

Current Affairs of the Day

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SC to study anti-conversion laws of Uttarakhand and U.P.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to examine the constitutional validity of laws enacted by States, such as Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, that criminalise religious conversion via marriage and mandate prior official clearance before marrying into another faith.

Highlights:

1. A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, however, did not stay the implementation of the Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020 and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018, despite fervent pleas by petitioners that “rampaging mobs are lifting off people in the middle of wedding ceremonies,” buoyed by the enactment of the laws.
2. What we have here is multiple States like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh enacting these laws which are absolutely horrifying. They require prior permission to marry.
3. The laws concerned violation of the fundamental rights of dignity and liberty enshrined under Article 21. They had been enacted despite a series of judgments by the Supreme Court, including in the Hadiya case, that right to marry a person of one’s choice was part of an adult’s privacy.
4. Under the laws, a person marrying into another faith should give a month’s prior notice to the authorities. There will be an inquiry. The provisions are oppressive. The laws were against public policy and society at large.
5. A series of Supreme Court verdicts underline that the choice of a life partner, whether by marriage or outside it, was part of an individual’s “personhood and identity”.



Learn Through Graphics: All sections of the law mock Fundamental Rights

Steps to a controversy

The Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, prescribes the procedure to be followed for religious conversion:

- The individual who wants to convert and those who perform such conversions have to submit a notice to the District Magistrate, **60 days and a month in advance**, respectively

- District Magistrate will institute a **police inquiry**

- Once conversion takes place, the person should **submit a declaration** within

60 days. The notice will be publicly exhibited for any objections

- The converted person has to **appear before the DM** and confirm his/her identity and details

- Violations will attract punishment of **six months to three years' imprisonment** for the person who has converted and one to five years

for the convertor

- The burden of proof that a conversion did not happen through **force, fraud or marriage** rests on the person who facilitated it

- **Marriages done for the sole purpose of religious conversion are liable to be declared void**

- All offences under the U.P. law are **non-bailable**

China surging ahead, says NITI Aayog

At a meeting to discuss the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy, trade flows and financial markets, NITI Aayog said China continued to outstrip India and, in fact, had managed to narrow the gap with the U.S. in the post-pandemic scenario. The officials did not give any specific details about the current economic state of India.

Highlights:

1. A presentation by NITI Aayog said the global economy was at the same stage as it was in 1918 after the First World War.
2. The discussion probed whether COVID-19 had proved to be an inflexion point in the global supply chain and if China would still continue to be the factory of the world.
3. The officials said China had been closing the gap between it and the U.S. This could very well be a flashpoint between the two big economies of the world. China had readjusted faster than the other economies in the post-COVID-19 world.



China denies entry to WHO experts

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said it was “very disappointed” that China had not allowed a team of international experts to go ahead with a visit to study the origins of COVID-19 that was planned for this week.

Highlights:

1. Beijing on Wednesday defended its decision saying that the issue of origin-tracing was “very complicated”. To ensure the work of the international expert team in China goes smoothly, we have to carry out necessary procedures and make relevant arrangements.
2. Chinese authorities have suggested they will exert control over how much access international scientists will have and have also controlled research within China on the origins.
3. In recent weeks, the State media in China has increasingly backed a narrative suggesting the virus came to China from elsewhere.

Services PMI signals expansion slowing, businesses halt hiring

India’s services sector activity expanded at a slower pace in December as growth in sales eased to a three-month low and staff hiring came to a halt amid weak business optimism, a monthly survey showed on Wednesday.

Highlights:

1. IHS Markit’s seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index fell to 52.3 in December, from 53.7 in November.
2. Global COVID-19 restrictions, particularly travel bans, reportedly restricted international demand for Indian services at the end of 2020. New export business decreased sharply, but at the slowest pace since March.
3. Given the damaging impact of the pandemic on the service economy, some companies are facing financial difficulties, which is preventing staff hiring. Input cost inflation was the strongest since February.

Background:

1. The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) is an index of the prevailing direction of economic trends in the manufacturing and service sectors. It consists of a diffusion index that summarizes whether market conditions, as viewed by purchasing managers, are expanding, staying the same, or contracting. The



purpose of the PMI is to provide information about current and future business conditions to company decision-makers, analysts, and investors.

2. The headline PMI is a number from 0 to 100. A PMI above 50 represents an expansion when compared with the previous month. A PMI reading under 50 represents a contraction, and a reading at 50 indicates no change. The further away from 50 the greater the level of change.

Crops grown in Bengaluru have high heavy metal content: Study

Highlights:

1. Crops grown in and around Bengaluru, using water from some of the city's lakes, were found to have high levels of toxic heavy metals, according to a study.
2. The study analysed crops such as coriander, spinach, radish and amaranth grown on soil using the water of the lakes of Bengaluru. They were found to have heavy levels of chromium, nickel, cadmium and lead.
3. The study noted that the water of the lakes was contaminated with sewage and industrial effluents from a number of factories and units operating in and around the city.
4. The high concentration of such heavy metals could have catastrophic consequences on human health. The only solution was to treat the wastewater flowing into the lakes at its source.

Tribal ministry panels draft fresh guidelines for community forest, habitat rights

Highlights:

1. Gram Sabhas will have more power in the management of community forest rights (CFR) and habitat rights, according to new guidelines drafted by the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) in December 2020.
2. An increased representation of various user groups such as graziers, minor forest produce collectors, women and other groups dependent on forests including hamlets also find mention in the two drafts.
3. The guidelines for CFR are aimed at creating community forests resource management committee as an executive arm of the Gram Sabha in managing CFR areas.

India bore the maximum brunt of extreme weather events in 2020: Report

Highlights:

1. Floods and Cyclone Amphan in India accounted for maximum loss of lives globally due to climate change-triggered events in 2020.
2. The cyclone, which ravaged the Sunderbans on the southern fringe of West Bengal and the hinterland including Kolkata in May 2020, led to “the biggest displacement” in the world in 2020 caused by a natural calamity.
3. These were the findings of an international report Counting the cost 2020: A year of climate breakdown released December 27, 2020. It was released by Christian aid, relief and humanitarian agency based in London.

UP, Bihar hit hardest by adverse weather in 2020

More than 350 deaths were reported from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar each in 2020, mainly due to thunderstorms, lightning and cold wave events, according to the India Meteorological Department’s (IMD) Statement on Climate of India during 2020.

Highlights:

1. Heavy rainfall and flood-related incidents reportedly claimed more than 600 lives in different parts of the country during pre-monsoon, monsoon and post-monsoon seasons.
2. Thunderstorm and lightning caused 815 deaths in 2020 across the country. Most of them were reported from: Bihar (280), Uttar Pradesh (220), Jharkhand (122), Madhya Pradesh (72), Maharashtra (23) and Andhra Pradesh (20).
3. Cold wave conditions mainly prevailed over central parts the country, especially in January, killing at least 150. Of these, 88 were reported from Uttar Pradesh alone; 45 from Bihar on January 1 alone.
4. As many as five cyclones formed over the North Indian Ocean in 2020: Super cyclonic storm Amphan, very severe cyclonic storms Nivar and Gati, severe cyclonic storm Nisarga and cyclonic storm Burevi. Of these, Nisarga and Gati formed over the Arabian Sea; the remaining three formed over the Bay of Bengal.

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