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Science Reporter

विज्ञान एवं प्रौद्योगिकी मन्त्रालय
MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



MK Yadav Sir

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BROADCASTING SERVICES BILL, 2024

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Governance)



Govt's proposed curbs on independent online content creators

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK & APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

THE MINISTRY of Information and Broadcasting is learnt to have proposed expanded regulations for independent creators of news content on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and X, which has raised concerns over the freedom of speech and expression.

A draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2024, circulated among a handful of stakeholders a few weeks ago seeks to expand the remit of the ministry from over-the-top (OTT) content and digital news to social media accounts and online video creators.

This is an updated version of the draft released publicly in November last year. The revised draft defines a "digital news broadcaster" in sweeping terms, requires them to have prior registration with the government, and prescribes standards for content evaluation.

Curbs on news creators

The 2023 draft defined news and current affairs programmes as: "(i) newly-received or noteworthy audio, visual or audio-visual programmes or live programmes, including analysis, about recent events primarily of socio-political, economic or cultural nature, or (ii) any programmes transmitted or retransmitted on broadcasting network, where the context, purpose, import and meaning of such programmes implies so".

In the 2024 draft, a new category of "digital news broadcaster" or "publisher of news and current affairs content" has been introduced, defined as "any person who broadcasts news and current affairs programme through an online paper, news portal, website, social media intermediary, or other similar medium as part of a systematic business, professional, or commercial activity but excluding replica e-papers".

"Systematic" activity has been defined as any structured or organised activity that involves an element of planning, method, continuity or persistence — terms with broad meanings that could give the executive sweeping powers of interpretation.

The 2024 draft specifically includes individual creators in the definition of digital news broadcasters; the definition in the Information Technology Rules, 2021 specifically excludes individual users. Part III of the 2021 IT Rules regulates digital news publishers and OTT platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

The Bombay and Madras High Courts have stayed Rules 9(1) and 9(3) of the IT Rules 2021 that say news and current affairs publishers must adhere to the Code of Ethics, citing their adverse impact on press freedom. These HC orders may serve as a precedent if digital news broadcasters seek a stay on provisions in the Broadcasting Bill, if it were to be brought in its current form.

EXPLAINED POLICY

Obligations of creators

The revised draft says that a creator who is categorised as a digital news broadcaster must "intimate" the ministry of their work and existence; they must form one or more content evaluation committees at their own expense; and "strive to make" the committee diverse. The names of the people on these committees must be shared with the government.

News creators who do not intimate the government of the details of committee members are liable to be fined Rs 50 lakh for the first contravention, and Rs 2.5 crore for subsequent violations in the next three years. But some exemptions are indicated — the government can "exempt a distinct class of players or a group for avoiding genuine hardship", the draft says.

The 2023 version had said the government may prescribe a subscriber/ viewer threshold that triggers intimation and content code obligations. The new draft Bill does not have this provision.

Rationale for regulation

A senior government official said a key reason for the significant changes proposed in the 2023 draft was the "role that a number of independent content creators played in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls".

"In a number of instances, creators made videos on current affairs that made some sensational claims about the government and its senior leaders. That is when it was decided that there has to be accountability for these creators, to create a level playing field between mainstream press and independent creators," the official said.

On June 4, the day the election results were announced, the ministry sent a notice to stakeholders regarding a meeting on the draft Bill. At least six meetings have taken place with the ministry since then, industry executives said.

As per the current wording of the Bill, even foreign creators may fall under its ambit, even though it could be challenging to enforce Indian content regulations on them.

Obligations on social media

According to the draft, online intermediaries such as Facebook, YouTube, and X are exempt from liability for third-party content, if the intermediary:

- limits its function to providing access to a communication system over which information made available by third parties is transmitted or temporarily stored or hosted;
- does not initiate the transmission;
- does not select or modify the information, except in compliance with government order;
- observes due diligence while discharging duties under the Act and observes other prescribed guidelines.

The draft Bill also has criminal liability provisions for social media companies if they do not provide information "pertaining to OTT Broadcasters and Digital News Broadcasters" on their platforms for compliance.

Law in other countries

In Singapore, both traditional broadcasters and OTT content providers come under the country's broadcasting law. Under the copyright law, OTT platforms are regulated, and they require a licence from a regulator, although licensees do not have the same level of obligations as other television services.

In the US, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and its Media Bureau regulate broadcast radio and television stations. OTT platforms are not directly regulated by US federal law or government authorities.

International Regulations on OTT and Broadcast Content

- **Singapore**: Both traditional broadcasters and OTT providers are regulated, requiring licenses, although with fewer obligations than traditional TV services.
- **United States**: The FCC regulates broadcast stations, but OTT platforms are not directly regulated by federal law.

Context: The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has proposed expanded regulations for independent news creators on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and X, through the draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2024.

Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2024

- **Definition**: The 2023 draft defined news and current affairs programmes as either newly-received or noteworthy content about recent socio-political, economic, or cultural events, or any programmes where context implies news.
- **New Category**: The 2024 draft introduces "digital news broadcaster" or "publisher of news and current affairs content," defined as any entity broadcasting news online through various platforms, excluding replica e-papers.
- **Systematic Activity**: The draft defines "systematic" activity as structured or organized efforts involving planning and persistence, potentially granting the government broad interpretative powers.
- **Individual Creators**: Unlike the 2021 IT Rules, which excluded individual users, the 2024 draft includes individual creators in the definition of digital news broadcasters.
- **Committee Disclosure**: News creators must disclose committee members to the government, with fines of Rs 50 lakh for first contraventions and Rs 2.5 crore for subsequent violations within three years. Exemptions are possible for genuine hardship.
- **High Court Orders**: Bombay and Madras High Courts stayed certain rules from the IT Rules 2021, which could impact digital news broadcasters if the Broadcasting Bill is enacted as currently written.
- **Creator Obligations**: Digital news broadcasters must notify the ministry of their existence, form content evaluation committees at their own expense, and strive for committee diversity. The 2024 draft lacks a subscriber/viewer threshold for these obligations.
- **Government Rationale**: Significant changes in the 2023 draft are attributed to independent creators' influence in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, aiming to ensure accountability and a level playing field between mainstream media and independent creators.

THE HINDU Page 12

INDIAN HIMALAYAN RANGE (IHR)

(Syllabus GS Paper 1 – Geography)

Why Himalayan towns need a different kind of development

Do cities along the Indian Himalayan Range have adequate funds and resources to manage civic issues?

Tikender Singh Panwar

The story so far:

The Indian Himalayan Range (IHR), comprising 11 States and two Union Territories, had a decadal urban growth rate of more than 40% from 2011 to 2021. Towns have expanded, and more urban settlements are developing. However, Himalayan towns require a different definition of urbanisation.

What is happening in IHR towns?

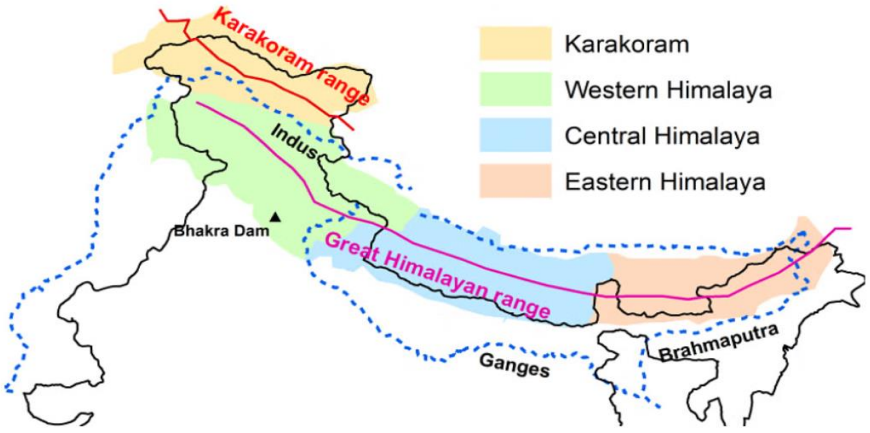
Almost all Himalayan towns, including State capitals, struggle with managing civic issues. For example, cities like Srinagar, Guwahati, Shillong, and Shimla, as well as smaller towns, face significant challenges in managing sanitation, solid and liquid waste, and water. Planning institutions in these States often fail because they use models copied from the plains and have only limited capacities to implement these plans. City governments are short of human resources by almost 75%. For instance, in the Kashmir Valley, excluding the Srinagar Municipal Corporation, there are only 15 executive officers across over 40 urban local bodies.

Cities continue to expand into the peripheries, encroaching on the commons of villages. Srinagar, Guwahati are examples of such expansion, leading to the plundering of open spaces, forest land, and watersheds. In Srinagar, land use changes between 2000 and 2020 showed a 75.58% increase. Water bodies have eroded by almost 25%, from 19.36 square kilometres to 14.44 square kilometres. These areas have been taken over by built-up real estate, increasing from 34.53 square kilometres to 60.63 square kilometres, a rise from 13.35% to 23.44% of the total municipal area. Nearly 90% of the liquid waste enters water bodies without treatment.

Why is this happening?

The IHR faces increasing pressure from urbanisation and development, compounded by high-intensity tourism, unsustainable infrastructure, and resource use (land and water), further aggravated by climatic variations like changing precipitation patterns and rising temperatures. This has led to water scarcity, deforestation, land degradation, biodiversity loss, and increased pollution, including plastics. These pressures have the potential to disrupt lives and livelihoods, impacting the socio-ecological fabric of the Himalayas.

Over the past few decades, tourism in the IHR has continued to expand and diversify, with an anticipated average annual growth rate of 7.9% from 2013 to 2023. Current tourism in the IHR often replaces eco-friendly infrastructure with inappropriate, unsightly, and dangerous constructions, poorly designed roads, and inadequate solid waste management, which leads to loss of natural resources damaging biodiversity and ecosystem services. Ecotourism, emphasising



Mountain ranges in the Himalayan

Context: The Indian Himalayan Range (IHR) had a decadal urban growth rate of more than 40% from 2011 to 2021.

Indian Himalayan Range (IHR)

- **Also known as**: These are also known by other names such as Himadri, Himavan, and more.
- **Composition**: The Himalayan Range is the youngest mountain range in the world, primarily made up of uplifted sedimentary and metamorphic rocks.
- **States**: 11 States and two Union Territories
- **Boundaries**: The Himalayas are bordered by the Karakoram and Hindu Kush ranges to the northwest, the Tibetan Plateau to the north, and the Indo-Gangetic Plains to the south.
    - The southern boundary is well-defined by the foothills, whereas the northern boundary merges gradually with the Tibetan Plateau.
- **River Origin**: Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra
- **Extent**: The main Himalayan Range stretches over 2,500 km, from the Indus Gorge in the west to the Brahmaputra Gorge in the east.
- **Width**: These Ranges are wider in the west than in the east.
- **Sub-Divisions**: The IHR are divided into three main sections: Greater Himalayas, Inner or Middle Himalayas, and Shiwalik.

TIMES OF INDIA

Aug 8

CLOUDED LEOPARD

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

Mizoram governor calls for protecting rare species on clouded leopard day



Context: During a recent event marking International Clouded Leopard Day, the Mizoram governor highlighted the critical challenges facing wildlife conservation.

Clouded Leopard

- **Habitat**: Inhabits dense forests of the Himalayas through mainland Southeast Asia into South China.
- **Species**: Includes the clouded leopard (Neofelis nebulosa) and the Sunda clouded leopard (Neofelis diardi).
- **Life Span**: 12 to 15 years
- **Geographic Range**: Found in southern China, Bhutan, Nepal, northeast India, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, and Bangladesh.
  - In India, it occurs in the states of Sikkim, northern West Bengal, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, as well as in the Meghalaya subtropical forests.
  - In Pakke Tiger Reserve, a clouded leopard was photographed in semi-evergreen forest.
- **Preferred Environments**: Primarily tropical evergreen rainforests but also found in dry tropical forests and mangrove swamps.
- **Altitude:** In the Himalayas, it is found at relatively high altitudes.
- **Presence in India**: Located in Sikkim, northern West Bengal, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh.
- **State Animal**: Recognized as the State animal of Meghalaya.
- **Conservation Status:** IUCN Red List: Both species are classified as 'Vulnerable'.

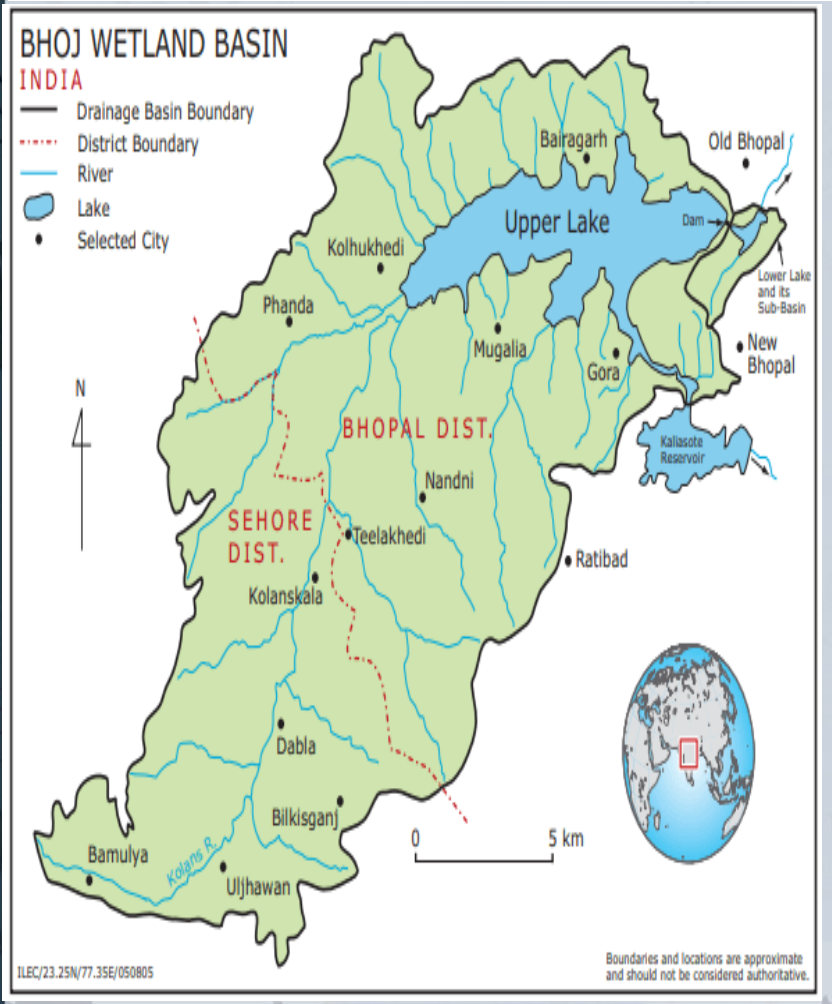
NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Aug 8

BHOJ WETLAND

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

Govt denies any threat to Bhoj Wetland delisting from Ramsar Convention list



Context: The Union Government recently affirmed that Bhoj Wetland in Bhopal, an international Ramsar site, is not at risk of being removed from the Ramsar Convention list of wetlands of international importance.

Bhoj Wetland

- **Location**: These lakes consist of two interconnected human-made reservoirs situated within Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.
- **Reservoirs**: It consists of two contiguous human-made reservoirs, the Upper and Lower Lakes.
    - The Upper Lake is locally referred to as Bhojtal or Bada Talaab, while the Lower Lake is known as Chhota Talaab.
- **Water Source:** The Upper Lake is a major source of potable water for Bhopal.
- **Biodiversity Richness**: These lakes boast significant biodiversity, particularly concerning macrophytes, phytoplankton, and zooplankton.
- **Diverse Fish Population**: With over 15 different types of fish, the lakes are home to a variety of aquatic species, including vulnerable ones such as turtles, amphibians, and aquatic invertebrates.
- **Ramsar Designation**: In 2002, these lakes were officially designated as Ramsar sites, recognizing their international importance for wetland conservation.

BUSINESS STANDARD
Aug 8

RABINDRANATH TAGORE
(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 – History)

Rabindranath Tagore's 83rd Death Anniversary: All about the Bard of Bengal

Context: Rabindranath Tagore's name evokes deep emotions across India as the country marks his 83rd death anniversary.

Rabindranath Tagore

- **Early Life**: Born in Calcutta in 1861, he was a poet, philosopher, musician, playwright, and painter.
- **Early Works**: He released his first collection of poems under the pen name 'Bhanusimha' at 16 years of age.
- **Influenced by**: Classical poetry of Kalidasa and started writing his own classical poems.
    - He published several books of poetry in the 1880s and completed Manasi (1890), a collection that marks the maturing of his genius.
- **Nobel Prize Recognition**: His poetry collection Gitanjali (Song Offerings) earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, making him the first non-European to receive this prestigious award.
- **National Anthems:** He wrote the National Anthems of India and Bangladesh.
    - He wrote the song Banglar Mati Banglar Jol (Soil of Bengal, Water of Bengal) to unite the Bengali population after the Bengal partition in 1905.
    - He also wrote the famed Amar Sonar Bangla, which helped ignite a feeling of nationalism amongst people.
- **Founder:** Tagore founded Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal, in 1921.

Role in the Freedom Struggle

- **Rakhi Utsav**: He started the Rakhi Utsav where people from Hindu and Muslim communities tied colorful threads on each other's wrists.
- **Views on British Rule**: He denounced British imperialism, yet he did not fully support or agree with Gandhi in the Non-cooperation Movement.
- **Critique of Colonialism**: He viewed British rule as a symptom of the overall "sickness" of the social "disease" of the public.
- **Renunciation of Knighthood**: He renounced the knighthood that had been given to him by Lord Hardinge in 1915 in protest of the violent Amritsar massacre in which the British killed unarmed Indian citizens.

DTE Aug 8

MPOX VIRUS
(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Sci and Tech)

Mpox outbreak: Global emergency declaration on the cards as WHO calls for emergency meet

Context: In response to the rapid spread of the monkeypox outbreak, the World Health Organization (WHO) has called an emergency meeting. The UN body may potentially classify the outbreak as a global emergency due to its severity.

MPOX Virus

- **About:** Mpox, formerly known as monkeypox, is a viral disease caused by the Monkeypox virus.
- **Belongs to:** Same family as the virus that causes smallpox.
- **Origins**: Mpox, previously known as monkeypox, originated from a spillover event in a research facility involving monkeys in 1958.
- **Sporadic Outbreaks**: Mpox has been identified in sporadic outbreaks among humans since the initial event in 1958.
- **Genetic Adaptations**: Mpox lineages have been circulating in humans, evolving through mutations modulated by APOBEC proteins.
- **Virus Type**: There are two main types of Monkeypox virus: Clade I and Clade II.
    - Clade I is endemic to Central Africa and is associated with more severe illness and higher mortality rates.
- Clade II is endemic to West Africa and generally causes less severe infections.
- **Global Outbreak**: The global outbreak of mpox in 2022-2023 affected over 118 countries, prompting the WHO to declare it a public health emergency.
- **Causes**: It is a painful rash, enlarged lymph nodes and fever. Most people fully recover, but some get very sick.
- **Transmission**: Person-to-person transmission of mpox can occur through direct contact with infectious skin or other lesions such as in the mouth or on genitals.
- **Symptoms**: It usually begin within a week but can start 1–21 days after exposure. Symptoms typically last 2–4 weeks but may last longer in someone with a weakened immune system.
- **Treatment**: Getting an mpox vaccine can help prevent infection.
- **Vaccines**: Three vaccines, initially developed for smallpox, have been approved for mpox prevention: MVA-BN, LC16, and OrthopoxVac.

BUSINESS STANDARD

Page 4

FPI investment limit in OIS mkt under review

ANJALI KUMARI
Mumbai, 8 August

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been reviewing the investment limit for foreign investors in the overnight index swap (OIS) market, Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra said in the post-monetary policy press conference on Thursday.

As of now, foreign investors have utilised 96 per cent of the ₹350 crore limit allocated for OIS transactions, nearing the maximum threshold.

The OIS market, which is a derivative market for the government bond market, allows investors to hedge against interest rate fluctuations.

"What the deputy governor said was right, that it will lead to more demand in the 5-year and 10-year segment. The OIS limit is also under review, I guess they will raise it because they want all the business to be on-shore. But the issue is that once the rules are established, they shouldn't be kept changing because it creates some amount of uncertainty," said Vikas Goel, managing director (MD) and chief executive officer (CEO), PNB Gilts.



REACHING SATURATION

- The OIS market allows investors to hedge against interest rate fluctuations
- Foreign investors have utilised 96% of the ₹350 crore limit for OIS transactions
- Since the inclusion of Indian bonds in JPMorgan emerging market debt index, trading activities picked up in the segment

Patra said excluding the new 14-year and 30-year government bonds from the Fully Accessible Route (FAR) will likely boost demand for 5-year to 10-year bonds.

This increased demand will enhance liquidity, improve price discovery, and reduce transaction costs as the volume of debt rises.

"Our hope is that concentrating them into this 5/10-year segment will actually make it more liquid and better price discovery will occur, and transaction costs will fall as debt increases," said Patra.

OVERNIGHT INDEX SWAP

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Economy)

Context: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is currently reviewing the investment limit for foreign investors in the overnight index swap (OIS) market. This move aims to adjust regulatory frameworks and enhance market dynamics.

Overnight Index Swap

- **Definition**: An OIS is a derivative instrument where returns from a fixed rate asset are exchanged for a pre-determined published index of a daily overnight reference rate over an agreed period.
- **Purpose**: The primary goal of an OIS is to manage interest rate risk, particularly fluctuations in the overnight lending rate.
  - **Liquidity Indicator:** The OIS-Libor credit spread reflects system liquidity.
  - **Wide Spread**: A wider spread indicates tightening liquidity in the system.
  - **Narrow Spread:** A narrower spread suggests better liquidity in the system.
- **Rate Calculation**: The OIS rate is calculated daily based on the average interest rate paid by institutions for overnight loans.
- **OIS Work**
  - **Functionality**: Financial institutions use OIS to swap interest rates without refinancing or altering the terms of their existing loans.
  - **Swap Mechanism**: In an OIS, one institution swaps a floating overnight interest rate, while the other swaps a fixed short-term rate. At the end of the agreement, the institution paying less interest compensates the other.

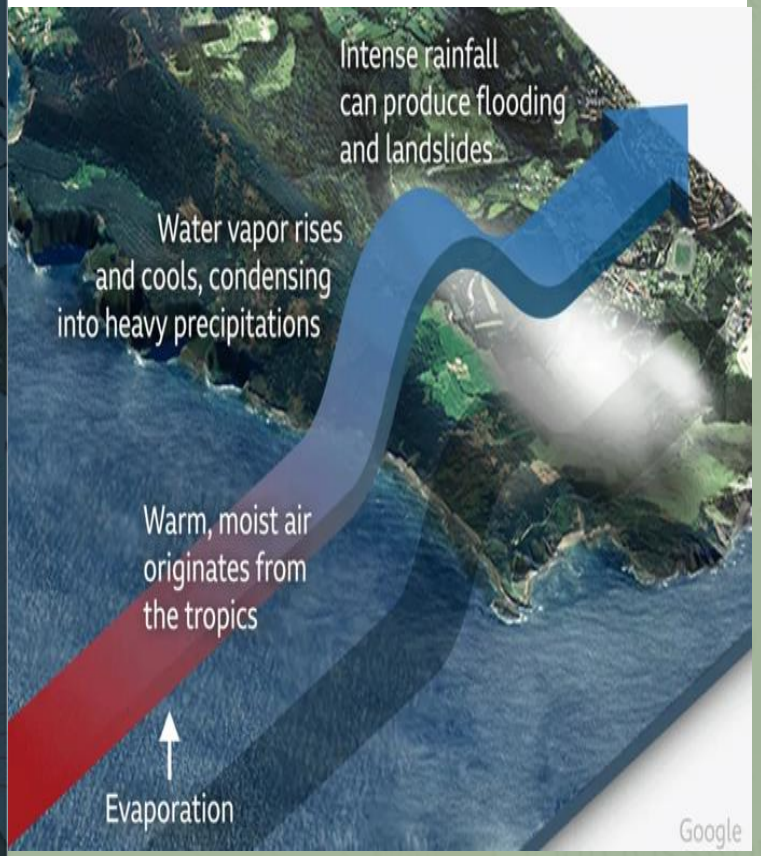
BBC

Aug 8

FLYING RIVERS

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 – Geography)

The 'flying rivers' causing devastating floods in India



Context: The warming of the Indian Ocean is fueling atmospheric rivers, leading to severe flooding across India.

Flying Rivers(FRs)

- **Definition**: Flying rivers, also known as atmospheric rivers (ARs), are long, narrow regions in the atmosphere that transport most of the water vapor outside of the tropics.
- **Dimensions**: An average FR measures about 2,000 km in length, 500 km in width, and nearly 3 km in depth.
- **Role in Extratropical Cyclones:** FRs are part of a larger system of extratropical cyclones that move heat and moisture from the tropics towards the poles.
- **Location:** FRs are typically situated within the low-level jet, a region of strong winds in the lower atmosphere.
- **Major Freshwater Transport Mechanisms:** These are the largest transport mechanisms of freshwater on Earth, accounting for 90% of the moisture transfer from the tropics to the poles.
- **Features:**
  - Several thousand kilometers long and only a few hundred kilometers wide.
  - Single one can carry a greater flux of water than Earth's largest river, the Amazon Rive.
- **Formation:**
  - These are usually begin over tropical regions. Warm temperatures cause ocean water to evaporate and rise into the atmosphere. Strong winds help to carry the water vapor through the atmosphere.
  - As atmospheric rivers move over land, the water vapor rises up farther into the atmosphere. It then cools into water droplets, which fall as precipitation.
- **Impact on India**: Seven of India's ten most severe monsoon floods between 1985 and 2020 were linked to ARs. Additionally, increased fog and haze in the Indo-Gangetic Plains have been connected to rising pollution and water vapor due to ARs.
- **Effects on Snow Albedo**: Declining snow albedo in the Hindukush-Karakoram-Himalayan mountain range is attributed to accelerated snow melting from increased rainfall.

THE HINDU Page 15

WAQF (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Polity)



Waqf goes to JPC after an acrimonious debate in Lok Sabha

Opposition calls the draft legislation 'draconian' and an attack on the Constitution; Minority Affairs Minister says Modi govt. aims to bring in reforms to give justice to ordinary Muslims as Waqf Boards have been captured by a handful of people

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, has been referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on Thursday after Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju introduced it in the Lok Sabha, amid strong objections from the Opposition parties which alleged that the legislation was targeted at the Muslim community.

The decision to send it to a JPC came after a two-hour debate in the Lok Sabha. Speaker Om Birla informed the House that he would constitute the committee after consulting the leaders of all parties.

Opposition parties called the proposed amendments to the Waqf law "an attack on the Constitution, interfering with religious matters and against the spirit of federalism". Leading the charge, senior Congress leader K.C. Venugopal called it a "draconian" Bill, and said it was brought with an eye on the Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Haryana.

Defending the Bill, Mr. Rijiju said it merely sought to implement reforms suggested by committees set up by the previous Congress government. Neither were any rights being snatched nor was religious freedom being curtailed, he said.

"Because you [Congress] couldn't do it, we had to bring these amendments... Some people have captured Waqf Boards, and this Bill has been brought to give justice to ordinary Muslims," the Minister said, adding that many leaders in the Opposition had privately told him that State Waqf Boards had turned into a mafia.

Though BJP allies such as the Janata Dal (United), the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Shiv Sena (Shinde) supported the Bill on the grounds of transparency and reform, sources said some of them had reservations. TDP MP G.M. Harish Balayogi said his party did not have a problem if the Bill was sent to a Select Committee to "remove misconceptions".

JD(U) leader and Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh, however, argued that the Opposition was mixing up the issue of institutions such as Waqf Boards with a place of worship such as a mosque.

The introduction of the Bill also witnessed a spat between Home Minister Amit Shah and Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav after Mr. Yadav said the government was proposing to curtail the powers of the Speaker but the Opposition would fight for the Chair. "This is an insult to the Chair. The rights of the Speaker do not belong to the Opposition, but to the whole House. *Akhilesh ji is tarah ki golmol ki baat aap nahi kar sakte* [Akhilesh ji you can't speak in a roundabout way]. You are not the protector of the Speaker's rights," Mr. Shah said.

War of words: Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Samajwadi Party MP Akhilesh Yadav in a heated exchange during a discussion on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha on Thursday. ANI

Far-reaching changes

The Waqf Bill seeks to make far-reaching changes to the 1995 law that governs Waqf Boards. The Bill proposes the inclusion of two Muslim women and two non-Muslim members on the Board, and inserts a new Section to prevent the wrongful declaration of a property as "Waqf". It introduces the District Collector as an arbiter to decide if a property is a Waqf or government land. In the 1995 Act, such decisions are made by the Waqf tribunal.

"This Bill is an attack on the faith and freedom of religion. You are going for Muslims, next you will go for Christians, Jains, Parsis," Mr. Venugopal said.

Mr. Yadav argued that the Bill was being introduced to appease the BJP's hardcore supporters. "What is the point of including non-Muslims in Waqf Boards when this is not done in other religious bodies," he asked.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader Kanimozhi said, "Will it be possible for a Muslim or a Christian to be part of a Board which manages a Hindu temple? No. Then why should somebody who doesn't believe in a particular religion have the right to make decisions on behalf of that religion?"

Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar MP Supriya Sule said, "Look at what is happening in Bangladesh, there is so much pain. It is the moral duty of a country to protect minorities."

Arguing that the Bill is an attack on the Basic Structure of the Constitution as it "violates" the principle of judicial independence and separation of powers, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen chief Asaduddin Owaisi said, "You are enemies of Muslims and this Bill is evidence of that."

Mr. Rijiju said the Modi government had been forced to "undertake reforms" because the Congress did not do so. He cited the case of a village in Tamil Nadu being declared Waqf land to underline the need for reforms in the law.

He said there was no provision to challenge or review the order of the Waqf tribunal but now that was being changed to allow appeals to higher courts.

"In our country, no law can be a super law and that can't be above the Constitution. However, in the 1995 Waqf Act, there are provisions that are above the provisions in the Constitution. Shouldn't that be changed?" he asked.

In the Lok Sabha, Mr. Rijiju had also introduced a Bill to repeal the Mussalman Wakf Act, 1923 to repeal a colonial-era law that was no longer in force for effective management of Waqf property.

In the Rajya Sabha, the Opposition objected to the withdrawing of the Waqf Properties (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Bill of 2014. CPI(M) MP John Brittas and Indian Union Muslim League MP Abdul Wahab gave notices against Mr. Rijiju's motion to withdraw the Bill to "provide for the eviction of unauthorised occupants from waqf properties". Mr. Brittas said the Bill would serve to grab waqf properties and the Centre's intention was to create polarisation. Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar put both the notices to vote and the Upper House rejected it by a voice vote.

Context: The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduced by the Union Minority Affairs Minister in the Lok Sabha, has been sent to a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) following strong opposition, with critics alleging it targets the Muslim community.

Waqf

- **About**: It refers to any property dedicated solely for religious or charitable purposes under Islamic law. Once a property is declared waqf, it becomes irrevocable.
- **Status:** Around 30 waqf boards in the country control properties spread over 9 lakh acres, with an estimated value of Rs 1.2 lakh crore. This makes the waqf boards the third-largest owner of land in India after the Railways and Defence Ministry.

Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024

- **Representation**: The bill proposes the establishment of a Central Waqf Council and state Waqf Boards, which will include representation of Muslim women and non-Muslims.
- **Mandatory Representation of Women**: Two women will be appointed to all state boards and the central council as per the bill.
- **District Collector as Arbiter**: The bill aims to designate the District Collector as the authority to determine whether a property is Waqf property or government land, replacing the Waqf Tribunal's role from the 1995 Act.
- **Separate Board for Bohras and Aghakhanis:** The bill proposes the creation of a separate Board of Auqaf for the Boharas and Aghakhanis.
- **Representation of Various Muslim Communities**: The draft law ensures representation of Shias, Sunnis, Bohras, and Agakhanis in the Waqf Boards.
- **Audit Powers to the Centre:** The legislation provides the Centre with the authority to direct the audit of any Waqf by an auditor appointed by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.
- **Requirement of a Valid Waqfnama**: The bill mandates the need for a valid waqfnama (a deed or document expressing the intention to donate a property), replacing the existing law that allows property to be given as Waqf through an oral agreement.

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GURU GHASIDAS-TAMOR PINGLA TIGER RESERVE

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

Chhattisgarh govt announces a new tiger reserve, fourth in the state

Context: The Chhattisgarh government has announced the establishment of a new tiger reserve, named Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve.

Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve

- **Location**: It is located in the northern part of the state Chhattisgarh, bordering Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand.
- **Area**: It is spread across the combined areas of the Guru Ghasidas National Park and Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary in Chhattisgarh.
- **Fauna:** This area is home to various mammal species, including tigers, leopards, hyenas, jackals, wolves, sloth bears, barking deer, chinkara, and chital.
- **Rivers**: It serves as the origin of significant rivers such as Hasdeo Gopad and Baranga and a catchment area for rivers like Neur, Bijadhur, Banas, Rehand, and numerous smaller rivers and rivulets.
- **Reserve Status**: This will be the fourth Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh, after the Udanti-Sitanadi, Achanakmar, and Indravati Reserves.
- **Guru Ghasidas National Park**: It connects Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh and provides a corridor for tigers to move between the Bandhavgarh and Palamau Tiger Reserves.
- **Historical Context:** It was originally part of the Sanjay Dubri National Park; Guru Ghasidas Park was created as a separate entity in Chhattisgarh's Sarguja region after the formation of the state in 2001.

Guru Ghasidas: He was the Guru of the **Satnam Dharma**, a Satnami Saint and a great Scholar from Chhattisgarh in the early 19th century. It was Guru Ghasidas who started preaching in a deep forested part of Chhattisgarh.

- He is the **founder of the Satnami community** in Chhattisgarh and also Satnam religion.
- During his lifetime, the political atmosphere in India was one of exploitation. Ghasidas experienced the evils of the caste system in the early age, which helped him to understand the social dynamics in a caste-ridden society and rejecting social inequality.

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