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Daily News Discussion (DND)

3rd March 2021

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1. Polity

1.1. DU to issue digital degrees to 2017-19 graduates soon

About

- In a bid to clear the backlog and facilitate students in receiving their degrees, Delhi University is expected to issue digital certificates to those who have graduated between 2017 and 2019 within one month
- Academic records and marksheets of those who have graduated since 2017 have already been transferred to the digilocker database, senior DU officials said.

DigiLocker

- DigiLocker is a flagship initiative of MeitY under Digital India programme.
- This is government's effort to create an electronic version of documents, which can be easily verified and stored in printable format.
- Apart from e-documents, DigiLocker can store a Uniform Resource Identifier (URI) link of e-documents issued by various issuer departments

key stakeholders in the DigiLocker system

- Issuer: Entity issuing e-documents to individuals in a standard format and making them electronically available e.g. CBSE, Registrar Office, Income Tax department, etc.
- Requester: Entity requesting secure access to a particular e-document stored within a repository (e.g. University, Passport Office, Regional Transport Office, etc.)
- Resident: An individual who uses the Digital Locker service based on Aadhaar number.

The main technology components of the DigiLocker system are

- Repository: Collection of e-documents that is exposed via standard APIs for secure, real-time access.
- Access Gateway: Secure online mechanism for requesters to access e-documents from various repositories in real-time using URI (Uniform Resource Indicator).
- DigiLocker Portal: Dedicated cloud based personal storage space, linked to each resident's Aadhaar for storing e-documents, or URIs of e-documents.

The platform has the following benefits

- Citizens can access their digital documents anytime, anywhere and share it online. This is convenient and time saving.
- It reduces the administrative overhead of Government departments by minimizing the use of paper.
- Digital Locker makes it easier to validate the authenticity of documents as they are issued directly by the registered issuers.
- Self-uploaded documents can be digitally signed using the eSign facility (which is similar to the process of self-attestation).

1.2.Election Commission cuts notice period for new political parties

About

- The Election Commission on Tuesday said it had reduced the public notice period for new political parties seeking registration from 30 days to seven days due to the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic
- Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (Registration of political parties)
 - ✓ According to guidelines, the applicants are supposed to publish the proposed name of their party in two national and local daily newspapers each on two days, seeking objections, if any, within 30 days.
- To be eligible for a 'National Political Party of India,' the Election Commission has set the following criteria:
 - ✓ If it secures six per cent of valid votes polled in any four or more states at a general election to the Lok Sabha or to the legislative assembly; and, in addition, it wins four seats in the Lok Sabha from any state or states; or
 - ✓ If it wins two per cent of seats in the Lok Sabha at a general election; and these candidates are elected from three states; or
 - ✓ If it is recognised as a state party in four states

2019 Update

- The National People's Party (NPP) has been recognized as the eighth national party by the Election Commission of India, making it the first regional party of the north-east to be accorded the status
- To be eligible for a 'State Political Party,' the Election Commission has set the following criteria
 - ✓ It secures at least six percent of the valid votes polled in the State at a general election, either to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned; and
 - ✓ In addition, it wins at least two seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned. OR
 - ✓ It wins at least three percent (3%) of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State, or at least three seats in the Assembly, whichever is more.

Benefits

- Recognised 'State' and 'National' parties need only one proposer for filing the nomination and are also entitled for two sets of electoral rolls free of cost at the time of revision of rolls and their candidates get one copy of electoral roll free of cost during General Elections.
- They also get broadcast/telecast facilities over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections.
- If a party is recognised as a State Party, it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it in the State in which it is so recognised, and
- if a party is recognised as a 'National Party' it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it throughout India.

- The travel expenses of star campaigners are not to be accounted for in the election expense accounts of candidates of their party.

Election commission of India

- Since its inception in 1950 and till 15 October 1989, the election commission was as a one-member body with only the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) as its sole member.
- On 16 October 1989, the voting age was changed from 21 to 18 years. So, two more election commissioners were appointed by the president in order to cope with the increased work of the election commission.
- Since then, the Election Commission was a multi-member body which consisted of 3 election commissioners.
- Later on, the two posts of election commissioners were eliminated in January 1990 and the Election Commission was reverted to the previous position.
- This was repeated again later in October 1993 when the president appointed two more election commissioners. Since then, the Election Commission functions as a multi-member body comprising of 3 commissioners.
- The chief and the two other election commissioners have the same powers and emoluments including salaries, which are the same as a Supreme Court judge
- In case of difference of opinion amongst the Chief Election Commissioner and/or two other election commissioners, the matter is decided by the Commission by a majority
- The office is held by them for a term of 6 years or until they attain 65 years, whichever happens first. They can also be removed or can resign at any time before the expiry of their term.

1.3.Delhi riots: court takes cognisance of sedition charge against 18 people

About

- A Delhi court on Tuesday took cognisance of sedition charge against 18 persons, including former JNU students – Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, Devangana Kalita, and Natasha Narwal – and others in connection with the north-east Delhi riots

About Sedition law

- Sedition laws were enacted in 17th century England when lawmakers believed that only good opinions of the government should survive, as bad opinions were detrimental to the government and monarchy.
- The law was originally drafted in 1837 by Thomas Macaulay, the British historian-politician, but was inexplicably omitted when the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was enacted in 1860.
- Section 124A was inserted in 1870 by an amendment introduced by Sir James Stephen when it felt the need for a specific section to deal with the offence.

Sedition Law Today

- Sedition is a crime under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Section 124A IPC

- It defines sedition as an offence committed when "any person by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in India".
- Disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity. However, comments without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, will not constitute an offence under this section.

Punishment for the Offence of Sedition

- Sedition is a non-bailable offence. Punishment under the Section 124A ranges from imprisonment up to three years to a life term, to which fine may be added.
- A person charged under this law is barred from a government job.
- They have to live without their passport and must produce themselves in the court at all times as and when required.
- British used Sedition law to convict and sentence freedom fighters.
 - ✓ It was first used to prosecute Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1897.
 - ✓ Mahatma Gandhi, too, was later tried for sedition for his articles in Young India

Major Supreme Court Decisions on Sedition Law:

- The SC highlighted debates over sedition in 1950 in its decisions in Brij Bhushan vs the State of Delhi and Romesh Thappar vs the State of Madras.
 - ✓ In these cases, the court held that a law which restricted speech on the ground that it would disturb public order was unconstitutional.
 - ✓ It also held that disturbing the public order will mean nothing less than endangering the foundations of the State or threatening its overthrow.
 - ✓ Thus, these decisions prompted the First Constitution Amendment, where Article 19 (2) was rewritten to replace "undermining the security of the State" with "in the interest of public order".
- In 1962, the SC decided on the constitutionality of Section 124A in Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar.
 - ✓ It upheld the constitutionality of sedition, but limited its application to "acts involving intention or tendency to create disorder, or disturbance of law and order, or incitement to violence".
 - ✓ It distinguished these from "very strong speech" or the use of "vigorous words" strongly critical of the government.
- In 1995, the SC, in Balwant Singh vs State of Punjab, held that mere sloganeering which evoked no public response did not amount to sedition.

Arguments in Support of Section 124A

- Section 124A of the IPC has its utility in combating anti-national, secessionist and terrorist elements.

- It protects the elected government from attempts to overthrow the government with violence and illegal means. The continued existence of the government established by law is an essential condition of the stability of the State.
- If contempt of court invites penal action, contempt of government should also attract punishment.
- Many districts in different states face a maoist insurgency and rebel groups virtually run a parallel administration. These groups openly advocate the overthrow of the state government by revolution.
- Against this backdrop, the abolition of Section 124A would be ill-advised merely because it has been wrongly invoked in some highly publicized cases.

Arguments against Section 124A

- Section 124A is a relic of colonial legacy and unsuited in a democracy. It is a constraint on the legitimate exercise of constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech and expression.
- Dissent and criticism of the government are essential ingredients of robust public debate in a vibrant democracy. They should not be constructed as sedition.
- Right to question, criticize and change rulers is very fundamental to the idea of democracy.
- The British, who introduced sedition to oppress Indians, have themselves abolished the law in their country. There is no reason why India should not abolish this section.
- The terms used under Section 124A like 'disaffection' are vague and subject to different interpretations to the whims and fancies of the investigating officers.
- IPC and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act 2019 have provisions that penalize "disrupting the public order" or "overthrowing the government with violence and illegal means". These are sufficient for protecting national integrity. There is no need for Section 124A.
- The sedition law is being misused as a tool to persecute political dissent. A wide and concentrated executive discretion is inbuilt into it which permits the blatant abuse.
- In 1979, India ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which sets forth internationally recognized standards for the protection of freedom of expression. However, misuse of sedition and arbitrary slapping of charges are inconsistent with India's international commitments.

Conclusion

- Freedom of Speech and Expression is a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a).
- Article 19(2) imposed reasonable restrictions. Moreover, the first Amendment to the Constitution on June 18, 1951, imposed further restrictions.
- To call for the overthrow of a stale and fearful social system is not sedition.
- The argument used against the scrapping of the sedition law is that the Supreme Court has repeatedly observed that the mere possibility of misuse of a provision does not per se invalidate the legislation.
- Democracy has no meaning without freedoms and sedition as interpreted and applied by the police and governments is a negation of it.



- Hence, before the law loses its potency, the Supreme Court, being the protector of the fundamental rights of the citizens has to step in and evaluate the law.
- To uphold the idea of democracy that the founders of the Constitution envisioned, India should deliberately avoid using the word sedition from its statute books and everyday vocabulary. Hoping that reason prevails over politics when it comes to freedom.

2. Economy

2.1.Revising food security act: NITI Aayog

About

- The NITI Aayog recently circulated a discussion paper on proposed revision on NFSA 2013 .
- recommended reducing the rural and urban coverage under the NFSA 60% and 40% respectively.
- Proposed revision of beneficiaries as according to latest population (currently done through census 2011)

Past schemes

- Targeted Public Distribution System-1997-
 - ✓ Panchayats, Self-help Groups, Co-operatives, Individuals are given 'license' to open fair price shops /
- Antyodaya Anna Yojana (2000)
 - ✓ to give 35 kg subsidized grains per poorest of poor family per month.
- National Food Security Act 2013
 - ✓ converted above scheme entitlements into 'legal rights'
 - ✓ It's a Central Sector Scheme
 - ✓ States shortlist the beneficiaries & sell them food-grains
 - ✓ 75% rural population is covered
 - ✓ 50% urban population is covered.
- Pregnant and lactating mothers (upto 6 months)
 - ✓ Take home ration" of 600 Calories
 - ✓ Entitled to a free meal at the local Anganwadi (including their 0-6 years child)
 - ✓ Maternity benefits of min.₹6,000, in instalments
- 6-14 aged children entitled to one free hot meal or 'take home rations' in Govt schools
 - ✓ Both BPL and (slightly) above poverty line (APL) families are covered
 - ✓ If State / UT doesn't want may do Direct Benefit Transfer Chandigarh, Puducherry,
 - ✓ If State / UT can't provide food within stipulated time / quantity then they've to pay food security allowance
 - ✓ States required to form State Food Commissions for monitoring / implementation.
 - ✓ The eldest woman in the household (aged 18/>) shall be considered the head of the household for issuing-ration card.
- Shanta Kumar committee (2015)

- ✓ Reduce the number of beneficiaries under the Food Security Act—from the current 67 per cent to 40 per cent.
- ✓ Stop bonuses on minimum support price (MSP) paid by states to farmers
- ✓ Allow private players to procure and store food grains.
- ✓ FCI should involve itself in full-fledged grains procurement only in those states which are poor in procurement.
- ✓ Abolishing levy rice: Under levy rice policy, government buys certain percentage of rice (varies from 25 to 75 per cent in states) from the mills compulsorily, which is called levy rice. Mills are allowed to sell only the remainder in the open market.
- ✓ Deregulate fertiliser sector and provide cash fertilizer subsidy of Rs 7,000 per hectare to farmers.
- ✓ outsource of stocking of grains

2.2.No TDS when Indian firms pay to use foreign software

About

- Recently Supreme Court on Tuesday held that tax deductible at source is not applicable to Indian companies for amounts paid to foreign software manufacturers and suppliers for use or re-sale of computer software through end-user licence agreements (EULA).
- Use or sale of computer software cannot be considered a payment of “royalty for the use of copyright in the computer software”.
- Payment of royalty is made only for exclusive use of copyright of a work.
- The computer software is sold in the form of a CD to an Indian buyer under a non-exclusive licence.
- The Indian buyer only receives the right to use the software. He does not get any copyright on the software. Hence, the amount paid for a computer software from a foreign manufacturer does not qualify as royalty for which tax should be deducted at the source.
- Example is the purchaser of a book or a CD/DVD, who becomes the owner of the physical article, but does not become the owner of the copyright inherent in the work, such copyright remaining exclusively with the owner.

About TDS

- TDS stands for tax deducted at source. As per the Income Tax Act, any company or person making a payment is required to deduct tax at source if the payment exceeds certain threshold limits. TDS has to be deducted at the rates prescribed by the tax department
- The company or person that makes the payment after deducting TDS is called a deductor and the company or person receiving the payment is called the deductee.
- It is the deductor’s responsibility to deduct TDS before making the payment and deposit the same with the government. TDS is deducted irrespective of the mode of payment—cash, cheque or credit—and is linked to the PAN of the deductor and deducted

Reason

- Usually, the person receiving income is liable to pay income tax. But the government with the help of Tax Deducted at Source provisions makes sure that income tax is deducted in advance from the payments being made by you.
- The recipient of income receives the net amount (after reducing TDS). The recipient will add the gross amount to his income and the amount of TDS is adjusted against his final tax liability. The recipient takes credit of the amount already deducted and paid on his behalf

2.3.Purchasing Manager's index

- Definition: PMI is an indicator of business activity- in the manufacturing and services sectors.
- There are three principal producers of Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) namely
 - ✓ Institute for Supply Management (ISM) – Established in 1915, Headquartered in Arizona, USA
 - ✓ Singapore Institute of Purchasing and Materials Management (SIPMM) – Established in 1972, Located in Singapore
 - ✓ IHS Markit Group – Located in London. IHS was established in 1959, Markit merged with IHS in 2016.

Calculation of PMI

- It is a survey-based measure that asks the respondents about changes in their perception about key business variables as compared with the previous month.
- It is calculated separately for the manufacturing and services sectors and then a composite index is constructed.
- The PMI is a number from 0 to 100.
 - ✓ PMI above 50 represents an expansion when compared to the previous month;
 - ✓ PMI under 50 represents a contraction, and
 - ✓ A reading at 50 indicates no change.
 - ✓ If PMI of the previous month is higher than the PMI of the current month it represents that the economy is contracting.
 - ✓ The PMI is usually released at the start of every month. It is, therefore, considered a good leading indicator of economic activity.
- Purpose: To provide information about current and future business conditions to company decision-makers, analysts, and investors. As the official data on industrial output, manufacturing and GDP growth comes much later, PMI helps to make informed decisions at an earlier stage.

3. Environment

3.1. How, after 170 years, a 'lost' bird was found in the jungles of Indonesian Borneo

About

- Between 1843 and 1848, a German naturalist by the name of Carl Schwaner, trekking through the dense equatorial forests of Borneo, came across a small brown-grey songbird with a distinctive broad, black eye-stripe running all the way around its head.
- On October 5, 2020, a solitary black-browed babbler (*Malacocincla perspicillata*) was spotted and captured alive by two local residents in southeastern Kalimantan, the part of Borneo that is administered by Indonesia.
- No Asian bird has been missing for as long as Indonesia's Black-browed Babbler *Malacocincla perspicillata*," the authors of the short paper wrote. ['Missing for 170 years – the rediscovery of Black-browed Babbler *Malacocincla perspicillata* on Borneo']

Past News

- New capital
 - ✓ Indonesia's President has announced that the country's capital (currently Jakarta) will be relocated to East Kalimantan province on Borneo island
- Reasons
 - ✓ Jakarta was built on a marsh, (already a few meters below sea level), thereby prone to be submerged.
 - ✓ Due to climate change, the water levels in the Java Sea are rising and weather events are becoming more extreme
 - ✓ Jakarta is among the world's fastest sinking city
- Concern
 - ✓ Kalimantan is one of the few places on earth where orangutans live in their natural habitat

4. Social issues

4.1. Gender bias at workplace: 4 in 5 women miss out on raise, promotion, finds survey

Key findings

- As many as 85 per cent women missed out on a raise, promotion or work offer because of their gender in India, according to LinkedIn Opportunity Index 2021.
- While 37 per cent of India's working women said they got fewer opportunities than men, only a quarter of the men surveyed agreed with this. More women (37 per cent) said they get paid less than men; 21 per cent men share the sentiment.
- More than half working women as well as working mothers in India expect organisations to offer reduced or part-time schedules (56 per cent) and robust maternity leaves and policies (55 per cent) to make the transition smoother.

5. Science and Technology

5.1. New sensor promises low-cost detection of methane emissions, leaks

About

- An accurate detection of very low concentrations of methane (CH₄) gas – a major contributor to global warming and air pollution – can be possible through a new sensor.
- The sensor uses an inter-band cascade light emitting device (ICLED) to detect methane concentrations as low as 0.1 parts per million.

ICLEDs

- are a new type of higher-power LED that emit light at mid-infrared (IR) wavelengths, which can be used to measure quantity of several chemicals.
- These sensors can be used to better understand methane emissions from livestock and dairy farms and enable a more accurate monitoring of the climate crisis.
- The new sensor measures infrared light transmitted through clean air with no methane and then compares it with air that does contain methane.
- To boost sensitivity, the researchers sent the infrared light from the high-power ICLED through a 1-meter-long hollow-core fiber containing an air sample.
- The inside of the fiber is coated with silver, which causes the light to reflect off its surfaces as it travels down the fiber to the photo detector at the other end. This allows the light to interact with additional molecules of methane in the air, thereby resulting in higher absorption of the light.
- The design also provides an alternative to commonly used laser-based sensors. The device could potentially be mass-produced, which could be a big stride toward the development of ICLED-based sensors that cost less than \$100 per device.
- Current laser-based sensors – the gold standard for methane detection – cost between \$10,000 and \$100,000 each.

6. International Relation

6.1. India and Japan back in New Sri Lanka port project

About

- Sri Lanka on Tuesday said it will develop the West Container Terminal (WCT) at the Colombo Port, along with India and Japan.
- Recently, the Sri Lankan government cancelled the contract with India and Japan for the Eastern Container Terminal (ECT).

China

- China is building state of the art gigantic modern ports all along the Indian Ocean to the south of it, in Gwadar (Pakistan), Chittagong (Bangladesh), Kyauk Phru (Myanmar) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka).
- Recently, a Chinese company has won a contract to set up hybrid wind and solar energy projects on three Sri Lankan islands off the northern Jaffna peninsula 45 km from Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu.
- Asian Development Bank (ADB) will fund the project, which will come up on Delft, Nainativu and Analativu, three islands in the Palk Strait off Jaffna peninsula.
- Delft, the largest of the three islands, is the closest to Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu, which lies to the island's south west
- Between the two is Kachchativu, the tiny island that India ceded to Sri Lanka in 1974
- The waters around these islands are an area of contest and rivalry between Tamil Nadu and Jaffna fishers.

India and Sri Lanka

Fishermen Issue

- The constant and frequent issue of fisherman and recently Indian fishermen were picked up by the Sri Lankan Navy. The fishermen dispute is inevitable between neighbours. Indian Fishermen entering Sri Lankan water is not with any particular intention. What is important is that the two governments and the fishermen associations of both the sides must take care of these incidents and can be contained.
- Both countries have signed an MOU to equip the fishermen and give them nets and necessary things to help them carry out their trade better and more peacefully

Economic Cooperation

- India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement was signed in 2010. India is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner

Defence and Security Cooperation

- India and Sri Lanka conducts joint Military ('Mitra Shakti') and Naval exercise (SLINEX).
- India also provides defence training to Sri Lankan force
- In April 2019, India and Sri Lanka also concluded agreement on countering Drug and Human trafficking.
- Cultural and Educational Cooperation:

- India and Sri Lanka signed a cultural cooperation agreement back in 1977
- India cultural centre in Colombo promotes Indian culture by providing courses in Indian music, dance, yoga etc
- Sri Lanka is also a partner in Nalanda university project of India

Significance of the relations

- India shares a common cultural and security space with the countries in the South Asian region especially Sri Lanka.
- Sri Lanka's location in the Indian Ocean region as an island State has been of strategic geopolitical relevance to several major powers.
- India should shed its big brother image and actively take part to rebuild the war-torn country.
- China's string of pearl's strategy is aimed at encircling India to establish dominance in the Indian Ocean.

Conclusion

- Despite some of the pending issues, the relations between the two neighbors in IOR look to be going forward. Trade between the two has grown rapidly after the entry into force of FTA in 2000. India is planning to develop regions beyond the defence assistance provided to Sri Lanka which are welcome steps. It may be hoped that the ethnic and fishermen issues may also get resolved in near future with better relations being on track.

Current affairs Worksheet (03 March 2021)

Factual sheet for Quick revision

Topic	Description	Update
New sensor to detect methane	ICLED GWP and lifetime order of GHG Methane source	
Indonesia	Lost bird New capital	
NFSA	Provisions Shanta kumar committee	

Economy	TDS PMI WPI CPI	
Digital india	Digilocker Other initiatives	
Election commission	RPA 1950 Vs 1951 National Vs State parties ECI	

Sedition Law	About Before Independence After independence	
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Sri Lanka	Locations in News	
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