The Hindu plus Summary : 05.03.2024

Mains Master

SC ends immunity for legislators taking bribes

Context: The Supreme Court of India recently overturned a 25-year-old precedent, ruling that legislators who take bribes cannot claim immunity from prosecution. This decision came in response to an appeal filed by JMM leader Sita Soren, who was accused of bribery.

Background: The previous ruling, from the JMM bribery case of 1998, allowed legislators who took bribes to escape prosecution if they fulfilled their promised vote or speech. This raised concerns about:

- **Erosion of public trust:** Citizens expect their elected representatives to act with integrity and uphold the law. Allowing bribery to go unpunished could create a perception that politicians are above the law, leading to a decline in public trust and confidence in democratic institutions.
- **Weakening of democratic principles:** Representative democracy relies on elected officials making decisions based on their conscience and the best interests of the people they represent. Bribery undermines this principle by allowing individuals to buy influence and manipulate the legislative process.
- Discouragement of ethical conduct: The previous ruling sent a message that taking bribes could be tolerated under certain circumstances. This could discourage potential candidates with strong ethical values from entering politics and incentivize others to engage in corrupt practices.

Observation of Supreme Court: The court declared that parliamentary privileges do not shield legislators from criminal charges related to bribery. They emphasized that:

- **Corruption is a serious offense:** Accepting or offering bribes is a criminal act that undermines the integrity of the legislative process and the rule of law. It is essential to hold elected officials accountable for their actions to maintain public trust and ensure a fair and just society.
- **Immunity does not extend to criminal activity:** The privileges and immunities granted to legislators are intended to protect them from undue interference in their legislative duties. These protections do not extend to acts of bribery, which are criminal offenses that fall outside the scope of legitimate legislative activity.
- **Free speech and voting are not justifications for bribery:** The court clarified that the freedom of speech and expression, including voting in the House, does not encompass the act of accepting or offering bribes. These are separate concepts, and engaging in bribery cannot be justified under the guise of free speech or voting rights.

Implications on Democracy: This ruling has several potential implications:

- Stronger fight against corruption: By removing the immunity shield for bribery, this decision empowers law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute corrupt officials more effectively. It sends a clear message that corruption will not be tolerated, regardless of the position held.
- Increased accountability and transparency: Holding legislators accountable for their actions fosters a more transparent and accountable legislative process. This encourages responsible decision-making and discourages corrupt practices.
- Reinforcement of the rule of law: The court's ruling upholds the principle that everyone is equal under the law. No individual, regardless of their position or status, is above the law and immune from prosecution for criminal offenses.

Way forward: The court's decision is a significant step towards ensuring greater ethical conduct among legislators. Moving forward, it's crucial to:

- Uphold the rule of law: Consistent and fair enforcement of the law is essential to deterring corruption and ensuring that justice is served. This requires robust legal frameworks, efficient investigative and prosecutorial processes, and an independent judiciary.
- **Implement anti-corruption measures:** Implementing strong anti-corruption measures, such as stricter campaign finance regulations, financial disclosure requirements, and whistleblower protection mechanisms, can further help prevent and combat corruption.
- **Promote ethical values:** Fostering a culture of integrity and ethical conduct in public service is crucial. This can be achieved through public education campaigns, ethics training programs for elected officials, and promoting strong leadership by example.
- **Maintain public trust:** Maintaining public trust in democratic institutions requires ongoing efforts to ensure transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the needs of the people. This can be achieved through open communication, active citizen participation, and a commitment to good governance practices.

The status of India's nuclear programme

Context: Prime Minister Modi recently witnessed the core-loading of the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) in Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu. This event is considered a milestone for India's nuclear power program.

Background:

- India's nuclear power program faces a growing need for energy security and reduced dependence on fossil fuels.
- The program aims to achieve self-sufficiency in nuclear fuel through a three-stage plan.

The Three Stages:

Stage I (Operational, 1960s-present):

- **Technology:** Uses Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) fueled by natural uranium (containing a small amount of fissile U-235 isotope).
- **Process:** PHWRs use heavy water (deuterium oxide) to slow down neutrons, allowing them to trigger fission reactions in U-235 and produce energy. This stage also produces plutonium-239 (Pu-239) as a byproduct.
- **Challenges:** Limited fuel resources in natural uranium necessitate a transition to more efficient fuel utilization.

Stage II (Beginning, 2024-onwards):

- **Technology:** Utilizes Pu-239 and U-238 in Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) like the PFBR.
- **Process:** FBRs use fast neutrons to trigger fission reactions in Pu-239 and U-238, producing more Pu-239 than they consume, along with energy and another fissile material, U-233. This stage aims to increase fuel efficiency and plutonium production.
- Specific details of the PFBR:
  - Designed to produce more Pu-239 than it consumes, contributing to fuel sustainability.
  - Uses liquid sodium as coolant, which is highly reactive and raises safety concerns if not managed properly.
  - Faced delays, cost overruns, and technical challenges during development and construction.

Stage III (Future):

- **Technology:** Aims to use Pu-239 and thorium-232 (Th-232) in reactors to generate energy and U-233.
- **Process:** Thorium is abundant in India and can be converted into fissile U-233 through neutron bombardment. This stage aims for long-term fuel sustainability by utilizing India's abundant thorium resources.
- **Challenges:** Thorium fuel cycle development is still under research and development and requires further technological advancements.

Challenges of the nuclear power program:

- **Safety concerns:** Public perception is often negative due to past incidents like Fukushima, and ensuring robust safety measures is crucial.
- Regulatory framework: The current structure may not be independent enough, and strengthening the regulatory framework to ensure transparency and public confidence is essential.

- **Waste management:** Both nuclear fission processes and reprocessing activities generate radioactive waste requiring complex handling and safe storage for extended periods.
- **Competition from renewables:** Solar energy is becoming increasingly cost-competitive and raises questions about the long-term economic viability of nuclear power.

Overall, the PFBR's core-loading marks a significant step for stage II of India's nuclear program. However, the program faces significant challenges related to safety, regulation, waste management, and competition from renewable energy sources. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for the program's long-term success and public acceptance.

Prelims Booster

GI Tag

🧵 The Narasapur crochet lace craft in the Godavari region of Andhra Pradesh has been granted the Geographical Indications (GI) tag, providing a lifeline to the struggling artisans involved in the craft, with hopes of revitalizing the dying industry.

🏷️ The GI tag, registered by the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, certifies that the craft is geographically limited to specific areas in West Godavari and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema districts, with Narsapur, Palacole, Razole, and Amalapuram being key trade points for lace products.

👩‍🎨 Around 15,000 women artisans are directly engaged in producing garments, home furnishings, and accessories made of lace, with the Alankriti Federation, Narasapur All India Crochet Lace Exporters Association, and Andhra Pradesh Handicrafts Development Corporation jointly applying for the GI tag to support the craft's revival.

📉 The craft faced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a significant drop in production and market demand, compounded by competition from China's machine-made lace products. The GI tag is expected to boost the craft's visibility, revive trade, and enhance foreign exports, benefiting the artisans and the industry as a whole.

- 🗺️ A geographical indication (GI) is a sign used on products with a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin. In order to function as a GI, a sign must identify a product as originating in a given place. The qualities, characteristics, or reputation of the product should be essentially due to the place of origin, creating a clear link between the product and its original place of production.

- 👥 Geographical indication rights enable holders to prevent unauthorized use by third parties whose products do not conform to the applicable standards. For example, in protected jurisdictions like Darjeeling, producers can exclude the use of the term “Darjeeling” for products not meeting specified criteria. However, protection does not extend to preventing the use of similar techniques as long as they meet the standards set for that indication.

- 🌾 Geographical indications are typically used for agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine, spirits, handicrafts, and industrial products, highlighting the diverse range of goods that can benefit from this form of protection.

- 🔒 Geographical indications are protected through various methods including sui generis systems, collective or certification marks, business practices, and unfair competition laws. These approaches differ in terms of conditions for protection and scope, with some common features like setting up rights for collective use by those meeting defined standards.

- 🌍 Geographical indications are protected globally through a combination of approaches, reflecting different legal traditions and economic conditions in different countries and regions.
- 🧩 Geographical indications encompass terms like appellation of origin, protected designation of origin, and protected geographical indication, each serving specific purposes within the realm of intellectual property rights and product origin protection.

Tired of spam or fraud calls? File a complaint on Chakshu

- 📞 The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) launched Chakshu, a platform for telecom users to report fraud or spam callers, available at sancharsaathi.gov.in/sfc.
- 🔍 Chakshu allows users to report various types of frauds including bank account, payment wallet, SIM, gas connection, electricity connection, KYC update, impersonation, and sextortion.
- 🛡️ The Digital Intelligence Platform was introduced as a non-public data-sharing resource for Telecom Service Providers, law enforcement agencies, banks, social media platforms, and identity document issuing authorities.
- 👤 Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw supported Caller Name Presentation (CNAP) to allow users to view the registered name of incoming callers, despite concerns raised by telecom firms and civil society groups about privacy rights.
- 🚪 Vaishnaw compared CNAP to the right to know who is at the door, indicating a balance between privacy and caller identification.

A vaccine that prevents six cancers

- 🦠 Cervical cancer poses a significant global health burden, with over 300,000 women losing their lives to this disease annually. The majority of these deaths occur in lower- and middle-income countries, underscoring the urgent need for effective prevention strategies, particularly in regions like India where cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women.
- 💉 Prevention strategies for cervical cancer include HPV vaccination and screening for precancerous lesions. These approaches aim to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health concern by 2030, aligning with the World Health Organization's 90-70-90 triple pillar intervention strategy that emphasizes vaccination, screening, and treatment.
- 🇮🇳 India took a significant step by introducing the HPV vaccine in 2008 and is on track to include it in the Universal Immunization Programme in 2023. This move is crucial for ensuring equitable access to vaccines for all girls, especially in a country where approximately 500 million women are at risk of cervical cancer.
- 🩺 Physicians play a pivotal role in promoting HPV vaccination and regular screening for cervical cancer. Medical societies like the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI) and the Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) are actively involved in educating healthcare providers and advocating for cancer prevention measures.
- ⚕️ The HPV vaccine offers protection against six cancers, including cervical cancer, highlighting the importance of early vaccination and regular screening for women's health. Efforts to create awareness, address vaccine hesitancy, and ensure widespread access to preventive measures are crucial in the fight against cervical cancer and other HPV-related cancers.