

Mains Master

Reclaiming the Republic, and the Constitution

Context:

- Published on January 22, 2024, amid the state-funded grand spectacle celebrating the 75th year of the Indian Republic.
- The article coincides with the consecration of the Ayodhya temple, a highly politicized event with Hindu supremacist undertones.

Introduction:

- Author Aruna Roy, a social activist, expresses concern about the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) agenda undermining the secular principles of the Indian Constitution and promoting a unidimensional Hindu culture.

Background:

- The Indian Constitution, born on January 22, 1947, with its inspiring Preamble, promised a secular nation embracing diversity and tolerance.
- India's rich history and vibrant cultural landscape are characterized by a multitude of religious practices and ethnicities.

Threat to India's Secularism:

- The BJP's agenda is seen as attempting to:
 - Make the state theocratic and the majority religion political.
 - Impose a one-dimensional culture, suppressing diversity and silencing dissent.
 - Centralize religion, aiming to dominate and marginalize other faiths.
- This poses a critical threat to:
 - Individual and group freedom of faith and cultural expression.
 - The fundamental values of the Constitution: liberty, equality, and justice for all.
 - India's unique identity as a pluralistic and tolerant democracy.

Critical Estimate:

- The article criticizes:
 - The BJP's manipulation of democratic freedoms to propagate their Hindutva ideology.
 - The suppression of diverse cultural practices and languages.

- The potential dangers of majoritarianism and its disregard for minorities and their rights.
- It highlights the importance of:
 - Resisting the erosion of the Constitution's secular values.
 - Protecting the rights and dignity of all citizens, regardless of religion or any other identity.
 - Reasserting India's commitment to tolerance and inclusivity.

Way Ahead:

- The article emphasizes the need for:
 - A collective public response against the BJP's agenda.
 - Reaffirming the central role of the Constitution in shaping India's future.
 - Cultivating cultural vibrancy and embracing diversity as India's true strength.
 - Protecting India's position in the world as a beacon of tolerance and pluralism.

In essence, the article is a call to action for all Indians to reclaim the Republic and its secular Constitution, safeguarding the diverse and tolerant India envisioned by its founding fathers.

Opposition MPs, parliamentary disruptions

Context:

- The winter session of Parliament in 2023 witnessed a significant political shift in India.
- A total of 141 Opposition MPs were suspended for causing disruptions during the push for a discussion on a security breach in Parliament.

Background:

- Concerns were raised about stifling diverse perspectives and the role of the Opposition in democratic governance.
- Acknowledgment of the vital role of protests and dissent in a democracy, echoing former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's emphasis.

Recent Trends and Findings:

- An analysis of suspended MPs reveals noteworthy contributions from individuals across party lines.

- Shashi Tharoor, a Congress member, demonstrated a 94% attendance, active in 99 debates, and introduced 13 Private Member's Bills covering crucial topics.
- S. Jothimani, a Congress Lok Sabha member from Tamil Nadu, displayed a 74% attendance, actively addressing various topics and introducing Bills on menstrual hygiene and paternity benefits.
- Manoj Kumar Jha, a Rajya Sabha MP from the Rashtriya Janata Dal, maintained a 97% participation rate, raised 347 questions, and introduced Bills on legislative reforms.
- Supriya Sule, a Nationalist Congress Party's three-time MP from Maharashtra, showcased a 93% attendance, active in 238 debates, and introduced 16 Private Member's Bills.
- Gaurav Gogoi, a Congress Lok Sabha MP for Kaliabor in Assam, presented a 75% attendance, active in 74 debates, and introduced Bills on air quality management, company regulations, and pollution control.
- Vandana Hemant Chavan, a Rajya Sabha MP from the NCP, maintained a 78% attendance, was involved in 334 debates, raised 687 questions, and introduced five Private Member's Bills.
- Derek O'Brien, a Rajya Sabha MP from All India Trinamool Congress, sustained an 81% attendance, participated in 315 debates, raised 1,001 queries, and introduced seven Private Member Bills.
- Kunwar Danish Ali, a Lok Sabha MP from the Bahujan Samaj Party, despite recent suspension, upheld a 97% attendance rate, participated in 140 debates, raised 205 questions, and introduced two Private Member's Bills.

Implications on Parliamentary Democracy:

- The suspension of MPs raises questions about the robustness of the Opposition.
- Disruptions during parliamentary proceedings are weighed against the substantive contributions of the suspended MPs.
- There is a potential hindrance to effective governance and inclusivity in decision-making.

Critical Estimate:

- The situation calls for a critical evaluation of democratic norms, emphasizing the necessity of diverse voices.
- The impact of the suspension on the democratic fabric of India's parliamentary journey remains uncertain.
- Ongoing developments will determine whether this is a transient disruption or a transformative phase.

Way Forward:

- Emphasizing openness, inclusivity, and meaningful dialogue is essential in a vibrant democracy.
- Reevaluating the collaborative relationship between the government and the Opposition is crucial.
- Balancing the need for order in parliamentary proceedings with the imperative of allowing diverse voices is essential for sustaining India's democratic trajectory.

An exchange

Initiative Overview:

- The Centre introduces the Vaibhav fellowship program to foster collaboration among scientists of Indian origin or ancestry.
- Recipients can spend up to three months annually for three years at a host research laboratory in India, focusing on initiating projects or technology start-ups.

- Aims to build long-term connections, encourage collaboration with host faculty, and bring fresh ideas to Indian university and research settings.

Comparisons with VAJRA:

- The Vaibhav initiative shares similarities with the VAJRA (Visiting Advanced Joint Research) Faculty Scheme introduced by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) during the same government tenure.
- While VAJRA allows participation from other nationalities, Vaibhav exclusively targets the Indian diaspora.
- Vaibhav offers a three-year engagement, in contrast to VAJRA's one-year commitment.

Concerns and Considerations:

- Approximately 70 international faculty have participated in VAJRA, raising concerns about its effectiveness.
- Clarity is needed on India's specific objectives in focusing on the Indian diaspora, considering the existing brain drain challenges.
- Short-term fellowships can help showcase the potential for science in India, highlighting challenges like funding gaps, limited private sector involvement in R&D, and academic freedom constraints.

Rationale Behind Targeting Indian Diaspora:





- Addresses the historical issue of 'brain drain,' where talented researchers moved abroad due to limited opportunities in India.
- Aims to leverage the vast pool of skilled scientific manpower trained abroad, particularly given the intense competition for tenured jobs in Western universities.
- Presumption that scientists of Indian origin might be more inclined to stay or return, potentially influenced by ethno-nationalist considerations.

Realistic Expectations and Challenges:

- Emphasizes the importance of realistic expectations in engaging with scientists of Indian origin.
- Raises questions about whether the ethno-nationalist restriction will indeed lead to a higher likelihood of scientists staying back.
- Acknowledges the role of short-term fellowships in revealing challenges and triggering policy changes in India's research landscape.

Prelims Booster

World's biggest iceberg battered by waves as it heads north

-  World's largest iceberg, A23a, encountered in Antarctic seas, nearly 4,000 sq km, twice the size of Greater London.
-  Waves up to 4 meters high battered the colossal iceberg.
-  After three decades on the Antarctic ocean floor, A23a is drifting north, containing an estimated one trillion tonnes of freshwater.
-  Currently positioned between Elephant Island and South Orkney Islands, its movement raises climate change questions; it broke free last year.

