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Category: **POLITY**

1. [India cutting sorry figure with threats to artists, says Bombay HC](#)

In news:

- A democratic country like India is cutting a very sorry figure with open threats being given to artists and others and with attacks on people for voicing their opinions.
- The high court, while referring to the Sanjay Leela Bhansali's controversy-hit film "Padmavati", observed that the director has not been able to release his film and an actress is facing death threats.
- The court noted that this was censorship of a different kind and it was damaging India's image.
- **Justice Dharmadhikari observations:**
 - "In this country, we have come to a situation where people cannot voice their opinions. Everytime a person says he or she wants to voice their opinion, somebody or a fringe group says they would not allow it. This does not augur well for the state,"
 - "In which other country do you see threats given to artists and performers? It is distressing to know that a person makes a feature film and several people work tirelessly towards it, but is not able to release the film because of continued threats. What have we come to?"

2. [Ministers not under RTI, says HC](#)

In news:

- The Delhi High Court has set aside the **Central Information Commission** order declaring Ministers as "public authorities" and answerable under the **Right to Information law**.
- The High Court's order came on the Centre's appeal against the CIC order.

Background:

- **2014:** An application filed by a Maharashtra resident who wanted to know how to get an appointment with the Union Law Minister.
- In November 2014, the man moved an application before Additional Private Secretary, Ministry of Law and Justice, seeking to know the time period of the Minister or Minister of State meeting the public.
- As the information sought was not received, the matter reached the CIC. Here the Commission went on to frame the questions whether the Minister or his office was a "public authority" under the RTI Act.
- It gave the Cabinet Secretary at the Centre and Chief Secretaries in the States **two months** to appoint public information officers for each Minister's office.
- Also, the CIC said each Minister should get a website of his/her own where information can be disclosed.

3. [EVMs Versus Paper Ballots](#)

In news:

- Electronic voting machines (EVMs) were designed without any software in them, so that to tamper with them you had to replace the chip.
- We know that today it is possible to replace the chip if we have access to EVMs. And in a situation where the machines are kept in places where they are difficult to access, it may not be possible to tamper with all of them but it is possible to tamper with some of them by replacing the chip.
- Following election results, we invariably come across reports of malfunctioning EVMs. On the VVPAT (voter verifiable paper audit trail) front too, there are reports of malfunctioning. Also, as per the rules, paper ballots and VVPAT machines are not counted until the Returning Officer asks for it.

Global Experience with EVMs

- World over, countries are moving to paper ballots. Just as they are giving up on nuclear energy world over, countries realise that EVMs are problematic too, because they carry the risk of being tampered with. I feel the time has come for us to go back to the paper ballot.
- EVMs have been in place for two decades and it is time to acknowledge that they have failed. Some European countries have acknowledged that EVMs have failed. Countries there started with EVMs and are now going back to the paper ballot.

Problems of paper ballot

- Paper ballots are cumbersome. Transporting them and guarding them is a problem. And ballot boxes can be captured.
- If EVMs are manipulated, all the votes could be captured with a greater degree of sophistication to favor one party. Tampering with EVMs would make booth capturing much easier.
- Election Commission (EC) has said that the machines cannot be hacked into as they are designed in such a manner so as to make that impossible. But it is quite possible to replace the chips to get the desired verdict.

4. The Tenth Schedule and Role of Presiding Officers

In news:

- India's party-based parliamentary democracy requires MPs and MLAs to strike a fine balance between their roles as representatives of the people and of a political party.
- As members of the legislature are elected by votes sought in their own name and in the name of their party, the provisions of the Tenth Schedule should not be misused to stifle dissent, whether inside or outside the House.
- The anti-defection law works best as an insurance against violation of the people's mandate for a party, but it cannot be made a tool to stifle all dissent.

Recent Case

- The JD(U) order is the latest in a long list of contentious decisions on disqualification by presiding officers.
- Invariably, presiding officers take a politically partisan view, necessitating judicial intervention.
- The disqualification of dissident Janata Dal (United) leaders Sharad Yadav and Ali Anwar as members of the Rajya Sabha was done in needless haste.
- Even if it did not violate the letter of the anti-defection legislation, the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu, could have considered whether it militated against its spirit.
- Naidu took the view that all such cases should be disposed of within three months as any delay would be tantamount to subverting the anti-defection law.
- The decision under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution was sought to be justified on the basis of the argument that the two members voluntarily gave up the membership of their party when they attended political rallies organised by rival parties.
- Naidu went by the fact that the faction led by Mr. Yadav did not command a majority within the JD(U) legislature party in the Rajya Sabha.
- It is current political affiliation and not past electoral alliance that is relevant to the disqualification process.
- However, neither Mr. Yadav nor Mr. Anwar had disobeyed a whip or posed a danger to the stability of any government.
- Given this, the Rajya Sabha Chairman could have taken the assistance of the privileges committee before deciding the case.
- It is the fact that he did not exhaust all the procedural avenues before him that has left him open to charges that his ruling has a political hue.
- In many State Assemblies, such disqualification proceedings have had an impact on the very survival of the government, most recently in Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand.

5. A woman does not mortgage herself to a man with marriage: CJI

Context:

- The Supreme Court to decide: whether a Parsi woman can keep her religious identity intact after choosing to marry someone from another faith under the 1954 Act.

In news:

- **Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra's observation** : A woman does not mortgage herself to a man by marrying him and she retains her identity, including her religious identity, even after she exercises her right to marry outside her community under the Special Marriage Act.
- The Special Marriage Act of 1954 is seen as a statutory alternative for couples who choose to retain their identity in

- an inter-religious marriage.
- Nobody could presume that a woman has changed her faith or religion just because she chose to change her name after marrying outside her community

Case: A petition was filed by a Parsi, who was barred by her community from offering prayers to her dead in the Tower of Silence for the sole reason that she married a Hindu under the **Special Marriage Act**.

Key Point:

- A decision in favour of the woman would uphold the fundamental right to religion, dignity and life and create a paradigm shift for women within the minority community.

Disagrees with widespread notion

- The Bench, prima facie, disagreed with the widespread notion in common law that a woman's religious identity merges with that of her husband after marriage.

Defence lawyer argument:

- Arguing for the petitioner, senior advocate Indira Jaising submitted that every custom, usage, customary and statutory laws had to stand the test of the Fundamental Rights principle.
- Article 372** (continuance of existing laws) of the Constitution was subject to **Article 13**, which mandated that laws should not violate the fundamental rights of an individual.
- Jaising argued that the fundamental right enshrined in **Article 14** of the Constitution guaranteed equality before the law and the equal protection of the laws. It prohibited discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. "Anything arbitrary violates the rule of law."
- Denying a woman respect and the right to observe her religion merely because she married outside her faith was violative of her fundamental right to religion enshrined under Article 25 of the Constitution.
- Jaising argued that the "doctrine of coverture", which held that a woman lost her identity and legal right with marriage, was violative of her fundamental rights. **"The doctrine is not recognised by the Constitution"**

6. HC view on performance of judges will prevail: collegiums

Context:

- The apex court collegium's recommendation of five names to the Centre for the appointment as judges in the Karnataka High Court records the objections raised by the Chief Minister and Governor of the State.
- Both are consulted in the process of judicial appointments to High Courts.

In news:

- The Supreme Court Collegium made it clear that an objective assessment made at the High Court and Supreme Court levels about the performance or merit of candidates being considered for judicial appointment in High Courts overcomes any disagreement by the Chief Minister or Governor concerned.

Present case:

- The Karnataka High Court Collegium had forwarded a list of 10 names.
- Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra and Justices J. Chelameswar and Ranjan Gogoi who sat in the Collegium refer to the Karnataka Chief Minister objecting to the list, as several bodies of advocates had expressed concern that the "names recommended do not provide opportunity of representation to cross-sections of the society."
- The Governor too had raised doubts about the efficiency of some candidates.
- The apex court Collegium differed. It notes that the minutes of the High Court Collegium meetings show that it had indeed taken into account the "merit, experience, performance, character and conduct of the recommendees".
- The Supreme Court Collegium concluded that there was no need for any further examination. Addressing the Governor's apprehensions, it recorded that the assessment of the persons recommended was done objectively by the judiciary at the High Court and the Supreme Court levels.

Category: INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS/BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. UNESCO names Kumbh Mela Intangible Cultural Heritage

In news:

- After "yoga" and "Nouroz", Kumbh Mela/ KumbhMela, the largest congregation of pilgrims on the planet, has been listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage under UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation)
- The inscription of "Kumbh Mela" in the list was undertaken following recommendation by an expert body which examines nominations submitted by member countries of the UNESCO
- The Kumbh Mela is held in Haridwar, Allahabad, Ujjain and Nashik

Basic Information:

What's an intangible heritage?

As defined by UNESCO, cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants.

As per UNESCO, Intangible cultural heritage is:

- Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time
- Inclusive “ contributes to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity
- Representative “ skills and customs passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation
- Community-based

2. [Trump’s announcement on Jerusalem](#)

In news

- U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, despite warnings at home and abroad, will worsen the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- Even though there is a Congressional resolution in the U.S. urging Washington to relocate its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, previous American Presidents avoided doing so given the legal, ethical and political implications of the issue, besides their commitment to a negotiated two-state settlement.

Background

- Jerusalem, which houses holy places of all three Abrahamic religions and is claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians, is at the very heart of the dispute.
- Israel occupied West Jerusalem in the 1948 war, soon after the proclamation of a separate state. Israel built its seat of power in West Jerusalem decades ago and occupied the East during the 1967 war, and later annexed it.
- Following its conquest of the eastern part from Jordan in the Six-Day War of 1967, the entire city has been under Israeli control.
- Palestinians insist that East Jerusalem should be the capital of their future state. Since the 1993 Oslo peace accord, the Palestinian Authority has pinned its hopes on negotiating a restoration of control of East Jerusalem, which it regards as its future capital.
- The UN’s 1947 plan for the partition of Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews provided for the international governance of Jerusalem in view of the city’s centuries-old religious and cultural sensitivities.
- It could be viewed as illegal as the Israeli claim that Jerusalem “complete and united” is its capital has been declared “null and void” by UN Security Council Resolution 478, which also asks member-countries to “withdraw diplomatic missions from the Holy City”. The U.S. is now acting against the spirit of this resolution.

Impact of the announcement

- S. President Donald Trump’s decision to recognize the disputed city of Jerusalem “revered by the Jews, Muslims and Christians” as the capital of Israel is a potentially provocative move.
- By recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, the U.S. has endangered the peace process And in doing so, he has undermined the U.S.’s position as a neutral broker in Israeli-Palestinian talks. In short, he has dealt a blow to the peace process.
- To the extent that it makes a general reference to the historic city of Jerusalem, it leaves open the question whether the part alluded to is the east or the west of the city.
- A central aspect of the prevailing dispute between the Palestinian Authority and Israel revolves around the recent division of Jerusalem.
- By breaking with this consensus, Mr. Trump has in effect endorsed the Israeli claims to East Jerusalem.
- Trump’s move raises vital questions about U.S. diplomacy in the region besides putting new roadblocks in the peace process.
- The Jerusalem gambit risks triggering another cycle of protests and repression in the Occupied Territories.
- In 2000, Ariel Sharon’s visit to the al-Aqsa compound in the Old City sparked the second intifada.
- Palestinians are expressing similar distress today. The peace process is not going anywhere, while Israel has gradually been tightening its occupation and building new settlements.
- Hamas has already called for a third intifada. In the longer term, Mr. Trump has just made the two-state solution more complicated.

Resolution of Israel-Palestine Conflict

- The Israeli-Palestine conflict can be settled only after an agreement is reached on the status of Jerusalem.
- The city was not part of Israel in the original 1947 UN plan to partition Palestine. Jerusalem, which was supposed to be ruled by an international trusteeship, was conquered by Israel.
- This is why the UN has not recognized it as Israel’s capital. With his latest announcement, Mr. Trump has endorsed the occupation.

US and Palestine

- Even if President Trump’s pronouncement does not quite amount to prejudging the outcome of the stalled West Asia peace process, it has renewed long-standing anxieties over its shape and direction.
- Washington has been hostile to the growing international support for the Palestine cause.
- It opposed Palestine’s elevation as a non-member observer at the UN in 2012, as well as its admission to the UNESCO.
- Similarly, the more recent U.S. decision to withdraw from the Paris-based institution was in response to the growing protection accorded to Palestinian heritage sites, which it viewed as an anti-Israel stance. Mr. Trump’s moves would be watched even more closely

Category: ECONOMY

1. [World awaits “fair winds” as Buenos Aires hosts trade talks](#)

Context:

- World Trade Organisation's (WTO) highest decision-making body meeting in Buenos Aires.
- The agenda for the multilateral trade negotiations would also include discussions on ways to advance e-commerce, investment facilitation and measures to help small firms participate effectively in the global marketplace.

In news:

- India is set to retain food security right and the protection of poor farmers and fisherfolk as top priorities at the upcoming meeting of the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) highest decision-making body in Buenos Aires.
- The city's Spanish name translates as "fair winds" a meaning fitting well in this context, considering that WTO rules are meant to "establish what is fair" in global trade and "discourage unfair" practices.

TFS proposal:

- India is keen to push forward its proposal on a **Trade Facilitation in Services (TFS)** Agreement.
- The TFS proposal aims to ensure relaxation of norms for movement of skilled workers and professionals across borders for short-term work.

Key Points:

- For India, a "permanent solution" to the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes is key.
- India is among the many countries which feel that the current WTO norms on public stockholding are very restrictive and prevent governments from meeting their people's food security needs.
- Another outstanding agricultural issue India wants to see resolved is a **Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM)** for developing countries.
- The SSM would permit developing nations like India to temporarily raise tariffs to counter import surges or price declines of farm items, and thereby protect their farmers.

On the negotiations to limit harmful fisheries subsidies, India is batting for continuation of subsidies to small and subsistence fisherfolk.

Focus on four areas with respect to e-commerce:

- The future of the Work Programme (covering issues related to trade arising from global e-commerce)
- The moratorium (practice of agreeing at every Ministerial Conference to not impose customs duties on electronic transmissions, until the next Ministerial Conference), Possible negotiations on e-commerce, and
- The setting up of a working group or other institutional structure.

Category: AGRICULTURE

1. [Indian Navy and Dedicated Rescue Vessel](#)

- Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Lanba detailed an ambitious acquisition plan for the Indian Navy that includes six diesel electric Scorpene-class submarines; three SSBNs (nuclear-propelled submarines equipped with a nuclear-tipped ballistic missile) to follow INS Arihant; and six SSNs (nuclear-propelled submarines) used in an attack role.
- When all these boats are operationally inducted, India will have a very credible underwater capability with a judicious mix of conventional and nuclear-propelled submarines.
- India acquired its first submarine, the INS Kalvari in 1967, six years after the Navy acquired its first aircraft carrier in 1961.
- In the intervening decades, the nation and its Navy have graduated to designing and indigenously building SSBNs à la the INS Arihant.
- Concurrently, the Navy is also invested in building conventional boats in India through partnership programmes with foreign suppliers.
- For the record, India is the first country in the world to move straight to designing and building an SSBN, without moving up the scale from conventional boats and then SSNs.
- This level of professional accomplishment in the underwater domain has been realized against many odds and much of this has been possible due to the dedication and rigorous professionalism of the human resource that lies at the core of the submarine arm, from its formative years to where it is now poised.
- Thus it is appropriate that the President's Colors will be presented to the dolphin arm in Visakhapatnam.

Why a Dedicated Rescue Vessel?

- Submariners the world over are aware that they have chosen what may be the most hazardous and high-risk military specialization and have internalized the "iron-coffin" syndrome.
- This is the unstated anxiety of the stoic submarine captain every time a boat dives that if it is unable to surface, the closure is the iron-coffin at the bottom of the sea.
- To prepare for such an exigency, every submarine-operating navy also invests in a deep submergence rescue vessel (DSRV) or has access to the same with navies that have such a capability.
- Accidents and tragic incidents do occur and the Navy's submarine arm has the ignominy of losing a boat in harbour.
- The most recent accident is that of the Argentine Navy's submarine, the San Juan, first reported "missing" on November 15 and now deemed to have been lost with 44 crew members on board, including a lady officer.
- Sadly, the Argentine Navy did not have a dedicated DSRV and there is considerable speculation if this tragic loss of lives could have been averted had there not been such an inventory void.
- It merits notice that the Indian Navy does not have a dedicated DSRV even as it enters its 51st year and this void will be filled only later in 2018.
- The long-delayed DSRV acquisition symbolises much of the systemic ineptitude that characterises the Indian military

machine and its many inadequacies.

Causes for the delay in acquisition of Dedicated Rescue Vehicle

- Without sounding like the bad fairy at the party, the inability of the Indian higher defence management ecosystem (from the Cabinet Committee on Security downwards) has resulted in denying the Navy's submarine arm a critical rescue capability for decades and had a worst-case exigency ever occurred, the price paid would have been very high.
- This complacency in decision-making and fecklessness in critical policy formulation have adversely impacted the growth of the Indian military profile in many ways.
- The submarine trajectory is illustrative. Indigenous submarine-building capability got off to an encouraging start in the mid 1980s with the West Germany yard, HDW.
- Two boats were acquired from abroad and two were to be built at Mazagon Dock, Mumbai, as the foundation for an indigenous submarine programme.
- However, allegations of financial impropriety in the HDW deal led to then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi peremptorily cancelling the whole programme " and the indigenous submarine programme was set back by three decades.
- Insulating core national security interests from the vagaries of mercurial political/electoral compulsions is a matter that warrants the most serious and urgent deliberation by legislators.

Nothing here for Today!!!

Nothing here for Today!!!

F. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

G. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS Paper I

- What characteristics can be assigned to monsoon climate that succeeds in feeding more than 50 percent of the world population residing in Monsoon Asia?

GS Paper II