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Article 371

Why in news?

Northeastern states of India have expressed apprehension that having rendered Article 370 irrelevant, the government might unilaterally move to abrogate or modify Article 371.

However, the government has clarified that it had no intention of removing Article 371 of the Constitution.

What is Article 371 all about?

- Articles 369 through 392 appear in Part XXI of the Constitution, titled 'Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions'.
- Article 371 of the Constitution includes "special provisions" for 11 states, including six states of the Northeast.
- Articles 370 and 371 were part of the Constitution at the time of its commencement on January 26, 1950; Articles 371A through 371J were incorporated subsequently.



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Overview:

Article 371, Maharashtra and Gujarat:

- Governor has “special responsibility” to establish “separate development boards” for “Vidarbha, Marathwada, and the rest of Maharashtra”, and Saurashtra and Kutch in Gujarat; ensure “equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said areas”, and “equitable arrangement providing adequate facilities for technical education and vocational training, and adequate opportunities for employment” under the state government.

Article 371A (13th Amendment Act, 1962), Nagaland:

- Inserted after a 16-point agreement between the Centre and the Naga People’s Convention in 1960, which led to the creation of Nagaland in 1963.
- Parliament cannot legislate in matters of Naga religion or social practices, Naga customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, and ownership and transfer of land without concurrence of the state Assembly.

Article 371B (22nd Amendment Act, 1969), Assam:

- The President may provide for the constitution and functions of a committee of the Assembly consisting of members elected from the state’s tribal areas.

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Article 371C (27th Amendment Act, 1971), Manipur:

- The President may provide for the constitution of a committee of elected members from the Hill areas in the Assembly, and entrust “special responsibility” to the Governor to ensure its proper functioning.

Article 371D (32nd Amendment Act, 1973; substituted by The Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana:

- President must ensure “equitable opportunities and facilities” in “public employment and education to people from different parts of the state”.
- He may require the state government to organise “any class or classes of posts in a civil service of, or any class or classes of civil posts under, the State into different local cadres for different parts of the State”.
- He has similar powers vis-à-vis admissions in educational institutions.

Article 371E:

- Allows for the establishment of a university in Andhra Pradesh by a law of Parliament. But this is not a “special provision” in the sense of the others in this part.

Article 371F (36th Amendment Act, 1975), Sikkim:

- The members of the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim shall elect the representative of Sikkim in the House of the People.

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- To protect the rights and interests of various sections of the population of Sikkim, Parliament may provide for the number of seats in the Assembly, which may be filled only by candidates from those sections.

Article 371G (53rd Amendment Act, 1986), Mizoram:

- Parliament cannot make laws on “religious or social practices of the Mizos, Mizo customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary law, ownership and transfer of land... unless the Assembly... so decides”.

Article 371H (55th Amendment Act, 1986), Arunachal Pradesh:

- The Governor has a special responsibility with regard to law and order, and “he shall, after consulting the Council of Ministers, exercise his individual judgment as to the action to be taken”.

Article 371J (98th Amendment Act, 2012), Karnataka:

- There is a provision for a separate development board for the Hyderabad-Karnataka region.
- There shall be “equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said region”, and “equitable opportunities and facilities” for people of this region in government jobs and education.
- A proportion of seats in educational institutions and state government jobs in Hyderabad-Karnataka can be reserved for individuals from that region.

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Article 371I deals with Goa, but it does not include any provision that can be deemed ‘special’.

Significance:

- All these provisions take into account the special circumstances of individual states, and lay down a wide range of specific safeguards that are deemed important for these states.
- In these range of Articles from 371 to 371J, Article 371I, which deals with Goa, stands out in the sense that it does not include any provision that can be deemed “special”. Article 371E, which deals with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, too, is not that “special”.

United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements

Why in news?

The United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements (UNISA) was signed by 46 countries in total.

India on Wednesday signed a key UN convention on international settlement agreements, even as experts called for local laws to support the treaty’s implementation in business contracts.

The United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements (UNISA) was signed by India’s High Commissioner to Singapore Jawed Ashraf, representing the Government of India. 46 countries signed the treaty named Singapore Convention on Mediation.

Significance

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- “The signing of the convention is particularly important for the growth of mediation in India.
- “India has adopted this (convention) and with that we have significantly enhanced the ease of doing business in India.

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IPCC REPORT: a Glance

Context

Activities like agriculture and cattle rearing are a major source of methane and nitrous oxide, both of which are hundreds of times more dangerous than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas.

A new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released Thursday presents the most recent evidence on how the different uses of land -- forests, agriculture, urbanisation -- are affecting and getting affected by climate change.

What is IPCC?

- The Geneva-based IPCC is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change.
- It was created "to provide policymakers with regular scientific assessments on climate change, its implications and potential future risks, as well as to put forward adaptation and mitigation options".

The land-climate link

- Land use, and changes in land use, have always been an integral part of the conversation on climate change. That is because land acts as both the source as well as a sink of carbon.
- Activities like agriculture and cattle rearing, for example, are a major source of methane and nitrous oxide, both of which are hundreds of times more dangerous than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas.

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- At the same time, soil, trees, plantations, and forests absorb carbon dioxide for the natural process of photosynthesis, thus reducing the overall carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere.
- This is the reason why largescale land use changes, like deforestation or urbanisation, or even a change in cropping pattern, have a direct impact on the overall emissions of greenhouse gases.

The IPCC's reports

- This is the first time that the IPCC, whose job it is to assess already-published scientific literature to update our knowledge of climate change science, has focused its attention solely on the land sector.
- It is part of a series of special reports that IPCC is doing in the run-up to the sixth edition of its main report, blandly called the Assessment Reports, that is due around 2022.
- Last year, the IPCC had produced a special report on the feasibility of restricting global rise in temperature to within 1.5 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial times.
- These reports were sought by governments to get a clearer picture of specific aspects of climate change.

What this report says

- The current report talks about the contribution of land-related activities to global warming -- how the different uses of land, like agriculture, industry, forestry, cattle-rearing, and urbanisation, was affecting emissions of greenhouse gases.
- An important part of the report talks about the manner in which even existential activities like food production contributes to global warming and is also affected by it.
- The report says that if pre-production activities like cattle rearing and post-production activities like transport, energy and food processing, is taken into account, then food production could contribute as much as 37 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions every year.
- It points out that nearly 25 per cent of all food produced is either lost or wasted. And even the decomposition of the waste releases emissions.

Land, oceans, forests

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- Land and ocean together absorb nearly 50 per cent of greenhouse gases emitted every year through natural processes in the carbon cycle.
- The importance of land, or ocean, as a carbon sink, thus cannot be overstated in the global fight against climate change.
- That is why afforestation, and reduction in deforestation, are vital approaches in a global strategy to combat climate change.

India's response

- India's action plan on climate change too, has a very important component on forests. India has promised that it would create an additional carbon sink of about 2.5 billion to 3 billion tonnes by the year 2032 by increasing its forest cover, and planting more trees.

RBI monetary policy

Why in news?

The RBI's repo rate has now fallen 110 basis points since February. The RBI also announced some measures to boost economic activity.

In its monetary policy review Wednesday, the Monetary Policy Committee of the RBI decided to cut the repo rate by 35 basis points (bps). Repo rate is the rate at which the RBI lends money to commercial banks. 100 bps make a full percentage point. The RBI's repo rate has now fallen 110 basis points since February. The RBI also announced some measures to boost economic activity.

Why does monetary policy matter?

- In any economy, economic activity, which is measured by gross domestic product or GDP, happens by one of four ways.
- One, private individuals and households spend money on consumption.
- Two, the government spends on its agenda.
- Three, private sector businesses "invest" in their productive capacity.
- And four, the net exports — which is the difference between what all of them spend on imports as against what they earn from exports.

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- At the heart of any spending decision taken by any of these entities lies the question: What is the cost of money?
- Monetary policy essentially answers that question. In every country, the central bank is mandated to decide the cost of money, which is more commonly known as the “interest rate” in the economy..

What is the repo rate?

- Repo and Reverse repo are short for repurchase agreements between the RBI and the commercial banks in the economy.
- In essence, the repo rate is the interest rate that the RBI charges a commercial bank when it borrows money from the RBI.
- As such, if the repo falls, all interest rates in the economy should fall. And that is why common people should be interested in the RBI’s monetary policy.

But the interest rate for consumer loans has not reduced by 110 bps since February. Why?

- In the real world, the “transmission” of an interest rate cut (or increase) is not a hundred per cent. And that is why, even though when the RBI cut by 35 bps on Wednesday, lay consumers may only receive a much lower reduction in the interest rate on their borrowings.
- This is due to a lot of factors — but primarily, it has to do with the health of the concerned commercial bank.
- There is another key element that affects the banks’ decision. The reduced repo rate applies only to new borrowings of banks.
- The banks’ cost of existing funds is higher. Of course, funding costs would eventually come down — but this process would take time.
- This “lag” in monetary policy is a key variable in determining the efficacy of any rate cut by the RBI.
- It could take anywhere between 9 and 18 months for the full effect of an RBI decision to reflect in interest rates across the economy.

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So, how does RBI decide the interest rate?

- Any central bank has a few main concerns.
- The first is to ensure price stability in the economy.
- The RBI continuously maps prices, inflation (which is the rate of increase in prices), and expectations of inflation (of households) to decide if it should increase or decrease interest rates.
- The other related concern for a central bank is to take care of economic growth. For instance, economic growth is anaemic at present (see charts), and partly as a consequence, the inflation rate has been below 4% for several months now.
- The RBI is, therefore, cutting interest rates to incentivise people to consume more and businesses to invest more.

Will the rate cut bring investments?

- Investments depend essentially on the “real” interest rate. The real interest rate is the difference between the repo rate and retail inflation.
- When making an investment decision, it is this interest rate that matters. As a variable, it allows an investor to compare the attractiveness of different economies.
- As can be seen in the third chart, real interest rates in India have been rising, and that is one of the biggest reasons why investments are not happening.
- The RBI’s move on Wednesday would reduce the real interest rate and hopefully attract more investment.

Methylmercury in ocean

Why in news?

The researchers warn that human exposure to the toxin through fish consumption is bound to increase as a result of climate change.

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Despite a decrease in seawater concentration of methylmercury since the late 1990s, the amount of toxin that gets accumulated in certain fish which are higher in the food chain have been found to increase.

Reasons behind?

- The amount of methylmercury in fish higher in the food chain can change due to two reasons — ocean warming and dietary shifts due to overfishing by humans.
- Based on 30 years (1970s and 2000s) of data and ecosystem modelling, researchers have found that there has been up to 23% increase in methylmercury concentration in Atlantic cod fish in the Gulf of Maine in the northwestern Atlantic Ocean.
- The increase in the methylmercury concentration in cod fish has been due to changes in diet caused by overfishing.
- As a result of diet change, cod fish in the 2000s relied more on larger herring and lobster, which have higher concentrations of the toxin than other prey fish consumed in the 1970s.
- In contrast, there has been 33-61% reduction in methylmercury concentration in spiny dogfish fish between 1970s and 2000s.
- This is because, in the 1970s, spiny dogfish fish consumed more of squid and other cephalopods, which have a higher toxin concentration.

Role of ocean warming

- Besides dietary changes, ocean warming too causes changes in the methylmercury accumulation in fish.
- Fish metabolism is temperature dependent.
- So as ocean temperature increases, fish experience higher metabolism and more energy obtained from food is spent on maintenance rather than growth, leading to more methylmercury getting concentrated in predatory fish.

Estimated increase.

- This estimated increase in tissue MeHg [methylmercury] exceeds the modelled 22% reduction that was achieved in the late 1990s and 2000s as a result of decreased seawater MeHg concentrations.
- The researchers warn that human exposure to the toxin through fish consumption is bound to increase as a result of climate change.
- Hence, there is a need for stronger regulations to protect ecosystem and human health.