Reinforcement of Burqa Ban in France

What is the issue?

- In France, a mother who was accompanying a child on a school trip was told by a politician Julien Odoul in the city of Dijon to uncover herself.
- The woman was wearing a hijab, which is a type of a headscarf worn by Muslim women, to cover her.

What are some similar events?

- **11th October 2019** - Odoul tweeted that he asked a woman to remove the Islamic veil from a school counselor present in the Chamber in the name of our republican and secular principles, and laïcité.
- **25th September 2019** - The French education minister criticised the country's largest association of parents when they used a photograph of a mother wearing a headscarf on one of their pamphlets.
- **2018** - Boris Johnson, now the Britain's Prime Minister, equated women who wear the full body veil to "letter boxes" and "bank robbers.
- **2010** - France became the first country in Western Europe to impose a ban on face-covering Islamic veils.
- Among the different types of Islamic veils, the burqa is the most conservative, covering the entire face and body.

What is the background?

- In 2004, before the Act was enforced, France had banned wearing headscarves and other obvious religious symbols in French state schools.
- The forbidden items included turbans, skullcaps, and crucifixes.
- Before passing this law, the debate about it had been ongoing for over two decades.
- One of the reasons was the perception of the French people to regard headscarves worn by Muslims as a sign of oppression faced by women.
- This in turn is believed to be an embodiment against secularism, an ideal highly regarded in France, because of its essential links with the French Revolution.

What is the French government's definition of secularism?

- Secularism is based on **three principles and values**:

1. The freedom of conscience and the freedom to manifest one's convictions within the limits of respect for public order.
2. The separation of public institutions and religious organizations.
3. The equality of all before the law whatever their beliefs or beliefs.

- Furthermore, secularism guarantees the **free exercise of cults** and **freedom of religion**, but also **freedom from religion**: no one can be compelled to respect religious dogmas or prescriptions.
- France is so committed to the principle that the government has various initiatives to train people to know more about it.
- It aims to familiarise the citizens with the principle in a way that they can apply it in everyday professional situations.
- Through its Ministry of Interior and the Observatory of Secularism, it has 21 university degrees that focus on teachings about religion in France, and secularism.
- December 9 is observed as National Secularity Day in the country.

What is the Burqa legislation in France?

- The bill is meant to prohibit the concealment of the face in public spaces was passed in 2010.
- The definition of public spaces includes public roads; places open to the public, or on government service.
- The bill made it illegal for people to cover their face in public.
- The law makes it illegal to wear garments such as the burqa and niqab, veils that cover one's face in public, except when worshipping in a religious place or travelling as a passenger in a car.
- **Punishment** - Women who don't comply with the law are liable to pay fines to the tune of 150 euros.
- Men who force their wives to wear a burqa could be liable to serve a jail term of 1 year, and to pay fines worth 30,000 euros.
- In the event that a minor is coerced, the fine increases to 60,000 euros, and the jail term to 2 years.
- This law was applicable to tourists as well. But in 2014, the European Court of Human Rights upheld the ban.

What are some similar legislations in other countries?

- In 2011, Belgium was the next country to ban full-face veils.
- A woman wearing a veil can be liable to pay fines to the tune of 1,378 euros, and can be jailed for up to seven days.
- In 2015, the Netherlands partially banned the full-face veil, which meant that women couldn't wear such garments in schools, hospitals and on public transport.

- Other countries where some sort of legislation against full-face veils exists include Chad, Cameroon, Turkey and Switzerland.

Source: The Indian Express

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