

Mains Master

Wrong messaging

Context:

- The Indian government's decision to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) just before the general elections sparked accusations of exploiting a sensitive issue to gain political advantage.

Background:

- The CAA, passed in 2019, established a fast-track route for citizenship for specific religious minorities facing persecution in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.
- This legislation primarily excludes Muslims, leading to widespread opposition and legal challenges, particularly from the Muslim community.

What is CAA:

- The CAA expedites the process of granting Indian citizenship to individuals belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities who:
 - Faced religious persecution in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, or Pakistan.
 - Migrated to India before December 31, 2014.
- This reduces the usual 11-year residency requirement for citizenship to only 5 years.

Challenges with CAA:

- Religious Discrimination:** The Act explicitly excludes Muslims, raising concerns about violating India's secular principles and creating a discriminatory pathway to citizenship based solely on religion.
- Uncertainty for Others:** Individuals who don't qualify under the CAA's criteria (due to their faith or arrival date after the cut-off) face an unclear future, potentially being categorized as illegal immigrants.
- Political Misinformation:** Linking CAA with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) fueled anxieties among Muslims. The NRC is a separate process to identify undocumented immigrants, and some feared the CAA might lead to their disenfranchisement without proper documentation.

Arguments in Favor of CAA:

- Protecting Minorities:** Proponents argue that the CAA offers a much-needed path to citizenship for persecuted minorities who have fled religious oppression in neighboring countries.
- No Loss of Existing Citizenship:** The Act emphasizes that it doesn't revoke the citizenship of any current Indian citizen.

Critical Outlook:

- Suspicious Timing:** The close proximity of the CAA's implementation to the general elections raises doubts about the government's motives, suggesting a potential attempt to influence voters through a polarizing issue.
- Flawed Religious Criterion:** The Act's dependence on religion as the sole qualifier for expedited citizenship is deeply problematic. This creates a two-tier system for immigrants, favoring specific religious groups.
- Heightened Anxiety:** The government's attempt to associate CAA with NRC further amplified anxieties, particularly among Muslims, who feared being targeted for loss of citizenship without proper documentation.

Overall, the CAA's foundation on religious affiliation and the timing of its execution raise serious concerns about its true purpose and the potential for its misuse for political gains. The discriminatory nature of the Act and its unclear implications for those who don't qualify under its narrow criteria necessitate a thorough review and potential amendments to uphold India's commitment to secularism and equal treatment for all citizens.

A fresh stance

Context:

- After a long hiatus, India signed a significant trade agreement called the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) comprising Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. Negotiations for this pact initiated in 2008 but were put on hold after 2014.

Background:

- This pact signifies a noticeable change in India's recent approach towards free trade agreements. Previously, India opted out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2019, raising concerns about its commitment to such collaborations.

What is EFTA:

- The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is an intergovernmental organization established in 1960 to promote economic cooperation and eliminate trade barriers among its member nations.

Direct Benefits:

- Enhanced market access for Indian service providers:** The agreement simplifies regulations and visa procedures, allowing Indian professionals like architects, accountants, and nurses to more easily establish themselves and offer their services in the European market through EFTA countries.
- Reduced costs for Indian producers:** The pact potentially leads to lower import duties on machinery and other goods required by Indian manufacturers, making their operations more cost-effective.
- Access to skilled workforce for EFTA nations:** Streamlined visa processes under the agreement benefit EFTA countries by granting them access to a wider talent pool of skilled professionals from India.
- Potentially lower consumer prices:** Indian consumers might benefit from reduced prices on imported goods like wine and chocolates due to lower tariffs.

Indirect Benefits (even if target is missed):

- Potential for substantial foreign investment:** The pact aims to attract \$100 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to India over the next 15 years. This significant influx of capital has the potential to create millions of new jobs and boost economic growth.
- Signaling a renewed approach to trade agreements:** This deal signifies a potential shift in India's trade policy, indicating a renewed willingness to engage in free trade agreements and potentially paving the way for similar collaborations with major economic blocs like the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK).

Challenges:

- Reaching the ambitious FDI target:** The success of the pact hinges heavily on achieving the target of \$100 billion in FDI. This necessitates sustained efforts from both India and EFTA member nations to create a conducive business environment and attract foreign investors.
- Long-term assessment:** A comprehensive evaluation of the pact's long-term effects on job creation, trade volume increase, and overall economic impact can only be accurately assessed after a significant period, likely exceeding 20 years.

Way Forward:

- The pact is expected to be ratified by the end of 2024, signifying its official implementation.
- This agreement sets a precedent for incorporating non-trade issues like labor rights, human rights, environmental concerns, and gender equality into future trade deals with other nations.

On judges and bureaucrats joining politics

Context: A recent case of a High Court judge and an IPS officer in West Bengal resigning to join political parties reignited the debate about the propriety of such actions.

Restrictions:

- While in office: The Constitution ensures the independence of judiciary and other bodies (Election Commission, Public Service Commission, CAG) through:
 - Fixed tenure
 - Financial autonomy
 - Stringent removal process
 - Post-retirement restrictions:
 - Supreme Court judges cannot practice law in any Indian court.
 - High Court judges have similar restrictions except for appearing in higher courts.
 - CAG and Public Service Commission officials cannot take government jobs after retirement.
- Political Participation:

- No legal bar: There are no legal restrictions on joining political parties, contesting elections, or holding certain positions after leaving government service.
- Examples:
 - Supreme Court judges have resigned to contest elections.
 - A former Chief Election Commissioner became a Rajya Sabha member and minister.
 - Retired CAG officials and judges have been appointed Governors.
 - Numerous bureaucrats have entered politics after retirement.

Cooling-off Period Proposal:

- Election Commission's recommendation: In 2012, they suggested a mandatory waiting period for top bureaucrats before engaging in political activities.
- Government's rejection: Based on the Attorney General's opinion, the proposal was deemed incompatible with the Constitution and democratic values.
- Supreme Court's observation: The court, in 2022, stated it's the legislature's responsibility to decide on a cooling-off period.

Arguments against Cooling-off:

- Right to contest elections: Every citizen has the fundamental right to participate in the democratic process.
- Existing restrictions: Bureaucrats already face a one-year ban on private sector jobs after retirement to avoid conflicts of interest.

Arguments for Cooling-off:

- Maintaining public trust: Judges and officials uphold the principle of "justice not only done but also seen to be done."
- Avoiding conflicts of interest: A cooling-off period minimizes potential bias during their service tenure in anticipation of future political aspirations.

Proposed Solution:

- The author suggests a two-year cooling-off period for joining political parties or holding political positions after leaving office.
- This aims to:
 - Uphold public confidence in institutions.
 - Mitigate concerns about quid pro quo (favors received in exchange for future actions).

Prelims Booster

U.S. to moot first-of-its-kind resolution at UN seeking equal global access to AI

- 🌐 The draft resolution, co-sponsored by numerous countries, underscores the importance of respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in the deployment of AI systems, aligning with global efforts to establish comprehensive AI regulations and promote international cooperation in fostering safe and trustworthy AI worldwide.
- 🗳️ If approved, the resolution would represent a significant milestone in fostering a global dialogue on AI governance and utilization, reflecting a collective commitment to harnessing AI for positive societal impact and supporting the UN's development objectives for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

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India, others call for TRIPS review with development focus

- 🌐 India, Bangladesh, Colombia, and Egypt have jointly urged the World Trade Organization (WTO) to review the TRIPS Agreement, emphasizing the importance of focusing on the development dimension, technology transfer, and addressing the concerns of developing countries in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.
- 🗳️ The submission highlights the significance of the Council for TRIPS conducting its first review under Article 71, with a specific emphasis on incorporating the development dimension and presenting recommendations to Ministers at the upcoming 14th Ministerial Conference, underscoring the need to explore the relationship between the TRIPS Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to safeguard traditional knowledge and prevent biopiracy.
- 🌐 Developing nations, including India, have persistently advocated for amendments to the TRIPS Agreement to align it with the principles of the CBD, recognizing countries' rights over biological resources while ensuring intellectual property protection, with a particular focus on expediting the examination of this relationship and promoting the preservation of traditional knowledge.
- 🗳️ Despite the setback in extending the TRIPS waiver to therapeutics and diagnostics during the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference, the call for a TRIPS review underscores the urgent need to draw upon the lessons learned from the pandemic to develop robust solutions for future health emergencies, emphasizing the necessity for prompt actions to address global health challenges and enhance preparedness for potential crises.

Overcoming theoretical limits on solar cell capacity

- ☀️ The Shockley-Queisser limit, a fundamental concept in photovoltaics, establishes the theoretical maximum capacity of a solar cell to convert light energy into electrical energy. Currently, conventional solar cells are limited to converting only about one-third of incident solar energy into electricity due to factors like transparency loss and thermalization, prompting ongoing research endeavors to enhance efficiency and transcend these constraints.
- 🔍 Solar cells function by generating electron-hole pairs when sunlight interacts with semiconducting materials, where electrons transition to the conduction band while leaving behind holes in the valence band. These electron-hole pairs serve as the essential charge carriers responsible for generating photocurrent within the semiconductor, facilitating the conversion of light energy into electrical energy.
- 🔍 Researchers are actively exploring innovative approaches, such as carrier multiplication and hot carrier extraction, to surpass the limitations imposed by the Shockley-Queisser limit and elevate the efficiency of solar cells. Carrier multiplication enables a single photon to generate multiple electron-hole pairs, while hot carrier extraction focuses on efficiently capturing high-energy photons before they dissipate as heat, offering promising avenues to enhance solar energy utilization and improve overall cell performance.

SC stops Assam govt. move to de-notify rhino habitat

- 🐘 The Supreme Court intervened to halt the Assam government's move to withdraw the 1998 notification establishing the Pobitora wildlife sanctuary, emphasizing the necessity of consulting the National Board of Wildlife before making decisions regarding wildlife sanctuaries, highlighting the importance of adhering to legal protocols and protecting the rights of forest dwellers.
- 🌿 The Assam Cabinet's decision to withdraw the sanctuary notification without proper consultation raised concerns over the unilateral nature of the action, prompting the Court to stay further steps and direct the State to prioritize the protection of forest dwellers' rights, underscoring the significance of involving the National Board of Wildlife in such matters to ensure environmental conservation and community welfare.