DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 13-08-2024

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Proposed Changes to Waqf Law

Syllabus: GS-2: Laws and Policies governing religious properties.

Context:

- *The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, was referred to a* **Joint Committee of Parliament** *on Thursday.*
- *The Bill, tabled by* **Union Minister of Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju**, *faced strong opposition for being termed* **"unconstitutional," "anti-minority," and "divisive**."

Waqf Property: Definition and Governance

- **What is a Waqf Property?**
    - *A Waqf is personal property given by Muslims for specific purposes: religious, charitable, or private.*
    - *Ownership of the property is considered to be with God, even though the beneficiaries may vary.*
    - *Waqf can be established through a deed, orally, or by long-term use for religious or charitable purposes.*
    - *Once declared as Waqf, the property's character is irrevocable.*
- **Governance of Waqf Properties:**
    - *Governed by the Waqf Act, 1995, which replaced earlier acts like the Muslim Waqf Validating Act (1913) and the Mussalman Wakf Act (1923).*
    - *The Waqf Act, 1995, was amended in 2013 to include penalties for encroachment and to restrict the transfer of Waqf properties.*
    - *Waqf properties are managed by a* **Mutawalli** *(caretaker) under the supervision of Waqf Boards and regulated by Waqf Tribunals.*
    - *The law provides for the appointment of a Survey Commissioner to maintain records of Waqf properties.*

Waqf Boards and Their Functions

- **Waqf Boards:**
    - *Waqf Boards operate under state governments and act as custodians of Waqf properties.*
    - *Separate Waqf Boards exist for Shia and Sunni communities in many states.*

- *A Waqf Board is headed by a chairperson and includes state government nominees, Muslim legislators, and scholars of Islamic theology.*

- **Powers of Waqf Boards:**
  - *Administer Waqf properties and recover lost properties.*
  - *Sanction the transfer of immovable Waqf properties with a two-thirds majority vote of the Board members.*

Proposed Amendments in the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024

- **Key Changes:**
  - **Renaming of the Parent Act:**
    - *The Waqf Act, 1995, is proposed to be renamed as the "Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development Act, 1995."*
  - **Introduction of New Provisions:**
    - **Section 3A:** *Prohibits the creation of a Waqf unless the person is the lawful owner and competent to transfer or dedicate the property.*
    - **Section 3C(1):** *Government property, whether identified as Waqf property before or after the Act's commencement, shall not be deemed Waqf property.*
    - **Section 3C(2):** *Empowers the government to determine if a property given as Waqf is government land, with the decision made by the Collector and not the Waqf Tribunal.*
  - **Central Government's Audit Powers:**
    - *The central government can direct an audit of any Waqf property by an auditor appointed by the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India or another designated officer.*

- **Redefinition of Waqf Property Possession:**
  - *The Bill seeks to remove the concept of "Waqf by use," which allowed properties to be deemed Waqf based on continuous use for religious purposes.*
  - *This change implies that without a valid Waqfnama, the Waqf status of certain properties, like mosques or graveyards, could be questioned.*

Significance of the Proposed Changes

- **Shift in Power:**
    - *The proposed amendments shift the control of Waqf properties from community-run Boards and Tribunals to the state government.*
- **Presumption of Incorrect Waqf Property Declarations:**
    - *The Bill implies that some government land may have been incorrectly deemed as Waqf property and requires government intervention.*
- **Impact on Religious Properties:**
    - *By omitting "Waqf by user," properties previously considered Waqf due to religious use could lose their status, leading to potential disputes.*

Conclusion

- *The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, proposes significant changes to the governance and regulation of Waqf properties, shifting authority from community-based organizations to the state government and raising concerns about the protection of minority rights and religious properties.*

Clean Plant Programme

Syllabus: GS-2; Government policies and Interventions

Context:

- *The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister, approved the* **Clean Plant Programme (CPP)** *proposed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.*

More about the scheme:

- **Investment***: A significant investment of Rs. 1,765.67 crore is allocated to the CPP.*
- **Objective***: To revolutionize the horticulture sector in India by enhancing the quality and productivity of fruit crops.*
- **Announcement***: The programme was announced in the Budget Speech by the Finance Minister in February 2023.*

Key Benefits of the Clean Plant Programme (CPP)

- **Farmers***:*
  - *Access to virus-free, high-quality planting material.*
  - *Increased crop yields and improved income opportunities.*
- **Nurseries***:*
  - *Streamlined certification processes.*
  - *Infrastructure support for efficient propagation of clean planting material.*
  - *Fostering growth and sustainability in the nursery sector.*
- **Consumers***:*
  - *Superior, virus-free produce.*
  - *Enhanced taste, appearance, and nutritional value of fruits.*
- **Exports***:*
  - *Higher-quality, disease-free fruits strengthen India's position as a leading global exporter.*
  - *Expanding market opportunities and increasing India's share in international fruit trade.*
- **Inclusivity***:*
  - *Affordable access to clean plant material for all farmers, regardless of landholding size or socioeconomic status.*
  - *Active engagement of women farmers in planning and implementation, ensuring access to resources, training, and decision-making opportunities.*
- **Agro-Climatic Adaptation***:*
  - *Development of region-specific clean plant varieties and technologies to address diverse agro-climatic conditions across India.*

Core Components of the Clean Plant Programme (CPP)

- **Clean Plant Centers (CPCs)***:*
  - *Establishment of nine world-class state-of-the-art CPCs across India.*
  - *Equipped with advanced diagnostic therapeutics and tissue culture labs.*
  - *Locations include:*

- *Grapes: NRC, Pune.*
- *Temperate Fruits (Apple, Almond, Walnuts, etc.): CITH, Srinagar &Mukteshwar.*
- *Citrus Fruits: CCRI, Nagpur & CIAH, Bikaner.*
- *Mango/Guava/Avocado: IIHR, Bengaluru.*
- *Mango/Guava/Litchi: CISH, Lucknow.*
- *Pomegranate: NRC, Sholapur.*
- *Tropical/Sub-Tropical Fruits in Eastern India.*

  - *These centers will produce and maintain virus-free planting material for larger propagation.*

- **Certification and Legal Framework***:*
  - *Implementation of a robust certification system.*
  - *Supported by a regulatory framework under the Seeds Act 1966.*
  - *Ensures thorough accountability and traceability in planting material production and sale.*
- **Enhanced Infrastructure***:*
  - *Support for large-scale nurseries in developing infrastructure.*
  - *Facilitates the efficient multiplication of clean planting material.*

Alignment with National and Global Initiatives

- **Mission LiFE and One Health Initiatives***:*
  - *Promotes sustainable and eco-friendly agricultural practices.*
  - *Reduces dependence on imported planting materials.*
- **Implementation***:*
  - *The programme will be implemented by the National Horticulture Board in association with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).*

Conclusion

- *The Clean Plant Programme is poised to significantly boost India's horticultural sector.*
- *It is a critical step toward establishing India as a leading global exporter of fruits and driving transformative change across the sector.*

Fruit Rot Disease

Syllabus: GS-3; Agriculture

Context

- *The Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI), Kasaragod, has issued an advisory to farmers to control* **'kole roga' (***fruit rot disease) in* **arecanut plantations.**

About

- *Fruit Rot Disease is a significant* **phytopathological issue** *affecting a wide range of fruit crops globally.*
- *This disease is primarily caused by* **fungal pathogens**, *but bacteria and viruses can also be culprits.*
- *It leads to substantial losses in fruit yield and quality, impacting both agricultural income and food security.*

Causes and Pathogens

- **Fungal Pathogens**: *The primary agents of Fruit Rot Disease are fungi, including species of Phytophthora, Colletotrichum, Botrytis, and Rhizopus.*
  These pathogens thrive in warm, humid conditions, which favor their rapid spread and infection of fruit crops.
- **Bacterial Pathogens:** *Certain bacteria, such as Erwinia and Pseudomonas, can also cause fruit rot, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions.*
- **Viral Pathogens:** *Though less common, viruses can contribute to fruit rot by weakening the plant's defenses, making it more susceptible to secondary infections.*

Symptoms

- **Initial Signs**: *The disease typically begins with small, water-soaked spots on the fruit surface, which gradually expand.*
- **Progression**: *The spots may turn brown or black as the rot progresses, often accompanied by a foul odor. The fruit may become soft, mushy, and unfit for consumption.*
- **Secondary Effects:** *In some cases, fruit rot can spread to other parts of the plant, including stems and leaves, leading to further deterioration.*

Impact

- **Economic Losses:** *Fruit rot can lead to severe economic losses for farmers, particularly those cultivating high-value crops like tomatoes, peppers, and strawberries.*
- **Food Security**: *The reduction in fruit yield directly impacts food availability, posing a threat to food security in regions heavily dependent on fruit production.*
- **Quality Degradation**: *Even when the fruit is not entirely destroyed, the quality is often compromised, affecting marketability and consumer preference.*

Management and Control

- **Cultural Practices:** *Good agricultural practices such as crop rotation, proper irrigation management, and sanitation can help prevent the onset of fruit rot.*
- **Chemical Control:** *Fungicides and bactericides are commonly used to manage fruit rot. However, their use must be carefully managed to avoid resistance development and environmental harm.*
- **Biological Control:** *The use of biocontrol agents, such as antagonistic fungi and bacteria, offers an eco-friendly alternative to chemical controls.*
- **Integrated Disease Management (IDM):** *This approach combines cultural, chemical, and biological methods to manage fruit rot effectively while minimizing environmental impact.*

Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar (RVP) 2024

Syllabus: GS-3: Science and Technology – Awards.

Context:

- *The* **Indian Space Research Organisation** *(ISRO) Chandrayaan 3 Team will be awarded the prestigious* **Vigyan Team Award** *for their significant contribution to Space Science and Technology.*
- *Additionally, celebrated biochemist* **Govindarajan Padmanabhan** *has been selected as the first recipient of the* **Vigyan Ratna Puraskar**.

About Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar (RVP):

- *The* **Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar** *is a newly established set of awards by the Government of India, designed to honor notable achievements in the fields of Science, Technology, and Innovation. These awards represent one of the highest forms of recognition in these fields within India.*

Objective:

- *The primary objective of the RVP is to* **acknowledge and celebrate the outstanding contributions** *made by scientists, technologists, and innovators, whether as individuals or teams, across various scientific disciplines.*

Eligibility:

- *The awards are open to scientists, technologists, and innovators working in both government and private sectors, as well as individuals not affiliated with any organization.*
- *Individuals of Indian origin residing abroad who have made exceptional contributions that benefit Indian society are also eligible.*
- **Scientists are selected across 13 domains:** *Physics, Chemistry, Biological Sciences, Mathematics & Computer Science, Earth Science, Medicine, Engineering Sciences, Agricultural Science, Environmental Science, Technology & Innovation, Atomic Energy, Space Science and Technology, and other fields.*
- *The selection process ensures representation from each domain, with a focus on gender parity.*

Award Categories:

- **Vigyan Ratna (VR):** *Recognizes lifetime achievements and contributions in any field of science and technology.*
- **Vigyan Shri (VS):** *Honors distinguished contributions in any scientific or technological field.*
- **Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (VY-SSB):** *Encourages young scientists (under 45 years) who have made exceptional contributions in science and technology.*
- **Vigyan Team (VT):** *Awarded to a team of three or more scientists/researchers/innovators for exceptional contributions in any scientific or technological field.*

Award Process:

- *Nominations are reviewed by the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar Committee (RVPC), chaired by the* **Principal Scientific Adviser** *(PSA) to the Government of India.*
- *The award ceremony,* **scheduled for 23rd August** *(National Space Day), includes the presentation of a Sanad (certificate) and a medal to the awardees.*

Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary

Syllabus: GS-3; Biodiversity

Context

- *Researchers discover Asceua tertia in the verdant terrain of Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary*

About

- *Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary is a prominent protected area located in the* **Western Ghats of Kerala, India.**
- *It was established in 1984 and is situated in the Kollam district, covering an area of approximately 171 square kilometers.*
- *The sanctuary is part of the* **Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve**, *a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which highlights its ecological significance.*

Key Features

Biodiversity

- *The sanctuary is rich in both flora and fauna, hosting a variety of ecosystems ranging from* **tropical evergreen forests to semi-evergreen and moist deciduous forests.**
- *It is home to several endangered and endemic species, including the* **Lion-tailed Macaque, Indian Elephant, and the Nilgiri Tahr.**
- *The flora includes rare and medicinal plants, with over 1000 species of flowering plants documented in the sanctuary.*

Fauna

- *Besides the Lion-tailed Macaque and Nilgiri Tahr, the sanctuary is home to other significant species such as the Indian Bison (Gaur), Sambar Deer, and Leopards.*
- *The sanctuary also supports a diverse range of avifauna, including the Great Hornbill, Malabar Grey Hornbill, and several species of butterflies, making it a birdwatcher's paradise.*

Riverine Ecosystem

- *The* **Kallada River** *originates in the Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary, adding to its ecological importance.*
- *The river and its tributaries support the sanctuary's rich aquatic life and contribute to the region's biodiversity.*

Eco-Tourism

- *The sanctuary offers various eco-tourism activities, such as guided treks, bird watching, and boat rides in the* **Thenmala Dam reservoir**, *which is part of the sanctuary.*
- *The Thenmala Eco-Tourism Project, one of India's first planned eco-tourism projects, is closely associated with the sanctuary, promoting sustainable tourism practices.*

Conservation Efforts

- *The sanctuary is crucial for conservation efforts in the Western Ghats, especially in preserving endangered species and maintaining the ecological balance of the region.*
- *The Kerala Forest Department undertakes various conservation initiatives, including anti-poaching measures and habitat restoration programs.*

Historical Significance

- *The name "Shendurney" is believed to be derived from the local name of the tree* **"Chenkurinji" (Gluta travancorica),** *which is endemic to this region and has medicinal properties.*