Argentina's Legalisation of Abortion

What is the issue?

- Argentina, which had some of the world's most restrictive abortion laws, has legalised abortions up to the 14th week of pregnancy.
- This change is historic and its implications may be witnessed beyond Argentina, in Latin America at large.

What is the condition so far?

- The Catholic Church and the evangelical community wield immense power and influence in Argentina.
    - They had strongly opposed the passing of this bill too.
- In fact, for several decades, following the beliefs of the Catholic Church, even the sale of contraceptives was prohibited there.
- Prior to the passing of the bill, abortions were only permitted in cases of rape or when the woman's health was at serious risk.
- As abortion was against the law, girls and women were forced to turn to illegal and unsafe procedures.
- For girls and women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the scope of access to safe medical procedures for abortion was even narrower.
- According to Human Rights Watch, unsafe abortion was the leading cause of maternal mortality in Argentina.

Why is it a landmark bill?

- Activists have been campaigning for years, calling for an overturning of the present restrictions that are in existence since 1921.
- Against this backdrop, the bill calls for greater autonomy for women over their own bodies and control of their reproductive rights.
- It also provides better healthcare for pregnant women and young mothers.
- The bill had been one of President Alberto Fernández's campaign promises.
    - Fernández had said: "I'm Catholic but I have to legislate for everyone."
- However, lawmakers who voted against the law continued to defend their stance.
    - "The interruption of a pregnancy is a tragedy. It abruptly ends another developing life."

What impact will this have in Latin America?

- The passage of this law is likely to have an impact in other countries in Latin America.
- At present, abortions are illegal in Nicaragua, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic.
- In Uruguay, Cuba, Guyana, and in some parts of Mexico, women can request for an abortion, but only in specific cases.
- Also, each country has its own laws on the number of weeks of pregnancy within which the abortion is legal.
- The countries also have varying degrees of punishment and penalties meted out to girls and women, including jail.
- Women's rights activists have acknowledged that despite the new law in Argentina, the fight is far from over in the region.
- Anti-abortion groups and their religious and political backers have attempted to stall any progress in the process.

Source: The Indian Express

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