



Current Affairs of the Day

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Serious issue if 3 cr. ration cards were cancelled, says SC

The Supreme Court said it was a “very serious” matter if the Centre had really cancelled around three crore ration cards, even those of tribal people and the poor, solely because they could not be biometrically linked with Aadhaar.

Technological issues

1. “The insistence on Aadhaar and biometric authentication had led to the cancellation of nearly four crore ration cards in the country, according to the Union of India. The Union of India casually gives an explanation that these cancelled cards were bogus.”
2. “The real reason is that the technological system based on iris identification, thumbprints, non-possession of Aadhaar, non-functioning of the Internet in rural and remote areas, etc., led to large scale cancellation of ration cards, without notice to the family concerned,” said a report submitted by the petitioner.

The ration card symbolises the Right to food

1. Right to food, which the ration card symbolised, cannot be curbed or cancelled because of lack of Aadhaar.
2. The government’s continued emphasis on Aadhaar was unfortunate as the Supreme Court had laid down in clear terms that “no insistence on Aadhaar can be done for statutory entitlements”.
3. “Tribals either do not have Aadhaar cards or the identification does not work in tribal and rural areas. Because of this reliance on Aadhaar cards three crore cards are gone.
4. “This cruel exercise deprived millions of Indians living below the poverty line of food and led to starvation deaths in Jharkhand, U.P., Odisha, Karnataka, M.P., Maharashtra, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and other States,” the petitioner’s side said in a report prepared after going through the responses obtained from the States.

The National Food Security Act

1. Issuance of ration card was not dependent on the Aadhaar card the government replied. Alternative mechanisms were in place. Besides, the issuance of ration cards was primarily the responsibility of the State governments.



2. The petitioners had come directly to the apex court without raising their issue with the grievance redressal mechanism under the National Food Security Act.
3. However, not a single State has appointed independent nodal officers or district grievance redressal officers under the Act.
4. “All the States have mechanically granted additional designations to existing officers. In many cases, the officers given additional designations are from the Food Supply Department, and they are the main persons responsible for corruption in the food distribution system,” the report said.
5. It referred to the directions imposed by the Supreme Court in the Swaraj Abhiyan cases on the implementation of the Food Security Act, which included social audits, framing of rules and setting up vigilance committees.

The Hunger Watch Report of the Right to Food Campaign in 2020 characterised the hunger situation in India as “grave”. India ranks 94 out of 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2020 and is in the ‘Serious Hunger Category’.

‘No decision on national NRIC till now’

The Union government informed the Rajya Sabha that “till now”, it had not taken any decision to prepare the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) at the national level.

Highlights:

1. However, the Home Ministry filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court that the NRC was a “necessary exercise for any sovereign country for mere identification of citizens from non-citizens”.
2. In 2018, before the passage of the CAA, the government had informed the Rajya Sabha that “as per the provisions contained in Rule 3 of the Citizenship Rules 2003 framed under the Citizenship Act, 1955, the Registrar General of Citizen Registration shall establish and maintain the National Register of Indian Citizens and prepare the Population Register”.
3. Though the government is now denying that the NRC is on the cards, the Citizenship Rules framed in the year 2003 say that NPR is the first step towards the compilation of NRC.



4. NPR was first collected in 2010 and then updated in 2015; it already has a database of 119 crore residents. The rules have not been amended or scrapped.
5. The CAA passed by the Parliament on December 11, 2019, allows citizenship on basis of religion to six undocumented communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who entered India on or before December 31, 2014.
6. There are apprehensions and fear that the CAA, followed by a countrywide NRC, will benefit non-Muslims excluded from the proposed citizens' register, while excluded Muslims will have to prove their citizenship.
7. An NRC has been compiled in the State of Assam on the directions of the Supreme Court and more than 19 lakh of the 3.29 crore applicants in Assam were left out of the final register.

Enact law to make Facebook, Google pay for news, says MP

India should take a cue from Australia and enact a law to make tech giants such as Facebook and Google pay local publishers of news content, senior BJP leader demanded in the Rajya Sabha.

Highlights:

1. The government must make Google, Facebook and YouTube pay to print and news channels for the news content they are using freely.
2. The way they have notified Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code to regulate social media and OTT platforms, they should enact a law on the pattern of Australian Code so that we can compel Google to share its revenue with traditional media.
3. The print and news broadcast media, whose content is freely available on platforms run by the tech giants, were passing through their worst phase in recent history as advertisements have shifted to tech platforms.
4. The traditional news media make heavy investments employing anchors, journalists and reporters who gather information, verify it and deliver credible news. But advertisement, which is their main source of revenue, has in the past few years shifted away from them.
5. Advertising earnings are going to these tech giants (and) because of this print media, news channels are passing through a financial crisis.



Protected Area in News: Similipal Tiger Reserve

Similipal Tiger Reserve needs to be saved from forest fires. Here's how much it is worth

The Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Odisha has been in news due to forest fires that are currently dotting the area. The region is a huge source of environmental services to humans.

Highlights:

1. Similipal National Park is a national park and a tiger reserve in the Mayurbhanj district in the Indian state of Odisha covering 2,750 km² (1,060 sq mi).
2. It is part of the Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve, which includes three protected areas — Similipal Tiger Reserve, Hadagarh Wildlife Sanctuary with 191.06 km² (73.77 sq mi) and Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary with 272.75 km² (105.31 sq mi). The Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve itself lies within Similipal Biosphere.
3. Similipal National Park derives its name from the abundance of red silk cotton trees growing in the area. It is the 7th largest national park in India.
4. The park is home to the Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, gaur, and chausingha, along with some of the beautiful waterfalls like Joranda and Barehipani Falls.
5. This protected area has been part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves since 2009.