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Virtues of Wetlands

Conservation and wise use of wide diversity of inland and coastal wetlands is a powerful climate change response.

- Blue carbon is the carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems such as mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrass meadows.
- Such ecosystems sequester and store more carbon per unit area than terrestrial forests
- Hence they assist in mitigating climate change by stabilising the Green House Gas (GHG) concentrations by minimising its release.
- These ecosystems also provide essential benefits for climate change adaptation, including coastal protection and food security for many coastal communities.
- However, if the ecosystems are degraded or damaged, their carbon sink capacity is lost or adversely affected.
- The carbon stored is released, resulting in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) that contribute to climate change.
- Dedicated conservation efforts can ensure that coastal ecosystems continue to play their role as long-term carbon sinks.

Adverse effects due to Wetland Degradation

- Wetlands change atlas recently published by the Space Application Center indicates declining natural coastal wetlands
- Peatlands, considered to be one of the world's largest carbon reserves, are sparse in India and require immediate attention.
- Areas surrounded by urbanised wetlands are expected to lead to a coastal squeeze ultimately leading to wetland loss.

> *As sea levels rise, coastal salt marshes retreat landward, but when their retreat path is blocked by coastal areas hardened by shoreline structures , such as seawalls or rock revetments, we lose wetlands in what is known as "the coastal squeeze.*

- Degradation of wetlands diminishes landscapes capability to absorb and moderate floods, droughts, and storm surges.
- Examples – Floods in Kashmir Valley and Chennai.

Measures taken for Wetland conservation

- The Environment Ministry has implemented management action plans for over 250 wetlands under schemes such as
  - National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems, Mangroves and Coral Reefs
  - Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats.
- India has designated 49 Ramsar sites, and is likely to expand the list to 75 wetlands.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/many-virtues-of-wetlands/article65530842.ece
2. https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-briefs/blue-carbon

Temporary visitors

During the pandemic 0.7% of the country's population was recorded as a 'temporary visitor' in Migration in India 2020-21 report released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)

- Temporary visitors have been defined as the ones who arrived in households after March 2020 and stayed continuously for a period of 15 days or more but less than 6 months
- Migrants are those people whose last usual place of residence, any time in the past, is different from the present place of enumeration.
- **Temporary visitors -** Over 84% of these 0.7% temporary visitors moved places for reasons linked to the pandemic.
- These includes
    - loss of job, lack of employment opportunities, migration of earning member (12.2%).
    - health related reasons (15.7%).
    - meeting family/relatives/friends (48.9%).
    - closure of educational institutions.
- **Migrants -** The all-India migration rate was 28.9% for July 2020-June 2021, with 26.5% migration rate in rural areas and 34.9 % in urban areas.
- Females recorded a higher share of migration rate of 47.9%, with 48% in rural areas and 47.8% in urban areas.
- The migration rate for males was seen at 10.7%, with 5.9% in rural areas and 22.5% in urban areas.
- The reasons being 86.8% due to marriage in case of women and 49.6% in search of employment for males.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-temporary-visitors-and-migrants-how-they-moved-during-the-pandemic-7972060/

Northern Ireland Protocol

The European Union (EU) has said that the proposed Northern Ireland Protocol by UK violates international law and has threatened to take legal action if U.K. goes ahead with the legislation.

- Great Britain consists of England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland together with Great Britain forms the United Kingdom.
- Northern Ireland is the only part of the U.K. that shares a land border with the EU, as Republic of Ireland (or Ireland) is an EU member-state.

- North Ireland Peace deal signed as a result of 1998 Good Friday Agreement avoids a customs check at the actual customs border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- Before Brexit, it was easy to transport goods across this border because both sides had the same EU trade rules. No checks or paperwork were necessary.

- After Brexit problem arose over preserving the sanctity of the EU's single market, as well as that of the U.K.'s domestic market.
- After Brexit, a new system was needed because the EU has strict food rules and requires border checks when certain goods - such as milk and eggs - arrive from non-EU countries.
- The UK and the EU agreed that protecting the Northern Ireland peace deal was an absolute priority.
- So, both sides signed the Northern Ireland Protocol (NIP) as part of the Brexit withdrawal agreement, which is now part of international law.
- Instead of checking goods at the Irish border, the protocol agreed that any inspections and document checks would be conducted at Northern Ireland's ports.

Proposed changes in the protocol –

- UK feels that the current version of NIP creates unacceptable barriers to trade within the U.K. internal market.
- So it proposes that the goods be split into two different lanes.
- Goods destined only for Northern Ireland go to the green lane.
- Goods destined for Ireland and EU will go to the red lane.
- It also proposes that spending and tax policies for Northern Ireland will be decided only by London.
- Any disputes will be resolved not through the European Court of Justice, but through independent arbitration and negotiations.
- Lastly, it proposes a dual regulatory regime for businesses by giving them a choice of selling their goods in Northern Ireland either according to the U.K. rules or the EU rules.
- It would enable the U.K. to override provisions of the Brexit deal that concern trading arrangements in Northern Ireland.
- UK has sought to justify its breach of its obligations under the Brexit agreement by invoking a principle of international law known as the "doctrine of necessity"

  Doctrine of necessity emphasize that certain actions must be taken at a particular moment although such acts would be regarded outside the scope of the law in a general legal situation.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/the-controversy-around-the-northern-ireland-protocol/article65530688.ece?homepage=true
2. https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53724381

IPC Sec 295A

The comments by Nupur Sharma and Naveen Jindal have put the spotlight on the law that deals with criticism of or insult to religion.

- India does not have a formal legal framework for dealing with hate speech.
- However a number of loosely termed hate speech laws are available.
- Section 295A is one of the key provisions in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to penalise religious offences.
- It defines and prescribes a punishment for deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class of citizens.

- The outrage or insult either written or spoken or through visible representations like signs, will attracts imprisonment of up to 3 years or fine, or both.
- Some other provisions invoked are
    - Section 296 - disturbing a religious assembly.
    - Section 297 – trespassing in a place of sepulture.
    - Section 298 - uttering, words, etc, with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person.
- Often Section 295A is invoked along with Section 153A and Section 505 of IPC
- Section 153A penalises promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc, and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony
- Section 505 punishes statements conducing to public mischief.
- In 1957, the constitutionality of Section 295A was challenged on the grounds of misuse. However the Supreme Court upheld the law on the grounds that it was brought in to preserve “public order”.
- Public order is an exemption to the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression and the right to religion recognised by the Constitution.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/hate-speech-ipc-sec-295a-how-courts-have-read-the-law-7972371/

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