Anatomy of Riots

Why in News?

After the Delhi Assembly election results were announced, a fake controversial social media post sparked tensions in Udayagiri, in Mysuru.

What are the causes of riot?

- **Provocative social media posts** – Organised or random provocative contents of hate speeches on social media incites violence.
- **Extreme communal polarisation** – Division of society along religious or ethnic lines through social segregation and religious fundamentalism.
- **Exploitation of communal feelings** - Riots are precipitated as a device to consolidate the support of ethnic, religious, or other culturally marked groups by emphasizing the need for solidarity in face of the rival communal group.
- **Majoritarianism** - When minority community frequently comes under attack both online and offline, religious polarisation has intensified, and pent-up frustration is spilled on to the streets.
- **Backwardness** – Socio economic backwardness of a region or community is potential ground for conflicts and riots.
- **Highly polarised polity** - Competitive assertion of identities in a highly polarised polity offers varied forms of patronage to non-state actors.
- **Communalisation of state** - Penetration of communal ideologies in various domains of state and state indifference or complicity.
- **Vicious cycle** – All above factors feed each other in a vicious cycle online and in the real world.

Paul Brass's Institutionalized riot systems
• Institutionalized riot systems (IRS) is a term invented by professor Paul Brass in 2004 in his book The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India with regards to Indian politics. • This term describes the dramatic production of riots, which Brass has divided into three phases. - Preparation, activation and explanation. • In the endemic riot prone regions , these three phases are continuous activities.
Preparation/ Rehearsal • This phase is a continuous activity. • The most important people in this phase are "fire tenders", who keep Hindu-Muslim tensions alive through various inflammatory and inciting acts.

Activation/Enactment • This phase is a phase of violence. • The activation takes place under particular circumstances, most notably in a context of intense political mobilization or electoral competition. • In this phase another group of people come forward, who lead and address mobs of potential rioters and give a signal to indicate if and when violence should start. • These leaders are called "conversion specialists". • They usually lead the mob of criminals from poor background, who were recruited and rewarded for practicing the violence.
Explanation/Interpretation • It follows after the violence in a broader struggle to control the explanation or interpretation of the causes of the violence. • In this phase, many other elements in society become involved, including journalists, politicians, social scientists, and public opinion generally. • Violence is presented as spontaneous, religious, mass-based, unpredictable and impossible to prevent. • Social scientists start the process of blame displacement to save those who are most responsible for the production of violence, and instead diffuses blame widely. • This contributes to the perpetuation of violent productions in future, as well as the order that sustains them.

What are the measures to manage riots?

- **Legal Framework** - Sections 141 to 190 of Indian Penal Code (IPC) provides for preventive and punitive actions against unlawful assemblies.
- **Section 144 of the IPC** - This section can be imposed to restrict public gatherings and prevent the spread of violence.
- **Disaster management** – Riots and communal violence are included as part of state disaster management plans in Rajasthan and Meghalaya.
- **Social media monitoring cells** – These cells have been formed by district administration to monitor the social media posts and potential persons media accounts.
- **Establishment of Peace Committees** - In riot-hit areas, peace committees comprising respected individuals from different communities are formed to mediate and restore peace
- **Proactive actions** - Police have filed numerous suo motu cases whenever they come across such “inflammatory and derogatory” content.
- **Development** – Regional and community development is essential in addressing the communal riots.
- **Press Briefings** - Frequent media briefings help prevent misinformation and keep the public informed about developments.
- **Fact check units** – Various government and news media have created fact checking platforms to enable people verity news.

What are the challenges in addressing riot situation?

- **Viral contents prevention** - Identifying such potentially provocative content before it goes viral is a major challenge.

- **Resource limitation** - Limited software that the district cells have is not compatible with regional languages, does not read what is written on images and scans only posts.
- **Vast volumes of content** – Social media is indefinitely vast with different open platforms such as Facebook and X and billions of users to check for objectionable content.
- **Monitoring private channels** – Privacy settings in WhatsApp and Telegram makes the monitoring of circulation of provocative contents close to impossible.
- **Overreach** - Social media monitoring by the police has also led to overreach, with many cases being booked against people for criticising the ruling party.
- **Technological evolution** – Rise of artificial intelligence and deep fakes makes it difficult to separate the reality and fake audio, images , video.

What lied ahead?

- Community outreach and trust between the local police, leadership, and the community can prevent escalation of situations.
- Use of advanced technologies like Artificial intelligence , Big data to monitor social media platforms to prevent the circulation of provocative contents.
- Coordination between different departments and levels of government is crucial for effective response and recovery.
- Media education and awareness creation among people about the potential misuse of advanced technologies.

Reference

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For Mains practice question, Click here.

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