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SC Overturns 1967 Ruling on AMU Minority Status

Context: In a landmark legal decision, the Supreme Court of India has overturned its 1967 ruling that denied Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) the status of a minority institution. This 4-3 majority verdict marks a significant shift in the interpretation of Article 30 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions.

Background of the Case

- **Founding of AMU:**
  - » **1877:** The institution was founded as the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, aiming to promote modern education among the Muslim community in India, while preserving Islamic values.
  - » **1920:** The college was upgraded to Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) under the Aligarh Muslim University Act, enacted by the British government.

The 1967 Supreme Court Ruling:

- **1967:** The Supreme Court ruled that AMU was not a minority institution. The Court stated that because the university was established by a statute (the AMU Act), and not solely by the Muslim community, it did not qualify for the protections under Article 30 of the Constitution.
- This decision effectively denied AMU the autonomy that minority institutions typically enjoy, including exemption from certain reservation requirements.
- **Subsequent Developments:**
  - » **1981:** In an effort to address the issue, an amendment was made to the AMU Act, stating that the university was established by the "Muslims of India". However, the Allahabad High Court struck down this amendment in 2005, declaring that it still did not confer minority status on AMU.

The Recent Supreme Court Ruling:

- **Overturning the 1967 Decision:** The Supreme Court has overturned its 1967 decision, recognizing that AMU's can claim minority institution status based on its historical context, founding purpose, and significant contributions to Muslim education in India.
- **New Test for Minority Status:** The Court established a new test to determine whether an educational institution can claim minority status under Article 30. This test focuses not just on the legal manner of the institution's establishment, but also on its founding intent and its historical and cultural significance.
- Educational institutions with a strong historical and cultural connection to a particular community (like AMU's connection to the Muslim community) may now be eligible to claim minority status, even if they were established through a government act or by a broader group.

Implications of the Ruling

- **Final Determination of AMU's Status:** While the Supreme Court has ruled that AMU can claim minority status, the final determination of its exact status will be made by a separate bench in subsequent proceedings.
- This ruling provides a legal foundation for AMU to assert its minority institution status, but the specifics of its entitlement will be clarified through further legal proceedings.

Expanding Himalayan Glacial Lakes

Context: The Himalayan region is undergoing significant changes due to climate change. Recent reports reveal that the surface area of Himalayan glacial lakes has increased by 10.81% from 2011 to 2024, expanding from 533,401 hectares in 2011 to 591,108 hectares in 2024. This expansion is primarily attributed to accelerated glacier melting, a direct consequence of rising global temperatures and altered precipitation patterns.

Key Findings:

- **Significant Expansion of India's Glacial Lakes:**
  - » Indian glacial lakes have seen a 33.7% increase in surface area between 2011 and 2024.
  - » A total of 67 lakes have experienced a growth of over 40%, placing them in the high-risk category for Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).
- **High-Risk Regions in India:** The regions with the most significant expansion of glacial lakes include:
  - » Ladakh: Known for its high-altitude glaciers, Ladakh

has seen large increases in lake size.
  - » **Himachal Pradesh:** This state, with several large glaciers, has reported notable expansions in lake areas.
  - » **Uttarakhand:** Home to the headwaters of major rivers like the Ganga, Uttarakhand's glacial lakes have also grown substantially.
  - » **Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh:** These northeastern states have experienced considerable changes in their glacial lake systems, especially near the borders with Bhutan and China.
- **Transboundary Risks:**
  - » Glacial lakes in India also pose risks to neighboring countries, including Bhutan, Nepal, and China.
  - » A breach in the moraine of glacial lakes could result in cross-border floods, landslides, and other environmental hazards, making transboundary cooperation critical in risk management.

Consequences of Expanding Glacial Lakes

- **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs):**
  - » GLOFs occur when a glacier-dammed lake breaches its natural moraine (a barrier made of rocks and debris), releasing a massive surge of water downstream.
  - » These floods can be sudden and catastrophic, eroding infrastructure, inundating settlements, and causing widespread destruction to ecosystems.
- **Impact on Water Availability:**
  - » The Himalayan glaciers, often referred to as the "third pole," store significant amounts of freshwater, feeding major river systems like the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Indus.
  - » As glaciers melt, the water feeds into glacial lakes, temporarily increasing the water volume. However, the unpredictability of water release from expanding lakes poses long-term risks to water security.
- **Ecosystem Disruptions:**
  - » The rapid expansion of glacial lakes and the resulting changes in the landscape can disrupt local ecosystems, threatening biodiversity.

Mitigation Efforts:

- **Leveraging Advanced Satellite Technology:** Sentinel-1 Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) and Sentinel-2 multispectral imagery are being used to monitor and track the growth, stability, and volume of Himalayan glacial lakes.
- **International Cooperation for Monitoring and Risk Assessment:** Recognizing the transboundary nature of the risks posed by expanding glacial lakes, India has called for increased international cooperation with neighboring countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, and China.
- **Building Resilience in Communities:** Alongside technological advancements and international collaboration, there is a growing effort to build resilience in the local communities most vulnerable to GLOFs and other climate-related hazards.

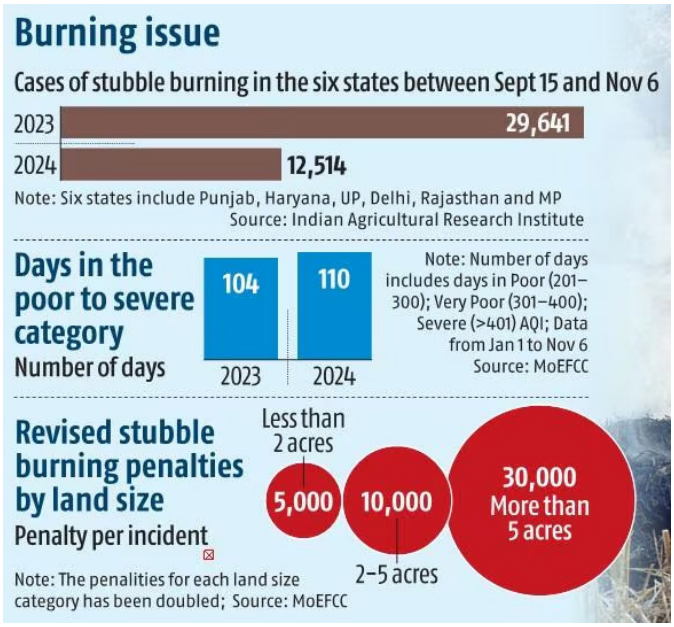
Centre Doubles Penalty for Stubble Burning

Context: In response to growing concerns over air pollution in Delhi and surrounding regions, the Government of India has significantly increased penalties for farmers involved in stubble burning. This action follows the Supreme Court's harsh criticism of existing penalties under the Environment Protection Act (EPA), 1986, for being ineffective and unenforced.

Key Points:

- **New Penalties for Stubble Burning**
  - » Government Action: The penalties for stubble burning have been doubled to discourage the practice that worsens air quality in Delhi and neighboring regions.
- **Fines:**
  - » Rs 5,000 for farmers with less than 2 acres of land.
  - » Rs 10,000 for farmers with 2 to 5 acres.

» Rs 30,000 for farmers with more than 5 acres of land.



- **Enforcement of Penalties:**
  - » **Mechanism:** Fines will be imposed through the issuance of a challan (fine notice) to farmers found burning stubble. The fine must be paid within 30 days of issuance.
  - » **Non-payment:** If the fine is not paid on time, the amount will be recovered as an arrear of land revenue and marked in the farmer's land revenue records.
  - » The collected fines will be deposited into the accounts of the State Pollution Control Boards or Pollution Control Committees for environmental compensation.

Rationale Behind the Increased Penalties

- **Air Pollution Crisis:** The fines aim to reduce stubble burning, which has been identified as a key contributor to seasonal air pollution peaks in the National Capital Region (NCR).
- **Rising Air Pollution:** Despite the decrease in stubble burning incidents, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) reports that the number of days with poor to severe air quality has increased from 87 to 110 days in the same period.

Contribution of Stubble Burning to Pollution:

- **Minor Contributor:** According to the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), stubble burning accounts for only 8.19% of Delhi's pollution.
- **Other Sources:** The main contributors to Delhi's air pollution include:
  - » Local pollution sources (30.34%),
  - » Vehicle emissions (50.1% of local pollution),
  - » Pollution from neighboring NCR districts (34.97%).
- This data challenges the notion that stubble burning is the primary cause of the air quality crisis in Delhi.

Government's Broader Approach

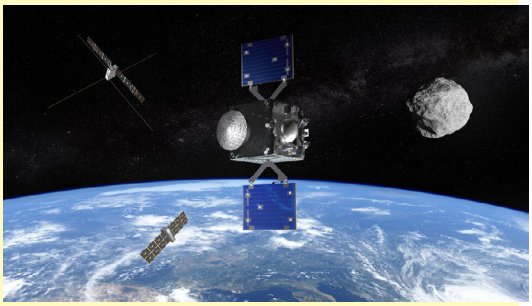
- **Additional Reforms:**
  - » In conjunction with the new stubble burning penalties, the MoEFCC has also introduced the Environment Protection (Manner of Holding Inquiry and Imposition of Penalty) Rules, 2024.
  - » These rules provide guidelines for investigating and penalizing a wide range of environmental violations.
  - » Factors like the location, size, and nature of the violation will be considered when determining penalties.
- **Accountability:**
  - » The government aims to strengthen accountability in environmental law enforcement, ensuring more rigorous action against violations.

Power Packed News

ESA's RAMSES Mission

- The European Space Agency (ESA) has initiated the Rapid Apophis Mission for Space Safety (RAMSES) to study the asteroid Apophis, which is expected to pass within 31,860 kilometers of Earth on April 13, 2029. Apophis, a 340-meter-wide near-Earth object discovered in 2004, will pass safely by Earth but close enough to allow detailed observation.
- RAMSES will study Apophis's orbit, rotation, and shape of the asteroid. The insights gained could inform future methods to deflect asteroids that may pose threats to Earth.

About Near-Earth Objects (NEOs):



- Asteroids like Apophis are remnants from the Solar System's formation, many of which pose potential risks to Earth. Among the estimated 35,000 near-Earth objects (NEOs), around 2,300 are classified as "potentially hazardous." Historical impacts, such as the one that contributed to the dinosaurs' extinction 66 million years ago, underscore the importance of understanding and tracking these objects.

NASA's Osiris-Apex Mission

- During this close approach, NASA will conduct its Osiris-Apex mission, which will examine Apophis's surface.
- Together, the RAMSES and Osiris-Apex missions represent a rare chance to observe a near-Earth object this closely, an opportunity that arises only every 5,000 to 10,000 years.

India's Tanushree Pandey Wins Silver at World Soft Tennis Championship

- Tanushree Pandey from India recently won a silver medal at the World Soft Tennis Championship, held in Jingshan, China. This achievement shows her talent and determination in the sport and brings recognition to India on the global stage.
- Tanushree's performance in the tournament was impressive. She began in the quarterfinals, where she defeated a strong Chinese opponent with a close score of 4-3.
- Moving to the semifinals, she faced a skilled Japanese player and won another match, with a 4-3 score, which secured her spot in the finals.
- In the final match, she played against Chiang Min Yu from Chinese Taipei. Though she lost narrowly with a 3-4 score, her performance was outstanding.

Significance of Her Silver Medal:

- Winning the silver medal highlights Tanushree's skill in soft tennis and serves as an inspiration to young athletes in India. Her achievement not only raises awareness of the sport in India but also shows her potential for even greater successes in future tournaments.

Understanding Soft Tennis:

- Soft tennis is a version of traditional tennis that uses softer balls and lighter rackets, making it easier for players of all ages. Played on smaller courts, it is popular in countries like Japan and Taiwan and requires speed, precision, and strategy.
- The World Soft Tennis Championship is a highly prestigious tournament that brings together elite players from across the world. Participants compete in different categories, such as singles and doubles, highlighting the top talent in the sport of soft tennis.

Common Cat Snake

- The common cat snake (Boiga trigonata) was recently discovered in Bihar, specifically in the Valmiki Tiger Reserve. This rare and mildly venomous species was spotted near the Kotaraha guest house in 2022 by nature guide Rajiv Arya.
- The common cat snake is known for its distinct cat-like eyes, which change shape depending on the time of day. During the day, its pupils are narrow slits, while at night, they expand into round shapes, aiding in its nocturnal hunting.
- This snake is primarily nocturnal, becoming active after sunset to hunt small animals such as lizards, frogs, rats, and birds.
- Its venom is not life-threatening to humans but helps subdue its prey, contributing to the control of local animal populations.

Conservation and Habitat

- The Valmiki Tiger Reserve plays a key role in preserving the common cat snake and its ecosystem. Given its rarity,

protecting its habitat is crucial for ensuring the species' survival.

'Asmi' Machine Pistol

- The Indian Army has made a significant step in its Atmanirbharta initiative with the induction of 550 'Asmi' machine pistols into the Northern Command. This milestone showcases India's growing capability in indigenous defence manufacturing.
- The 'Asmi' machine pistol is designed for close-quarter combat and specialized operations.
- It features a semi-bullpup design, enabling single-handed operation, combining the features of both a pistol and a submachine gun.
- Developed by Colonel Prasad Bansod of the Indian Army in collaboration with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the 'Asmi' is manufactured by Lokesh Machine in Hyderabad, marking a successful partnership between military and private industries.

Significance of the Induction

- The induction of the 'Asmi' machine pistol highlights India's progress towards self-reliance in defence. It enhances operational readiness and supports local industries, creating new jobs while inspiring future innovations in military technology.

What is the Atmanirbharta Initiative?

- Atmanirbharta is a campaign launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reduce dependency on imports and encourage local production across various sectors, particularly in defence.