DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 13-05-2025

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Supreme Court Action on Morphological Ridge Violations

Syllabus: GS-1: Urbanization and Its impact on ecology.

Context:

On **May 7, 2025**, the **Supreme Court of India** issued **show cause notices** to senior officials from the **Delhi government**, the **Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)**, and a **private developer (RR Texknit LLP)** over alleged violations in a housing project within the ecologically sensitive **Morphological Ridge**.

The court's intervention came after environmental activist **Bhavreen Kandhari** filed a **contempt petition**, highlighting illegal construction activities that could cause irreversible ecological damage.

Why is the Morphological Ridge Important?

➤ Part of the **Delhi Ridge**, the southern extension of the ancient **Aravalli range**.

➤ Acts as Delhi's **green lung**, combating pollution and desertification.

➤ Spans **35 km** and serves as a **natural barrier** against dust storms from Rajasthan.

➤ Though not officially classified as forest land, it is **protected under court orders**.

Ecological Significance

➤ Comprises **rocky outcrops** and **dry thorn forests**.

➤ Home to native species like **bistendu** and **dhak (flame of the forest)**.

➤ Acts as a **buffer zone** for core forest areas, preventing unchecked urban expansion.

Legal and Regulatory Challenges

➤ Land use is regulated by the **Ridge Management Board** and the **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)**.

➤ **No construction is permitted without Supreme Court clearance**.

➤ Yet, **RR Texknit LLP allegedly began construction without approvals**.

➤ The area remains **unnotified as a Reserved Forest** under the **Indian Forest Act, 1927**, due to pending ground-truthing surveys.

Supreme Court's Stance

The court has **reiterated the need for strict enforcement** of environmental laws in the Ridge area. Its latest action underscores:

➤ **Zero tolerance for illegal construction** in ecologically fragile zones.

➤ **Accountability of officials** who permit such violations.

➤ The **urgency of finalizing the Ridge's legal status** to prevent further encroachment.

What's Next?

➤ The **Delhi government, MCD, and RR Texknit LLP must respond** to the contempt notices.

➤ The court may order **demolition of illegal structures** and **penalties for violations**.

➤ Environmentalists are pushing for **formal forest designation** to ensure long-term protection.

This case highlights the **ongoing conflict between urban development and environmental conservation**, stressing the need for **sustainable planning** in rapidly growing cities like Delhi.

Safe Harbour for Social Media Platforms

Syllabus: GS-2: Laws – Rules and Regulations

Context:

The Indian government's re-evaluation of **safe harbour protections** for social media platforms highlights the growing tension between **regulating harmful content** (such as fake news, cyber fraud, and AI-generated deepfakes) and **preserving free speech and innovation**.

Current Safe Harbour Framework in India

➢ **Legal Basis**: Section 79 of the **IT Act, 2000** grants intermediaries (social media platforms, ISPs, etc.) immunity from liability for user-generated content, provided they comply with **due diligence requirements**.

➢ **Conditions for Protection**:

   o Platforms must not **initiate, modify, or select** unlawful content.

   o They must **expeditiously remove** illegal content upon receiving a court order or government notice.

   o The **IT Rules, 2021** mandate additional compliance, including grievance officers, compliance reports, and proactive removal of certain categories of unlawful content.

Why is the Government Re-evaluating Safe Harbour?

➢ **Misinformation & Fake News**: Rising concerns over **deepfakes, election-related disinformation, and harmful viral content**.

➢ **Non-compliance by Platforms**: Government alleges that some platforms (like X/Twitter) **delay compliance** with takedown orders.

➢ **2023 Amendment Attempt**: The government tried to **remove safe harbour** for content flagged as "fake news" by the **Press Information Bureau (PIB)**, but the **Bombay HC struck it down**, calling it **arbitrary and beyond IT Act powers**.

Proposed Changes & Digital India Act

The upcoming **Digital India Act (DIA)**, set to replace the IT Act, 2000, may introduce stricter conditions:

➢ **Tighter Due Diligence**: Platforms may be required to **proactively monitor** and remove misinformation, not just react to complaints.

➢ **Accountability for AI Content**: Rules may mandate **watermarking AI-generated content** and faster takedowns of deepfakes.

➢ **Loss of Immunity for Non-Compliance**: If platforms fail to act on government orders, they may **lose safe harbour protections**, exposing them to lawsuits.

Global Context & Challenges

- ➢ **EU's Digital Services Act (DSA)**: Requires platforms to **assess systemic risks** (e.g., election interference) and mitigate them.

- ➢ **US Section 230 Debate**: Similar discussions on whether platforms should **lose immunity** if they moderate content in a biased manner.

- ➢ **Free Speech Concerns**: Stricter regulations could lead to **over-censorship**, where platforms preemptively remove content to avoid penalties.

What's Next?

- ➢ **Legal Battles**: Any new rules may face **judicial scrutiny** (like the 2023 amendment).

- ➢ **Industry Pushback**: Tech companies may argue that **excessive regulation stifles innovation**.

- ➢ **Balancing Act**: The government must ensure **accountability without making platforms liable for every user post**.

Conclusion

India's move to **tighten safe harbour rules** reflects a global shift towards **greater platform accountability**. However, striking the right balance between **combating misinformation** and **avoiding censorship** remains a key challenge. The **Digital India Act** will likely shape the future of intermediary liability in the country.

Punjab-Haryana Water Dispute

Syllabus: GS-2: Interstate disputes.

Context:

- ➢ Punjab restricted water flow to Haryana from the Bhakra Dam, defying the **BBMB's allocation**.
- ➢ The **Punjab & Haryana High Court** warned of contempt proceedings, calling Punjab's actions "unbelievable" and a "breakdown of constitutional machinery."

Historical Context

- ➢ The **Bhakra-Nangal Dam** (1963) is a critical infrastructure project on the **Sutlej River**, managed by the BBMB.
- ➢ Water-sharing disputes date back to Punjab's reorganization in 1966, when Haryana was carved out but lacked river water rights.

Allocation & Violations

2024 Allocations:

- ➢ Punjab: **5.512 MAF** (million acre-feet)
- ➢ Haryana: **2.987 MAF**
- ➢ Punjab alleges Haryana has **exceeded its quota (104%)**, while Haryana claims shortages for drinking/irrigation.

Legal Interventions

- ➢ The High Court barred Punjab from interfering with BBMB operations, upholding its authority under the **Punjab Reorganization Act, 1966**.
- ➢ Punjab's protest (led by a cabinet minister) disrupted BBMB officials, prompting judicial rebuke.

Political Standoffs

Punjab's Argument:

- ➢ Opposes "forced sharing," citing its own agrarian needs.
- ➢ Claims Haryana's demand exceeds actual requirements.

Haryana's Counter:

- ➢ Highlights legal entitlements and criticizes Punjab's "unilateral" actions.

Central Mediation Failure

- ➢ The **Union Home Secretary** proposed temporary water borrowing, but Punjab boycotted talks, alleging procedural bias.

Environmental Concerns

> Reservoir levels (e.g., Ranjit Sagar, Pong Dam) are **lower than 2023**, raising drought fears ahead of summer.

Why This Matters

> **Legal Precedent**: The court's contempt threat underscores federal-state tensions over resource governance.

> **Food Security**: Both states are agrarian powerhouses; water shortages threaten **rice/wheat production**.

> **Inter-State Relations**: The conflict mirrors broader disputes like **Cauvery (Karnataka-TN)** and **Krishna (AP-Telangana)**.

Potential Resolutions

> **Judicial Enforcement**: Strict adherence to BBMB allocations under court supervision.

> **Political Negotiation**: Revival of the **Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal**—a stalled project meant to share water.

> **Central Intervention**: The Centre may invoke **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956**, if talks fail.

Conclusion

The dispute reflects **deep-rooted competition over scarce resources**, compounded by legal and political failures. A long-term solution requires **cooperative federalism**, updated water-sharing agreements, and investment in conservation technologies.

Parliament's Standing Committee on External Affairs

Syllabus: GS-2: Parliamentary committees.

Context:

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri will brief Parliament's Standing Committee on External Affairs on the current situation with Pakistan on May 19.

Parliament's Standing Committee on External Affairs

Overview

> The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs** is a **Departmentally Related Standing Committee (DRSC)** of the Indian Parliament.

> It provides **legislative oversight** of the **Ministry of External Affairs**, including **foreign policy** and decision-making processes.

Composition

- Total members: **31** (**21 from Lok Sabha, 10 from Rajya Sabha**).

- Members are **nominated** by the **Speaker of Lok Sabha** and the **Chairman of Rajya Sabha**.

- **Chairperson** is appointed by the Speaker from among Lok Sabha members.

- **Ministers are not eligible** to be members; if a member becomes a minister, they cease to be a member.

- **Tenure:** One year from constitution date (unless Lok Sabha is dissolved earlier).

Functions

- Examines **Demands for Grants** of the Ministry of External Affairs and submits reports (cannot propose cut motions).

- Scrutinizes **bills** referred to it that pertain to the Ministry and reports on them.

- Reviews **Annual Reports** of the Ministry and makes recommendations.

- Considers **long-term policy documents** referred by the Speaker or Chairman.

- Can appoint **sub-committees** or **study groups** for detailed examination of specific subjects.

Working and Procedure

- After the Union Budget is presented, the Committee reviews MEA's **budgetary demands** and submits a report within a fixed period.

- Examines only those **bills referred** by the presiding officers after introduction in either House.

- May seek **expert or public opinion** on referred subjects and bills.

- Prepares and presents **reports** to Lok Sabha; these are also laid in Rajya Sabha.

- Ministry must respond to recommendations within **three months**; Committee reviews action taken and presents **follow-up reports**.

Significance

- Enhances **parliamentary oversight** and **accountability** of the executive in foreign affairs.

- Facilitates detailed, **non-partisan scrutiny** of complex foreign policy issues.

- Promotes informed **legislative debate** and **policy direction**.

Additional Points

- The Committee interacts with **foreign delegations** for bilateral and multilateral understanding.
- Can undertake **study tours** with Speaker's permission for on-the-spot assessments.

Summary Table

Feature	Details
Type	**Standing Committee (DRSC)**
Ministry Covered	**External Affairs**
Members	**31 (21 LS, 10 RS)**
Chairperson	Appointed by Speaker (**LS member**)
Tenure	**1 year**
Key Functions	Examines **grants, bills, reports, policies**

Nuclear fallout

Syllabus: GS-3: Disaster Management.

Context:

'US stopped nuclear conflict': US President Donald Trump's big claim on India-Pakistan ceasefire.

Nuclear Fallout:

Definition

- *Nuclear fallout* refers to **residual radioactive material** propelled into the upper atmosphere after a nuclear explosion, which then "falls out" of the sky, contaminating the environment.

Causes

- Occurs primarily after **nuclear detonations** (weapons or reactor accidents).

➢ Especially significant in **ground bursts**, where dust and debris are mixed with radioactive products.

Types

➢ **Local Fallout**: Heavy particles settle near the explosion site within hours.

➢ **Global Fallout**: Lighter particles travel long distances, spreading radioactive contamination over large areas.

Major Incidents

➢ **Chernobyl (1986)**: Level 7 INES event; widespread environmental and health effects, including increased thyroid cancer risk among children and contamination of crops and urban areas.

➢ **Three Mile Island (1979)**: Level 5 INES event; minimal public health impact, minor increase in radiation exposure.

➢ **Fukushima (2011)**: Initially Level 5, later upgraded to Level 7; limited health effects, but significant environmental contamination and evacuation challenges.

Effects

➢ **Health Hazards**: Exposure can cause **acute radiation sickness**, increased cancer risk (notably thyroid cancer), and genetic mutations.

➢ **Environmental Impact**: Contaminates soil, water, crops, and livestock; long-term ecological damage.

➢ **Economic and Social Disruption**: Evacuation, loss of livelihood, and long-term exclusion zones.

Key Terms

➢ **Radioactive Isotopes**: Iodine-131, Cesium-137, Strontium-90-common in fallout, dangerous due to their radioactive decay and biological uptake.

➢ **INES Scale**: International Nuclear Event Scale, ranks nuclear incidents by severity (Level 7 is highest).

Mitigation and Management

➢ **Evacuation**: Immediate removal of populations from contaminated zones.

➢ **Sheltering**: Staying indoors reduces exposure.

➢ **Decontamination**: Removal of radioactive particles from skin, clothing, and surfaces.

➢ **Food and Water Safety**: Monitoring and restricting contaminated supplies.