

Current Affairs - 22 February 2025

WEAPONIZATION OF THE SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT

Context:

- The article highlights how a legal provision meant to facilitate interfaith and inter-caste marriages - **the Special Marriage Act, 1954 (SMA)** - is often **misused** to harass and intimidate couples, **particularly in cases involving religious differences**.
- It discusses **a case from Bhopal** where an interfaith couple faced violence for attempting to register their marriage.

Case of Bhopal - When Law Becomes a Tool of Harassment:

- A Hindu-Muslim couple in Bhopal **sought to marry under the SMA**, which **requires a 30-day public notice before solemnizing the marriage**.
- Their information was leaked, leading to **a violent mob attacking them at the court**.
- The provision designed to ensure transparency instead **exposed them to social and communal backlash**.

Key Issues with the Special Marriage Act (SMA), 1954:

- **Purpose vs. reality:**
 - The SMA was enacted to **provide a secular legal framework for marriage**.
 - The law **allows interfaith and inter-caste marriages** outside religious personal laws, intending to **protect individual autonomy and choice**.
 - However, **the 30-day public notice requirement often leads to societal interference**, jeopardizing the safety of couples.
- **Violation of privacy:**
 - The Supreme Court's judgment in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)** reaffirmed the **Right to Privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21** (Right to life and personal liberty).
 - The public notice provision **violates individual autonomy**, making personal decisions about marriage vulnerable to public scrutiny and opposition.



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- **Social and religious backlash:** The leakage of private information from marriage registrars' offices allows vigilante groups, **moral policing**, and religious extremists to harass couples.
- **Misuse of the no-objection clause:**
 - The law allows **anyone** to object to the marriage on arbitrary grounds.
 - Objections often stem from **personal vendettas**, communal motives, or familial coercion rather than legitimate legal concerns.

Need for Reform:

- The public notice requirement should be **re-examined or removed** to prevent privacy violations.
- The SMA should be **aligned with constitutional values** of individual liberty and freedom of choice.
- **Ensure privacy protections in marriage registration**, in line with the Right to Privacy judgment.
- The law should **ensure protection** rather than expose couples to threats.
- **Strict action** against harassment is needed to protect couples from societal backlash.

Conclusion:

- The Special Marriage Act, intended as a progressive law, has become an instrument of persecution for interfaith and inter-caste couples.
 - Urgent legal reforms (for example, **Section 7 of the SMA**, which invites objections to marriages) are needed to prevent misuse and uphold the constitutional values of **secularism, equality, and personal liberty**.
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QUALITY OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURE INDEX

- Government expenditure plays a **critical role** in shaping economic growth, infrastructure, and public welfare.

In India, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has developed a **Quality of Public Expenditure (QPE) Index** to analyse how efficiently both the Centre and states utilize public funds.

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- The latest **RBI report** suggests that **India's quality of public expenditure is at its highest level** since economic liberalization in **1991**.
- This improvement is attributed to **higher capital spending, fiscal discipline, and better allocation of resources**.

About Quality of Public Expenditure (QPE) Index:

- The Quality of Public Expenditure Index is a framework created by the RBI to measure how effectively government funds are spent.
- Instead of just looking at the total expenditure, the index evaluates the **composition of spending** and its **impact on long-term economic growth**.
- **Key Indicators of the QPE Index:**
 - **Capital Outlay to GDP Ratio** – Measures the proportion of government spending on infrastructure and development projects relative to GDP. A **higher ratio** indicates better quality expenditure.
 - **Revenue Expenditure to Capital Outlay Ratio** – Assesses the balance between day-to-day operational expenses and long-term investment. A **lower ratio** is preferred, as excessive revenue expenditure weakens fiscal sustainability.
 - **Development Expenditure to GDP Ratio** – Tracks public spending in **healthcare, education, research, infrastructure, and social welfare**. Higher investment in these sectors improves human capital and economic productivity.
 - **Development Expenditure as a Percentage of Total Expenditure** – Evaluates the share of **productive investments** in overall government spending. The **higher the proportion**, the better.
 - **Interest Payments to Total Government Expenditure Ratio** – Reflects the burden of government debt. A **lower percentage** indicates better fiscal management and reduced reliance on borrowed funds.

Challenges to Maintaining High-Quality Public Expenditure:

- Despite these improvements, some challenges remain:

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- **Crisis-Driven Fiscal Stimulus** – Events like the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and COVID-19 lockdowns forced the government to increase spending beyond fiscal limits, impacting expenditure quality.
- **Political Pressures for Loan Waivers and Freebies** – Increasing populist measures like loan waivers, direct cash transfers, and free electricity schemes put pressure on government finances.
- **Balancing Revenue and Capital Expenditure** – While capital investment has grown, revenue expenditure on salaries, subsidies, and interest payments remains high, reducing fiscal flexibility.

TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION FUND



Recently, the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe) has launched a new fund called Technology Adoption Fund.

- It consists of a corpus of Rs 500 crore to support the growth of India's space startups.
- This fund aims to accelerate the **development of indigenous space technology**, reducing reliance on imported solutions.
- **Key features of Technology Adoption Fund:**
 - The fund will offer financial support of **up to 60 per cent of the project cost** for startups and MSMEs, and **40 per cent for larger industries**, with a maximum funding cap of **Rs 25 Crores per project**.
 - It is also open to all **eligible Non-Government Entities (NGEs)/companies** that are ready to demonstrate the commercial potential of their innovations.
 - It will also provide partial funding to NGEs. In addition to financial support, the initiative will **provide technical guidance and mentoring opportunities**, which will help companies navigate challenges during the product development phase.



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- The fund will also support the **transition of early-stage space technologies** developed by Indian companies into commercially viable products.
- It is designed to enable “innovators to bridge the gap between early-stage development and commercialisation”.
- This support will enable companies to refine their technologies, enhance production processes, and meet market demands both within India and abroad.
- The fund will help promote advanced space technologies and **contribute to job creation along with economic growth.**
- With TAF, IN-SPACE aims to support a **wide range of outcomes** — from the development of new space products to the **creation of intellectual property** that can drive future research and development.
- It will invest in domestic research and development and strengthen collaboration between government agencies and the private sector, positioning India as a key global player in the space industry.



ELECTRONIC PERSONNEL LICENSE

Recently, the Union Civil Aviation Minister launched **Electronic Personnel License (EPL) for pilots.**

- It is a **digital version of a personnel license** that will replace traditional physical licenses for pilots.
- It will be securely accessible via **the eGCA Mobile Application**, ensuring a seamless and transparent process in alignment with the Government of India’s “Ease of Doing Business” and “Digital India” initiatives.
- The introduction of EPL follows **International Civil Aviation Organization’s (ICAO) Amendment 178 to Annex 1 – Personnel Licensing**, which encourages Member States to adopt electronic licenses for improved security and efficiency.

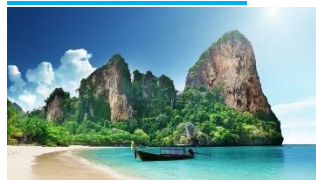
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- With this advancement, **India becomes the second country** globally to implement this advanced system, following approval from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).
- It is implemented by the **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)**.

International Civil Aviation Organization:

- It is an intergovernmental specialized agency **associated with the United Nations (UN)**.
- It was established in 1947 by the Convention on International Civil Aviation (1944) known as Chicago Convention.
- **Functions:**
 - It is dedicated to **developing safe and efficient international air transport** for peaceful purposes and ensuring a reasonable opportunity for every state to operate international airlines.
 - It sets standards and regulations necessary for **aviation safety**, security and facilitation, efficiency, and economic development of air transport as well as to improve the environmental performance of aviation.
 - It also serves as a clearinghouse for cooperation and discussion on civil aviation issues among its member states.
 - It also promotes regional and international agreements aimed at liberalizing aviation markets.
- **Headquarters:** Montreal, Canada

ANDAMAN SEA



An earthquake of magnitude 5.2 struck the Andaman Sea recently.

- It is a semi-enclosed **marginal sea** in the northeastern **Indian Ocean**.
- It lies **between the eastern coast of India and the Malay Peninsula**, with Myanmar to the north and the Indonesian island of Sumatra to the south.



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- The Bay of Bengal bounds the Andaman Sea to the west and the Strait of Malacca to the east.
- It is a complex geological region with a **tectonically active plate boundary**.
- It is **part of the larger Sunda Plate**, which the Indian Plate borders to the northwest and the Australian Plate to the southeast.
- The ongoing tectonic convergence between these plates has resulted in the formation of the **Andaman Basin**, characterized by undersea ridges, trenches, and faults.
- The most prominent geological feature in the region is the **Andaman Trench**, which is **formed by the subduction of the Indian Plate beneath the Eurasian Plate**.
 - This tectonic activity has **given rise to numerous earthquakes and volcanic eruptions** in the region, making the Andaman Sea **seismically active**.
- It is home to **extensive coral reef systems, sea grass meadows and mangrove forests**, which provide critical habitats for a multitude of marine organisms.
- The Andaman Sea is also an important site for **migratory birds**, with several key stopover locations along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

IRON DOME



Recently, the US President signed an Executive Order to build an Iron Dome-style missile defence system to shield the United States against the “threat of attack by ballistic, hypersonic, and cruise missiles, and other advanced aerial attacks.”

- It is Israel’s **air missile defense system** that can defend against short-range rockets, intercepting them in the air above the state.
- It is a **short-range mobile air defense system** developed for Israel by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries, with additional support from Raytheon.
- First deployed in 2011, it constitutes the innermost layer of the tiered Israeli air defense network.



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- It has **all-weather capabilities** and is able to function night or day and in all conditions, including fog, rain, dust storms, and low clouds.
- It is able to launch a variety of interceptor missiles.
- It is designed to shoot down missiles with a **range of about 40 miles or less**.
- It also has the **ability to be moved, either onto ships or across land**, to better suit defense needs.
- It must be reloaded to continuously intercept incoming missiles.
- The Iron Dome operates through three main components:
 - a radar that detects incoming rockets,
 - a command-and-control system that determines the threat level,
 - an interceptor that seeks to destroy the incoming rocket before it strikes.

KUNO NATIONAL PARK



Five cheetahs were released into the wild in Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur district recently.

- It is located in the Morena and Sheopur districts in **Madhya Pradesh**.
- It is nestled near the **Vindhyan Hills**.
- It covers an area of 750 sq.km.
- It derives its name from the meandering **Kuno River** (one of the **tributaries of the Chambal River**) that graces the region.
- Initially established as a wildlife sanctuary, it was in 2018 that the government changed its status into a national park.
- It was **selected under 'Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India'**.
- **Vegetation:** Kuno is primarily a **grassland region**, though a few rocky outcrops are found here too.
- **Flora:**



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- **Kardhai, Salai and Khair trees dominate** the forested area of Kuno National Park, which is mostly mixed forest.
 - The park has a total of 123 tree species, 71 shrub species, 32 exotic and climbing species, and 34 bamboo and grass species.
 - **Fauna:** The protected area of the forest is home to the **jungle cat, Indian leopard, sloth bear, Indian wolf, striped hyena**, golden jackal, Bengal fox, and dhole, along with more than 120 bird species.
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BRINE POOLS



Scientists recently discovered a deadly secret lurking beneath the Red Sea, brine pools so extreme that they instantly kill or stun any marine life that enters.

- Brine pools are the lakes of **hypersaline, anoxic (oxygen-lacking) water** that form on the seafloor.
 - They are often referred to as “**underwater lakes**” or “**brine lakes**” because they appear as **distinct pools, separate from the surrounding seawater** due to their high salinity and density.
 - The water in the brine pool is filtered through **salt sediments**.
 - The deepest-known brine pool lies in the **Orca Basin in the Gulf of Mexico**, some 2,200 m below sea level.
 - This depression is filled with water that has a salt content of around 300 g/litre, around eight times saltier than the Gulf itself.
 - The salinity of these pools is so great that they are **toxic to most sea life**, but certain **highly adapted chemosynthetic organisms have found ways to survive** and even thrive on the shores of these undersea lakes.
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