



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 25-12-2024

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NHRC Chairperson

Syllabus: GS-2: Statutory bodies.

Context:

- **Justice V. Ramasubramanian** appointed as **Chairperson** of the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)**.
- Announced by **President Droupadi Murmu**.
- **Priyank Kanoongo** and **Dr. Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi (Retd.)** appointed as **members** of NHRC.
- Appointment follows the retirement of **Justice Arun Kumar Mishra**.

Background of Justice V. Ramasubramanian

- **Served** in the **Supreme Court** (Sept 23, 2019 – June 29, 2023).
- **Decades of experience** in various judicial roles.
- Appointment to NHRC continues his **public service journey**.

Role of NHRC

- **Mandate:** Protect and promote **human rights** in India.
- **Responsibilities:**
 - **Investigates** human rights violations.
 - **Recommends** actions to the government.
 - Ensures **accountability and justice**.

Leadership Changes at NHRC

- **Justice Arun Kumar Mishra** retired on **June 1, 2023**.
- **Vijaya Bharathi Sayani** served as **acting chairperson** post-retirement.
- New appointments aim to **strengthen NHRC's mandate**.

New NHRC Members

- **Priyank Kanoongo** and **Dr. Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi (Retd.)** join as **members**.
- Their expertise will contribute to **safeguarding human rights**.

Impact of New Leadership

- Justice Ramasubramanian's **judicial background** may lead to:
 - **Informed decisions** and policies.
 - Enhanced NHRC **effectiveness** in addressing human rights issues.

The GATT-ification of the World Trade Organization

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Economy – Trade Organisations.

Context:

- It has been five years since the Appellate Body (AB), the second tier of the WTO's two-tier dispute settlement system, has been non-operational due to the persistent blocking, by the United States, of the appointment of the Appellate Body members.

Introduction

- **Geneva-based WTO:** A multilateral trade referee established in 1995.
- **Current issue:** Failure to revitalize a “full and well-functioning dispute settlement system” by the end of 2024.
- **Key problem:** Appellate Body (AB), the second tier of WTO's dispute settlement, has been non-operational for 5 years.
- **Cause:** U.S. blocking the appointment of Appellate Body members across successive administrations (Obama, Trump, Biden).

Significance of the Appellate Body

- **Two-tier dispute system:** Ensured binding adjudication on trade disputes.
- **Present situation:**
 - First-tier WTO panels still operate.
 - Losing countries exploit non-operational AB to stall the process by appealing.
- **Larger implications:** Reflects the existential crisis of the WTO, risking irrelevance in global trade governance.

Historical Context: The Promise of the WTO

- **Establishment:**

- Formed in 1995, succeeding GATT (1948-1994).
- Shift from diplomacy-based multilateralism to a rule-based system.
- **Features:**
 - Comprehensive trade rules (goods, services, intellectual property).
 - Binding two-tier dispute system with effective retaliation measures.
 - Described as the “thickening of legality” in international trade (Celso Lafer).
- **Scholarly view:**
 - Regarded as a constitutional project elevating international law over politics.

The Unravelling of WTO

- **China's rise:**
 - U.S. facilitated China’s WTO accession (2001), hoping it would adopt free-market principles.
 - Reality: China retained state-led industrial policies, exploiting the WTO system.
- **U.S. reaction:**
 - Belief that WTO hinders its ability to counter China’s trade practices.
 - Strategy to “wreck” the WTO system to regain autonomy.
 - **Examples:**
 - 2018: Trump imposed 25% tariffs on Chinese products, violating WTO rules.
 - Anticipated trade war under Trump 2.0 administration with further tariffs.

Transition to a New Trade Regime

- **Regime change:**
 - International lawyers like Geraldo Vidigal argue that WTO’s crisis reflects a shift, not just dysfunction.
- **Thinning of legality:**
 - Reversal from the legal revolution of 1995-2019 to the GATT-style diplomacy.

- Nations reclaiming control over trade policies.
- **Impact:**
 - Decline in rule-based multilateralism.
 - International politics dominates over legal frameworks in trade.

Conclusion

- **Current state:** WTO's "GATTification" signals a rollback of its rule-based system.
- **Future outlook:** Technical negotiations are unlikely to resolve the systemic crisis.

Ken-Betwa River Linking Project

Syllabus: GS-3: Development and Environment.

Context:

- Ken-Betwa River Linking Project poses serious threat to **Panna Tiger Reserve** – voice raised by opposition.

Overview of Ken-Betwa River Linking Project

- **Foundation Stone:** To be laid by PM Narendra Modi on December 25, 2024, at Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh.
- Aims to transfer surplus water from the **Ken River in Madhya Pradesh (MP) to Betwa in Uttar Pradesh (UP)** to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region.
- The region spread across the districts of two states mainly Jhansi, Banda, Lalitpur and Mahoba districts of UP and Tikamgarh, Panna and Chhatarpur districts of MP.
- **Significance:**
 - First initiative under the national river interlinking policy.
 - Aims to address water scarcity and enhance irrigation in drought-prone areas.

Environmental Concerns Raised by Congress

- **Threat to Panna Tiger Reserve:**
 - **Submersion Impact:** Over 10% of the core area of the reserve to be submerged.

- **Biodiversity at Risk:**
 - Prime tiger habitats and vulture nesting sites threatened.
 - Fragmentation of the ecosystem.
- **Tree Felling:** Over 23 lakh trees to be cut.
- **Disturbance:** Construction activities likely to disrupt wildlife.
- **Panna Tiger Reserve – A Success Story:**
 - By 2009, tigers were wiped out from Panna.
 - Successful tiger reintroduction program launched in 2009.
 - As of 2024, the reserve has 90+ tigers, including cubs and sub-adults.
 - Sustainable tourism supports local livelihoods.

Additional Concerns

- **Industrial Development:**
 - Three cement factories planned near the reserve.
 - One factory already operational.
- **Water Surplus Assumptions:**
 - Concerns regarding accuracy of surplus water estimates.

Project Details

- **Dam Construction:**
 - Daudhan Dam (77 m high, 2.13 km long) to be built on the Ken River within the reserve.
- **Tunnel Construction:**
 - Two tunnels planned: Upper level (1.9 km) and lower level (1.1 km).

Alternative Solutions Suggested

- **Upstream Dam Location:**
 - Alternative locations suggested to minimize ecological damage.
- **Balancing Development and Conservation:**
 - Call for a more environment-friendly approach to water management and infrastructure projects.

Mumps Vaccine Inclusion

Syllabus: GS-3: General Science – diseases.

Context:

- Tamil Nadu is currently experiencing a surge in mumps cases, with reports indicating at least 150 cases each month.

Mumps Surge in Tamil Nadu – Current Situation

- Tamil Nadu reports **150+ mumps cases/month**.
- Cases rose from **61 (2021-22)** to **1,091 (2023-24)**.
- **Children aged 6-9** and those **under 5** are most affected.
- **Chennai** records the highest number of cases.
- Other districts contribute **3-10%** of total cases.

Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) – Overview

- Tamil Nadu's UIP covers **11 vaccines** for **12 diseases** (e.g., tuberculosis, measles).
- Benefits:
 - **10 lakh pregnant women** annually.
 - **9.15 lakh children** annually.
- **Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccine** added in **April 2017**.
- **Mumps vaccine not yet included** in UIP.

Concerns and Complications of Mumps

- **Highly infectious** – leads to clusters.
- **Self-limiting** in children but causes:
 - **Orchitis** in adults (risk of infertility).
 - Other complications necessitate urgent attention.

Policy Recommendations

- Classify **mumps as a notifiable disease**.
- **Integrate mumps vaccine** into UIP following GOI protocols.
- Requires:
 - **Resource allocation** for vaccine production/distribution.

Bald Eagle

Syllabus: GS-3: Species in News.

Context:

- President Joe Biden has made it official: The bald eagle is now the national bird of the United States.

Historical Background

- The bald eagle has symbolized the **power and strength** of the United States for over **240 years**.
- On **Tuesday**, President **Joe Biden** signed legislation officially designating the bald eagle as the **national bird**.

Legislative Action

- The law amends the **United States Code**, addressing a long-overlooked detail regarding the eagle's official status.
- Although the bald eagle has been a familiar symbol, this is the first time it has been formally recognized as the **national bird**.

Significance in U.S. Symbolism

- The bald eagle appears on the **Great Seal of the United States**, finalized in **1782**.
- Components of the Great Seal include:
 - **Bald eagle**
 - **Olive branch** (symbolizing peace)
 - **Arrows** (symbolizing war)
 - **Flag-like shield**
 - Motto: "**E Pluribus Unum**" (Out of many, one)
 - **Constellation of stars**

Earlier Recognition

- In **1782**, Congress designated the bald eagle as the **national emblem**.
- The eagle's image is present on:
 - **Official documents**
 - **Presidential flag**

- **Military insignia**
- **U.S. currency**

Clarification of Status

- Despite its widespread use, the bald eagle had never been formally recognized as the **national bird** until now.

Natural Habitat

- The bald eagle is **indigenous to North America**.

Bald Eagle

General Information

- **Scientific Name:** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*
- **Conservation Status:** Least Concern (IUCN) – Once endangered, now recovered.
- **Habitat:** Native to **North America** (U.S., Canada, Mexico).
- **Physical Characteristics:**
 - White head and tail feathers (distinct from juvenile eagles).
 - Brown body and wings.
 - Yellow beak and talons.

Ecological Role

- **Apex predator** in ecosystems, controlling fish and small mammal populations.
- Plays a role in maintaining **environmental balance**.

Conservation Success

- **Mid-20th century:** Faced severe population decline due to **DDT pesticide** use.
- **Bald Eagle Protection Act (1940)** and **Endangered Species Act (1973)** aided recovery.
- Removed from the **Endangered Species List** in **2007**.