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NEWS JUICE

Intelligent Compilation from The Hindu, Indian Express & others along with News Background

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What is News Juice?

BY PREPMATE



1. Analysis ..

1. Karnataka's organised crime law, Lankesh murder, and an HC order

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Polity & Governance

The Karnataka Control of Organised Crime Act (KCOCA), 2000, a stringent law modelled on the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999, is at the centre of a controversy in Karnataka relating to its use in the case of journalist Gauri Lankesh's murder in 2017.

On April 22, the Karnataka High Court ordered dropping of KCOCA charges against Mohan Nayak, a key accused in the murder. Nayak, 50, is also accused of being an integral part of an organised crime syndicate that shot down Lankesh. As the BJP-led state government delayed over mounting a challenge against the High Court order, the slain journalist's sister Kavitha Lankesh has moved the Supreme Court over the dropping of KCOCA charges.

At the heart of the controversy is a clause under which any person arrested for an organised crime, even an abettor, is considered a member of the organised gang involved in the crime, if any of the persons arrested for the crime has one or more preceding chargesheets for similar crimes in the previous 10 years.

Karnataka Control of Organised Crime Act: The law & its use

KCOCA was legislated during the tenure of a Congress government in 2001 and received Presidential assent in December 2001. Among its provisions, it allows police to hold arrested persons in custody for 30 days and in judicial custody for up to 180 days before filing a chargesheet, unlike in other crimes where the maximum allowed duration for such custody is 14 and 90 days respectively. In KCOCA cases, bail can be rejected based on prima facie evidence of involvement of a suspect in a crime; a confession before a police officer can be treated as evidence; and legal telephone interceptions are given credence.

Initially, KCOCA was used very sparingly, since the setting up of special courts for KCOCA cases were delayed. In the early 2000s, the then Congress government was reluctant to use it since the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002 was still in force then (it was repealed in 2004).

The law was used by the Karnataka police against a gang linked to underworld don Bannanje Raja, who was arrested for the December 2013 shooting of trader R N Naik in Ankola in coastal Karnataka. Although there were no chargesheets against Bannanje Raja himself when he was deported from Morocco in 2015, police invoked KCOCA against him on account of the multiple chargesheets faced by many others arrested for the shooting.

These cases are currently in a special KCOCA court. There are 17 KCOCA cases pending in the state.

In the Gauri Lankesh murder, a Special Investigation Team invoked KCOCA in 2018. The SIT has arrested and chargesheeted 17 people linked to right-wing groups who created a

syndicate to carry out killings and attacks on critics, primarily in Karnataka and Maharashtra, during 2013-18.

The controversy

On April 22 this year, a single judge of the Karnataka High Court, K S Mudagal, ordered the dropping of KCOCA charges against Nayak, an alternative medicine practitioner who allegedly helped those involved in the killing of Gauri Lankesh, on the grounds that the law was not applicable to him since he had no prior chargesheets. The High Court order quashed the August 14, 2018 order of the Bengaluru police commissioner invoking KCOCA in the murder case – with specific reference to Nayak — and also ordered the quashing of charges under KCOCA against Nayak on the ground that he was not involved in “continuing unlawful activities” as defined in KCOCA.

The court rejected the plea of the Karnataka police who cited the KCOCA provision that a person is considered involved in “continuing unlawful activity” linked to a crime syndicate if any one person in the group accused of a crime faces more than one chargesheet for similar offences within the preceding period of 10 years.

Courts on the clause

In 2019, the Karnataka High Court, ruling in the case of a Class 12 examination paper leak, said the definition of “continuing unlawful activity” under KCOCA does not mean that more than one chargesheet had to be filed in the preceding 10 years even against abettors of the organised crime.

A special KCOCA court has held the view in the Gauri Lankesh case that “the provisions of KCOCA Act can also be invoked against the abettor, who assisted and abetted the continuing unlawful activity of an organised crime syndicate”.

Referring to an MCOCA case, the court said “even if a person is not having any direct role to play as regards the commission of an organised crime, if the nexus either with an accused who is a member of an organised crime syndicate or with the offence in the nature of organised crime is established, that would attract the invocation of Sec.3(2) of MCOCA... The provisions of MCOCA and KCOCA Act are similar”.

Gauri Lankesh murder accused

The police have cited the fact that key accused in the Gauri Lankesh murder case, such as Amol Kale and Sharad Kalaskar, are also charged in the killing of the rationalist Narendra Dabholkar, the leftist thinker Govind Pansare, and the Kannada scholar M M Kalburgi, 77, apart from attempting to kill the writer K S Bhagawan and plotting of acts of terrorism in Maharashtra. Police cited multiple violent crime charges against four of the 15 others in the case from the last 10 years.

The SIT investigation found that Nayak, a sympathiser of the right-wing group Sanatan Sanstha which allegedly inspired the murders, was closely associated with main accused

Kale and Degwekar. He is accused of being a key conspirator who rented a house a few kilometres from Lankesh's home to shelter the four hitmen involved.

Implications of HC order

The Karnataka police are of the view that the HC order of April 22 would result in accused in many more cases seeking dropping of KCOCA charges.

The police department sent a proposal from police headquarters to the Karnataka Home Department for filing of a plea in the Supreme Court against the dropping of the KCOCA charges in the Nayak case. With the BJP government yet to decide on an appeal, Kavitha Lankesh has now filed a special leave petition in the Supreme Court.

Source: The Indian Express

2. Need for an official digital currency

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Official digital currency

In contrast to India's continued ambiguity over the legality of cryptocurrencies, its stance on introducing an official digital currency has been reassuringly clear and consistent over time. And, four years after an inter-ministerial committee recommended that India launch fiat money in digital form, the Reserve Bank of India has indicated that pilot projects to figure out its viability are likely to be launched soon.

In a speech a few days ago, T. Rabi Sankar, Deputy Governor, RBI, said, "RBI is currently working towards a phased implementation strategy and examining use cases which could be implemented with little or no disruption." The clarity is welcome, given that the much-awaited Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021, is yet to be introduced.

Interest in digital currencies

In recent years, the significant rise of private cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Ether has spooked central banks throughout the world, and pushed the case for official digital currencies. Mr. Rabi Sankar himself cited a 2021 BIS survey of central banks, which found that 86% were actively researching the potential for such currencies, 60% were experimenting with the technology, and 14% were deploying pilot projects. China, having already engaged in pilot projects for its digital RMB, is in fact planning a major roll-out soon. There has been little doubt, therefore, that India needs a digital rupee. The important questions are about the details and the timeline.

Need for preparation

There are crucial decisions to be made about the design of the currency with regards to how it will be issued, the degree of anonymity it will have, the kind of technology that is to

be used, and so on. It is possible that the question of the degree of anonymity, especially, will be quite a challenging one. While official digital currencies can borrow the underlying technology feature of private cryptocurrencies, they significantly differ from the latter in their philosophy and goals. Also to be considered are possible impacts of the introduction of an official digital currency on people, the monetary policy, and the banking system. There are risks to be considered as well, not the least of which will be those emerging from cyberattacks. What is more, many laws need to be amended to make the digital rupee a reality. So, while India might have done exceedingly well in digital payments in recent years — the Deputy Governor said they have grown at a compounded annual growth rate of 55% over the last five years — the digital rupee will be something else altogether. Notwithstanding all these challenges, it would seem that the answer to Mr. Rabi Sankar's speech title, 'Central Bank Digital Currency – Is This the Future of Money', is a yes.

Source: The Hindu

3. Himachal landslide tragedy

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Recent landslides

The tragic death of nine tourists in a landslide in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh is another pointer to the fragility of the ecology of the Himalayan States. Extraordinarily heavy rain pummelled the State recently, leaving the hill slopes unstable and causing floods in built-up areas including Dharamshala. The descending boulders from destabilised terrain, which crushed a bridge like a matchstick, are a source of worry even for cautious local residents, and for unwary visitors, such as the tourists travelling in a van, they can turn into sudden disaster.

High tourism

Himachal is famed for its scenic vistas and welcoming summer climate, and drew a few hundred thousand tourists in June this year as States began relaxing the controls for COVID-19. There was justified alarm at the prospect of a fresh surge in infections, prompting Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur to appeal for COVID-appropriate behaviour. Unfortunately, there was not enough vigil against travel to risky areas, in the wake of a disastrous year for tourism, resulting in the mishap in Kinnaur's Basteri area.

Ecological sensitivity

What should worry Himachal, and neighbouring Uttarakhand, is that the States may be entering a phase of irreversible decline because of losses to their ecology; frequent landslides may become inevitable. Bootstrapping an incompatible model of development in the hills, represented by big hydroelectric projects and large-scale construction activity involving destruction of forests and damming of rivers, is an invitation to harm.

Should HP go for mega hydropower projects

Mega hydropower, which Himachal Pradesh is working to tap as a significant source of “green” power that substitutes energy from fossil fuels, could alter several aspects of ecology, rendering it vulnerable to the effects of extreme events such as cloudbursts, flash floods, landslides and earthquakes. The parliamentary Standing Committee on Energy during 2018-19 noted that the State could more than double its existing harnessed hydropower potential of 10,547 MW.

Kinnaur is a focus point for such development, centred around the potential of the glacially-fed Sutlej valley, but one scientific estimate warns that avaricious tapping of the river through all planned projects would impound nearly a quarter of its waters in dams, and divert a staggering 72% through tunnels. Other researchers, studying the 2015 Nepal earthquake, point to high seismicity causing fatal landslides and severe damage to hydropower structures in the Himalayas; the cost of power produced was underestimated, while the potential was overestimated. Evidently, it is impossible to assign a real value to the costs to people and communities, together with the loss of pristine forests that weak afforestation programmes cannot replace. As catastrophic weather events inflict frequent, heavy losses, Himachal Pradesh and other Himalayan States can only watch their ecological base erode. Changing course may yet preserve a lot of their natural riches.

Source: The Hindu

4. Multi-track strategy: India ‘engages Taliban’, but questions Pakistan’s support to militant group

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

India is engaging all stakeholders in Afghanistan, including some parts of the Taliban, as part of a “multi-track” strategy necessitated by the advance of the Taliban militants on the ground, according to official sources, who for the first time confirmed the talks are ongoing. The talks with the militant group don’t dilute India’s concerns over the Taliban’s recent military gains, and Pakistan’s support to Taliban fighters, but signify that a negotiated power-sharing agreement is now seen as the “best case scenario” for Afghanistan.

“We support the Afghan government. We deal with them irrespective of who is in power. We are in constant touch with Afghan leaders from all ethnic backgrounds. We have participated at the Doha [conference inauguration] and later on also have been in meetings [with the Taliban]. We believe Afghans deserve peace, and if we have to be in touch with all stakeholders and regional countries, we will be,” the sources explained.

According to the government’s latest assessment, the Taliban is attempting to acquire territory to the South and border posts of Afghanistan, and will accelerate its efforts to take major cities once the U.S. completes its pull-out of troops at the end of August. In particular, the assessment has found that while the Taliban holds territory considerably less than

media speculation of “85%”, and pegs its reach to only about “45-50%”, it is in a position to establish control of one or more of the Southern provinces including Kandahar, Helmand, Ghazni and Paktia.

Next 3-4 months crucial

The detailed assessment doesn't predict the fall of Kabul at present, but that the next 3-4 months will be crucial to decide Afghanistan's future.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is expected to share this perception with U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken on Wednesday in Delhi, pointing out that the U.S. air support and international financial assistance would be necessary to stave off the Taliban's onslaught against the Afghanistan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), along with a check on Pakistan's continued support to the Taliban. He would also discuss the outcome of his recent visits to Doha, Dushanbe, Moscow, Tehran and Tashkent, all of which focused on the situation in Afghanistan and India's concerns about Pakistan's role.

In particular, the sources cited recent reports from international news agencies and videos that showed Taliban fighters being treated in Pakistani hospitals, and identified hospitals in the border town of Chaman and Quetta as places where those injured in the fighting with the ANDSF near the border post at Spin Boldak were brought.

The sources said many of those killed and injured also held Pakistani identity cards, which was one of the reasons Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani had, at a conference in Tashkent this month, openly blamed Islamabad for failing to stop the flow of “10,000” jihadis, who he said had entered Afghanistan from Pakistan and other countries in the past month.

Need for sustained pressure on Pakistan

On Sunday, MEA officials involved in the planning of talks during Mr. Blinken's visit had also said they would discuss the “the need for sustained pressure on Pakistan on terror financing and terror havens”.

However, it is far from clear how much the U.S. will be willing to criticise Pakistan publicly, given that it is deeply engaged with its military and political leadership on pushing the Taliban towards some sort of a “face-saving” peace agreement before the U.S. pulls out all its troops.

Earlier this month, the U.S. also announced a new connectivity ‘Quad’ comprising U.S.-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan. In New Delhi, the move is seen as part of the U.S.'s search for a role in Afghanistan post-pullout, amidst reports that American officials are discussing acquiring a base in Central Asia, and also negotiating shelter for those in Afghanistan who have helped their forces and hence, targeted by the Taliban.

Source: The Hindu

5. 84 kos parikrama in Ayodhya: plan, its significance, and challenges

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Social Issues

The central government last week decided to declare the “84 kos parikrama marg” around Ayodhya a national highway. Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari posted on Twitter: “Draft Notification has been issued declaring ‘Chaurasi Koshi Parikrama Marg’ as National Highway in the state of Uttar Pradesh. #PragatiKaHighway”.

The decision was welcomed by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He described it as a step towards restoring the ancient glory of Ayodhya, and said the highway would boost religious tourism.

Besides Ayodhya, similar parikramas are performed by devotees at Govardhan in Braj, Kamadgiri in Chitrakoot, and Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu.

Religious significance

All three parikramas in Ayodhya — the 5 kos (around 15 km), 14 kos (42 km), and 84 kos (about 275 km) parikramas — are linked to Lord Ram. The Baal Kand of the Valmiki Ramayana mentions that Ayodhya was earlier known as Koshaldesh, initially spread over 48 kos, and was later expanded to 84 kos. The 84 kos parikrama is a circumambulation of Koshaldesh, touching all important places associated with the kingdom of Ram. The 14 kos parikrama is for the main Ayodhya city of that time, and the 5 kos parikrama circumambulates the inner circle within which the heart of Ram’s kingdom was located.

“As per Hindu belief, the 84 kos parikrama frees a person from the obligation of complete 84 lakh yoni (lives). Hindus believe the parikrama of Ayodhya started from Treta Yug, the yug of Lord Ram, which was over 1 lakh years ago,” Acharya Raghunath Das Tripathi of Ayodhya said.

Parikrama and its route

It is believed that King Dasharath performed a Putrayeshthi Yajna on the bank of the Manorama river some 20 km from Ayodhya, to seek sons from the gods. Subsequently, he was blessed with four sons from his three wives. The 84 kos parikrama starts and ends — after about 22 days — from the place where the yajna was performed, now identified as Makhaura in Basti.

The yatra is covered on foot, with some 25 stops and several places to rest. While the two shorter parikramas are completed by thousands of devotees every year, the 84 kos parikrama is undertaken by no more than 100-150 people — mostly sadhus — annually, Acharya Tripathi said.

According to officials, the 84 kos parikrama is done in the Hindu month of Kartik. Those who undertake the parikrama must eat grains only once a day, and depend on fruits for the rest of the meals. They must worship and bathe every day.

The pilgrims' first stop on the parikrama is at Ramrekha temple in Basti; the next two stops are at Hanumanbagh in Dubaulia block of Basti, and the Shring Rishi Ashram in Ayodhya. The parikrama route passes through more than 100 villages in the five districts of Basti, Ayodhya, Ambedkar Nagar, Barabanki, and Gonda.

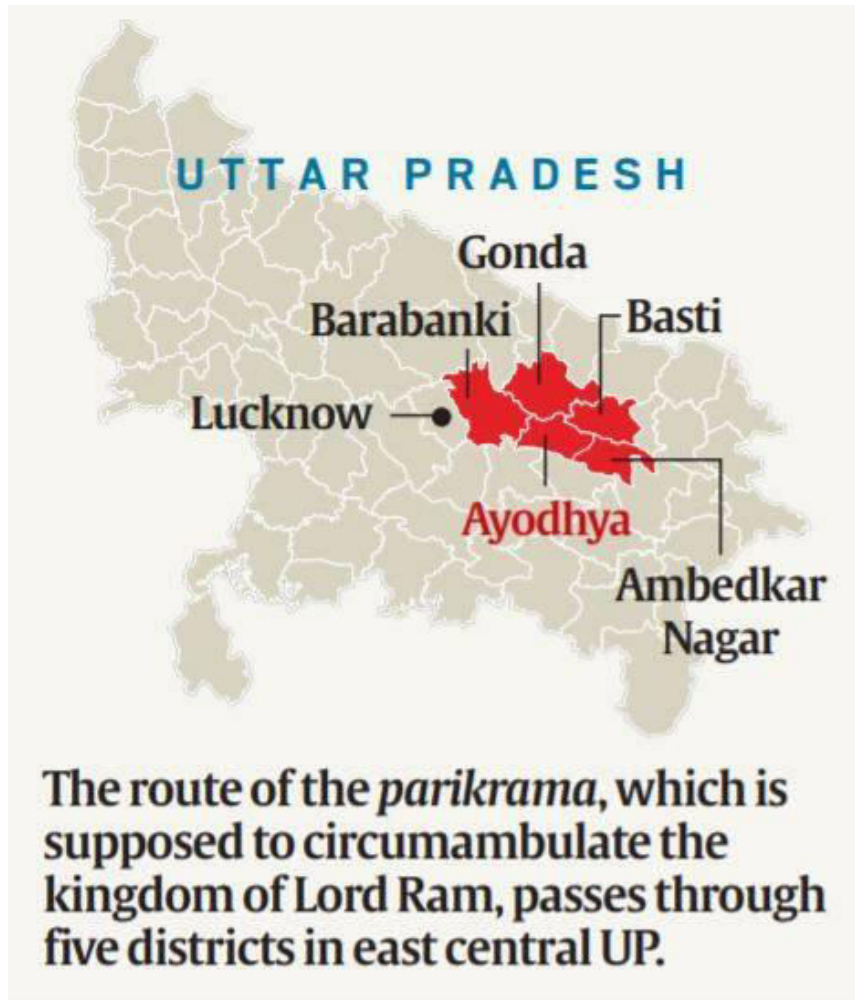
Among the important stops on the parikrama marg are Mahadev Ghat, Bhaganrampur Suryakund, Sitakund, Janmejay Kund, Amaniganj, Rudauli, Belkhara, Tikait Nagar, Dularebagh, Paraspur, Uttar Bhawani, Tarabganj, and Beer Mandir. Most places on the route are connected to events or characters in the Ramayana.

"The yatra moves on some 15 different roads, most of which are currently single lane," Ayodhya Deputy Director (Information) Murlidhar said. The route of the 84 kos parikrama was decided long ago based on the traffic situation on these roads.

Politics around yatra

In 2013, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) announced it would undertake the 84 kos parikrama. The plan was to start from Ayodhya and travel through Basti, Faizabad (now Ayodhya), Ambedkar Nagar, Barabanki, Bahraich, and Gonda before returning to Ayodhya, to revive the demand for the Ram Temple at the then disputed Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid site, ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

The Samajwadi Party government of Akhilesh Yadav banned the VHP's yatra, ordered a heavy security bandobast, and sealed district borders. The VHP and BJP accused Akhilesh of pandering to the SP's Muslim leaders, especially Azam Khan.



Since coming to power in 2017, the BJP government in UP has focused on developing religious places, including Ayodhya, Varanasi, Prayagraj, and Gorakhpur. Deepotsava has been celebrated on the eve of Deepawali in Ayodhya, special attention has been given to the Kanwar yatra, and ghats along holy rivers have been developed.

The development of the 84 kos parikrama marg can be seen as part of the same push. Trees mentioned in the Ramayana will be planted at the Janmabhoomi, along the 14 kos and 5 kos parikrama routes, and on gram sabha lands and in parks. Last September, the CM had directed officials to provide more facilities to pilgrims on all the parikrama routes.

Challenges before govt

Upgrading the 84 kos parikrama route, which is 15 mostly single-lane roads passing through five districts, will not be easy, Acharya Tripathi said. Many believe the government's announcement is only to gain political mileage before the Assembly elections.



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Back in 2015, the BJP MP from Faizabad, Lallu Singh, had demanded that the parikrama route be four-laned. But despite favourable statements from the government, no work started. Work on several similar projects — including the Ram-Janki Marg, the Ram Van Gaman Marg, and the giant statue of Ram in Ayodhya — too has been crawling.

Source: The Indian Express



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