US Antitrust Suit

Why in news?

The US Department of Justice has filed an antitrust lawsuit against Google.

What does filing this suit mean?

- This marks a significant step towards curbing the growing monopolistic power of the Internet behemoth.
- The lawsuit focuses only on specific deals done by Google with phone makers and telecom operators to capture significant market share for its search engine business.
- But, the outcome of this case could open investigations into other practices related to its Android app store and other software platforms.

How monopolistic is Google?

- With a 90% market share in the search business, Google is one of the largest companies the world has ever seen.
- The nature of its online products and services allows Google to wield power over five billion people with Internet access around the world.
- It influences consumer shopping behaviour and also determines the political destiny of countries around the world.
- Google arguably exercises more influence over how we live than any government today.
- This dominance enables Google to do a lot of things that are not just anti-competitive, but also anti-consumer.

What are the anti-consumer actions?

- Google announced that it would make app developers on the Google Play Store platform use its in-app payment system instead of other systems.
- This meant that the developers would have to use Google's billing system, which takes a 30% fee for every transaction.
- This decision has been withheld after protests from developers.
- But, it reveals Google's inclination to misuse its market dominance.

What is the issue specific to India?

- Google tracks users' shopping habits, video-watching preferences, the content of e-mails, places travelled among other things.
- This could be a major problem in countries like India, where personal data protection and privacy laws are virtually non-existent.

How policing could be done?

- Twitter, Facebook and Google exert immense influence on the social, economic and political landscape of a country.
- Facebook recently set up an oversight board in a bid to showcase that it can self-regulate.
- However, a big drawback of this board is that it is not designed to take quick decisions.
- These platforms cannot be trusted to do its own policing.
- Neither can this task be left to governments, as it could be misused by ruling regime to change the course of elections or target political rivals.

What is needed?

- It is time to set up an **independent regulatory oversight** of Internet platforms.
- Proceedings initiated against Google in the US should pave the way for similar scrutiny in India, too.

Source: Business Line

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