetary policy stance, with the headline inflation number edging lower.

These could dampen the fervour for festive spending as inflation in health (7.8%), transport and communication (10.2%), fuel and light (almost 13%), remains high. They attributed the downward movement in inflation largely to the base effect — CPI inflation was at 6.7% in August 2020, with the Consumer Food Price Index rising 9.05%.

The pace of price rise in protein sources and oils remained a concern, even though overall food and beverages inflation stood at 3.8% this August. After moderating last month, oils and fats inflation zoomed to 33%, while inflation in eggs, meat and fish and pulses hit 16.3%, 9.2% and 8.8%, respectively, as per the National Statistical Office (NSO).

"On the whole, the comfort level from the lower CPI inflation is not commensurate with the level of decline. For the next two months, inflation will trend downwards as the base effect will provide this support," said CARE Ratings chief economist Madan Sabnavis, adding that the dip in food inflation was "more due to the fall in vegetable inflation which has moved to -11.7%".

"Inflation for clothing and footwear firmed up to 6.8% in August 2021, which may be a signal of a demand recovery," said ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar, estimating that core-CPI inflation eased to 5.5% in August 2021 from 5.7% in July.



Q- Which of the following are correctly matched?

Work	Author
1. Nil Darpan	Dinabandhu Mitra
2. Devi Chaudhurani	Prem Chand
3. Anandmath Bankim	Chandra Chatterjee

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a. 1 and 2 only b. 2 and 3 only
c. 1 and 3 only d. 1, 2 and 3



Q- Consider the following pairs of Institutions along with personalities who established them:

Institutions Established	by
1. Sanskrit College at Benares	Jonathan Duncan
2. Madarasa Aliya or Calcutta Madrasa	Warren Hastings
3. East India Association	Dadabhai Naoroji

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- a. 1, 2 and 3 b. 1 and 3 only
c. 2 only d. 2 and 3 only

Answer: A

Jonathan Duncan in 1788 was appointed superintendent and resident at Benares by Lord Cornwallis. In 1791 he started the Sanskrit College at Benares for the study of Hindu law and Philosophy. Hence, pair 1 is correctly matched. In 1781, Warren Hastings founded the Madarasa Aliya or Calcutta Madrasa to promote the study of Arabic, Persian and Islamic law. Hence, pair 2 is correctly matched. The East India Association was founded by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1866, in collaboration with Indians and retired British officials in London. Hence, pair 3 is correctly matched.

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