Kanwar Yatra - Supreme Court Intervention

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court asked the Uttar Pradesh government to either withdraw the decision to allow the Kanwar yatra or invite an order from the court, given the fear of a third Covid-19 wave.
- Uttar Pradesh government cancelled the Yatra after the Supreme Court intervention.

What is the case about?

- In the Kanwar yatra, the Kanwarias, devotees of Shiva, make a pilgrimage to collect water from the Ganga.
- It was not held last year (2020) due to COVID-19.
- The Uttarakhand government had earlier cancelled the yatra in its territory.
- It rightly heeded to warnings by experts that such large gatherings posed a major risk to public health, amidst fears of a third wave.
- But Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath appeared keen that the pilgrimage be held this year (2021).
- The Court was disturbed by reports of the plan to conduct the yatra, resulting in the initiation of suo motu proceedings.

What were the Court's remarks?

- The Court disagreed with even the idea of a 'symbolic yatra' in deference to religious sentiment.
- It emphasised, "the health of the citizenry of India and their right to 'life' are paramount".
- It said that all other sentiments, albeit religious, were subservient to this most basic fundamental right.
- This is a matter which concerns every one of us as citizens of India, and goes to the very heart of Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

Why is the case significant?

- The organisation of the Kumbh Mela earlier in 2021 was seen as responsible for a surge in infections in the run-up to the disastrous second wave.
- There may be a case for lockdown relaxations aimed at economic revival and restoration of normality in most parts of the country.

- But there cannot be justifications for large gatherings in the name of religion.
- Clearly, right to life and safety takes precedence over religious rights.
- Any relaxation after a long spell of severe curbs will have to be based on a scientific assessment of the number of daily infections, the rate of positivity and signs of fall in cases.

Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express

