The Popular Front of India (PFI)

What is the issue?

The general strike to protest the arrest of top leaders of the Popular Front of India (PFI) on Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) resulted in incidents of violence.

What is the PFI?

- The Popular Front of India describes itself as a non-governmental organisation and a neo-social movement striving for the empowerment of marginalized, deprived and oppressed sections of India.
- It was formed in 2007 by the merger of three Muslim groups — the National Democratic Front (NDF) in Kerala, the Karnataka Forum for Dignity (KFD) and the Manitha Neethi Pasarai (MNP) in Tamil Nadu.
- The headquarter is at Delhi.
- The PFI expanded to States in the north, west, east and northeastern parts of the country by merging with various other social organisations.
- The organisation has been described by Central agencies and the government as being a resurrection of the banned outfit, Students Islamic Movement in India (SIMI).
- The PFI has various wings such as its women's wing, student wing, political arm, an NGO and a think tank with over 50,000 members.

What are the major cases involving PFI in the last decade?

- PFI has been on the radar of security agencies for its role in violent protests in different parts of the country
    - Against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act
    - Alleged forced conversions
    - Radicalisation of Muslim youths
    - Money laundering
    - Disturbing communal harmony
    - Links with banned groups
    - Organising arms training camp
    - Inciting people during the Delhi riots
- **Current issue**- Recently, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested over 100 leaders and activists of the Popular Front of India after raids in 15 States.
- The raids are related to Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967 (UAPA) cases registered against the body.
- The NIA was accompanied by officials of the Enforcement Directorate as PFI was alleged to mobilise funds through well-organised networks in Gulf countries.
- In response to large-scale arrests of its leaders, the PFI organised a dawn to dusk hartal.

- Extremely provocative slogans and speeches formed part of the protest.
- It led to sporadic incidents of violence with police officers being attacked and inter-state buses being targeted.
- Involving in organising terror camps and encouraging youth to join terror activities could lead to a ban on the organisation under anti-terror laws.

What does a 'ban' on an organisation mean?

- **Declaration of an organisation**- The UAPA gives powers to the government to declare an organisation an "unlawful association" or a "terrorist organisation".
- The UAPA defines "terrorist organisation" as an organisation listed in the Schedule to the UAPA, or an organisation operating under the same name as an organisation so listed in the Schedule.
- Schedule 1 currently lists 42 organisations as terrorist organisations.
- The law states that an organisation shall be deemed to be involved in terrorism, if it,
    - Commits or participates in acts of terrorism, or
    - Prepares for terrorism, or
    - Promotes or encourages terrorism, or
    - Otherwise involved in terrorism
- **Removal of an organisation from the Schedule**- An application can be made to the central government by the organisation itself or any person affected by inclusion of the organisation in the Schedule.
- A review committee which is headed by a sitting or former judge of a High Court is appointed to judicially review the application.

What are the consequences of such declaration?

- **Association of individuals**- The association of individuals with a terrorist organisation is punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.
- Exemption- If the individuals have been members before declaring it as terrorist organisation and did not take part in any activities of the organisation at any time during its inclusion in the Schedule.
- UAPA prescribes punishment for
    - Being member of terrorist gang or organisation
    - Holding proceeds of terrorism.
- **Funding**- Funding a terrorist organisation is also criminalized under the UAPA Act.

References

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Quick facts

National Investigation Agency (NIA)

- NIA was established under the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008 in the wake of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack.
- The agency came into existence on December 31, 2008, and started its functioning in 2009.
- NIA is the Central counter terrorism law enforcement agency in India.
- The law under which the agency operates extends to
    - The whole of India
    - Indian citizens outside the country
    - Persons in the government service wherever they are posted
    - Persons on ships and aircraft registered in India wherever they may be
    - Persons who commit a scheduled offence beyond India against the Indian citizen or affecting the interest of India
- Scheduled offences include the offences under laws that are mentioned such as Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, UAPA Act, Explosive Substances Act, Atomic Energy Act, etc.

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