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Current affairs summary for prelims

11 December 2024

"Reservation Can't Be on Basis of Religion": Supreme Court

Context: The Supreme Court of India recently addressed a critical question on whether reservation benefits can be extended solely based on religion, as it heard appeals against the Calcutta High Court's decision that nullified the West Bengal government's classification of 77 communities, mostly Muslim, as Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

Background:

- In 2010, the West Bengal government classified 77 predominantly Muslim communities as OBCs to allow them reservation benefits in government jobs and educational institutions. However, the Calcutta High Court struck down this classification on May 22, 2024. The court ruled that the classification appeared to be based solely on religion, not backwardness.
- It also noted that the necessary surveys and data to justify the backwardness of these communities were lacking, violating constitutional provisions on reservations.

The Supreme Court's Observations:

- The Supreme Court bench, comprising Justices B.R. Gavai and K.V. Viswanathan, observed that "reservation cannot be on the basis of religion." This statement underscores ongoing debates on whether religion should be a valid criterion for reservations.
- The court also acknowledged that a larger constitutional question about using religion for reservations is pending before a Constitution Bench.

Constitutional Framework related to reservation in India:

- The Constitution of India provides for affirmative action to promote social justice, particularly for disadvantaged communities.
  - » Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
  - » Article 16 ensures equal opportunities in public employment but allows reservations for backward classes.
  - » **Article 46:** It directs the state to promote the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and other socially and educationally backward classes.
  - » **Article 340:** This article allows the creation of a commission to examine the backwardness of certain classes and communities
- The Mandal Commission Report (1980) laid the foundation for identifying backward classes based on socio-economic criteria, particularly caste, and not religion. The Indira Sawhney Case (1992) reinforced that reservations should be based on backwardness, not religion.

Arguments in the Case:

- Kapil Sibal, representing the West Bengal government, defended the classification, asserting it was based on backwardness, not religion. He referred to quantifiable data on the backwardness of these communities.
- Conversely, P.S. Patwalia, representing the respondents, argued that the state had not followed due procedures, bypassing the Backward Classes Commission and failing to conduct a comprehensive survey on backwardness.

Current Status and Next Steps:

- The Supreme Court has scheduled the matter for further hearing on January 7, 2025. The Court's ruling will likely have a significant impact on the legal framework governing reservations in India, especially with regard to the question of religion-based quotas.
- The decision could further clarify the constitutionality of using religion as a basis for classification under the backward classes category.

Antimatter's Cosmic Mystery

Context: The matter-antimatter imbalance is a long-standing mystery in the universe. A groundbreaking paper published in August 2024 suggests a potential solution within the Standard Model of particle physics. While the Standard Model has successfully explained fundamental particles and forces, it struggles to explain this imbalance. The paper proposes that meson decays, which violate CP symmetry, could contribute to the imbalance.

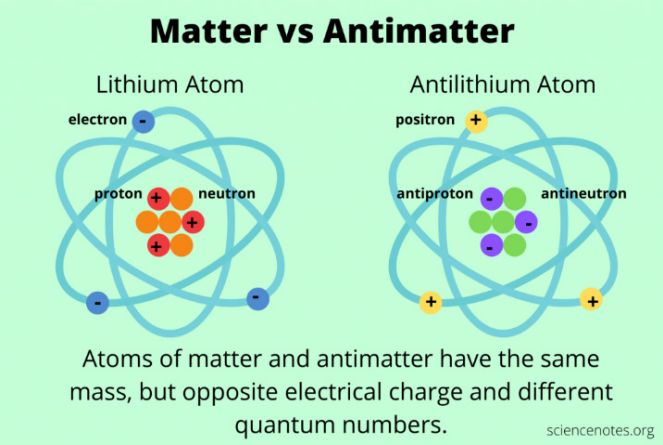
About the Mesons:

- Mesons, composed of quark-antiquark pairs, when decaying, could create a new particle species that

influenced the early universe's matter creation. Over time, the effect of these particles would diminish. If confirmed, this theory would provide a key explanation for the imbalance and demonstrate the Standard Model's broader potential.

About Antimatter:

- The concept of antimatter was theorized by Paul Dirac in 1928 and experimentally discovered by Carl Anderson in 1932.
- Antimatter consists of antiparticles that have the same mass as matter particles but opposite charges. For example, the antielectron (positron) is the antiparticle of the electron, with the same mass but a positive charge.



Antimatter's Scarcity:

- Despite being detected in cosmic rays and even within our bodies (producing one antielectron every 20 seconds), antimatter is incredibly scarce in the universe.
- This raises the critical question: Why is there so much more matter than antimatter?
- If the universe started with equal amounts of matter and antimatter, they should have annihilated each other, leaving only energy. Yet, matter dominates the universe.

About CP Violation:

- The answer likely lies in a phenomenon known as CP violation — a violation of the combined symmetry of charge conjugation (C) and parity transformation (P).
- CP violation plays a crucial role in creating an imbalance between matter and antimatter.

Sakharov Conditions:

- Andrei Sakharov formulated three essential conditions that any theory explaining matter-antimatter asymmetry must satisfy:
  - **Violation of CP symmetry:** Particles and antiparticles behave differently, or mirror reflection of a system results in a change in behavior.
  - **Violation of baryon number:** Particles like protons and neutrons have a baryon number of +1, while antiparticles have -1.
  - **Out-of-equilibrium conditions:** Particle processes must occur at different rates in the forward and backward directions, preventing thermal equilibrium.
- The Standard Model of particle physics doesn't fully meet these conditions

Foreign Direct Investment in India

Context: India has achieved a significant milestone with foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows crossing the $1 trillion mark from April 2000 to September 2024. This milestone highlights India's growing appeal as a global investment hub and reflects its attractiveness to foreign investors, despite global challenges.

Key Trends in FDI Inflows

- **FDI through Key Routes:**
  - Mauritius and Singapore are the largest contributors, accounting for 49% of the total FDI. The U.S. follows with 10%. Other countries such as Netherlands, Japan, U.K., and UAE also contribute significantly.
- **Sectoral Focus of FDI:**
  - Services remains the largest sector for FDI, driven by industries like telecommunications, computer software, and trading.
  - Manufacturing has seen a 69% increase in FDI over the last decade, particularly in automobiles, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.
  - Government initiatives like Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes have boosted manufacturing and attracted more FDI.

Growth in the Last Decade:

- India saw a 119% increase in FDI inflows between 2014 and 2024, amounting to $667.4 billion, reflecting the country's sustained economic growth and attractive investment policies.

Government's Role in FDI Policy:

- The Indian government regularly reviews and adjusts FDI policies to ensure the country remains investor-friendly. Reforms in areas like mergers and acquisitions (M&A) are aimed at improving the investment climate.

Challenges and Potential Risks:

- **Geopolitical Risks:** Geopolitical tensions and shifting global trade policies can impact FDI inflows. For instance, changes in U.S. and Chinese economic policies may lead to fluctuations in investor confidence.
- **Policy Changes in Key Markets:** Policy shifts in major FDI source countries could slow down inflows. However, India's continuous structural reforms are expected to mitigate such risks.
- **Regulatory Environment:** While India has liberalized FDI policies, challenges like bureaucratic delays and complex regulations still hinder ease of doing business. Further reforms are needed to improve India's competitiveness.

Strategic Measures for Continued Growth

- **Strengthening Structural Reforms:** India should continue implementing reforms in areas like taxation, labor laws, and M&A processes to simplify the investment environment and attract more FDI.
- **Enhancing Infrastructure and Connectivity:** Focused investments in infrastructure, especially through public-private partnerships (PPPs), will further incentivize foreign investors and enhance the ease of doing business.
- **Skilling the Workforce:** Developing a skilled workforce through government-backed initiatives and training programs will ensure that India remains competitive in global markets, particularly in the high-tech and manufacturing sectors.
- **Fostering Digital Innovation:** Encouraging digital transformation through investments in technology and research will help create long-term value and maintain India's position as an attractive investment destination.

Key Terms:

- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is a type of investment where a company or individual from one country establishes or acquires a business operation in another country. FDI promotes job creation, infrastructure development, and technological advancements.
- **Automatic and Government Approval Routes:** In India, most sectors allow FDI under the automatic route, where foreign investors only need to notify the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) after making an investment. In contrast, sectors like telecommunications and media require government approval before investment.

No-Confidence Motion Against Vice-President

Context: On December 10, 2024, the Opposition parties in India moved a no-confidence motion against Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, who also serves as the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

Reason for the motion:

- The no-confidence motion follows months of opposition tensions with Dhankhar, who is accused of not being neutral in managing debates.
- The Opposition claims their voices were suppressed, especially on key issues opposing the government in Rajya Sabha.
- Congress, leading the motion, called it a difficult but necessary step to uphold parliamentary democracy.

Removal of the Vice President of India:

- Under article 67(b) of the Indian constitution, The Vice President of India can be removed through a resolution passed in the Rajya Sabha with an effective majority

(majority of total members) and approved by a simple majority in the Lok Sabha.
- The resolution must be introduced in the Rajya Sabha with at least 14 days' notice. Unlike the President, there is no impeachment process for the Vice President.

Powers and Functions of the Vice President of India:

- **Chairman of Rajya Sabha:** Presides over sessions, ensures parliamentary procedures, and votes in a tie.
- **Acting President:** Temporarily assumes presidential duties if the office is vacant.
- **Presiding Over Debates:** Appoints committees and oversees motions involving judicial appointments.

Significance:

- The Vice President plays a key role in maintaining order in Rajya Sabha debates and shaping legislative decisions. While not holding executive powers, the position is significant in parliamentary functions.

Constitutional Context and Articles:

- **Article 63 - Vice-President of India:** Article 63 of the Indian Constitution states that there shall be a Vice-President of India, who also serves as the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.
- **Article 89 - Chairman of the Rajya Sabha:** Article 89 of the Constitution designates the Vice-President as the ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.
- The Chairman is responsible for the overall conduct and decorum in the House, ensuring impartiality and fairness in its proceedings.
- **Article 68 - Election of Vice-President:** Article 68 governs the procedure for the election of the Vice-President of India, ensuring that the process is conducted in a free and fair manner.
- **Article 71 - Disputes Relating to Election of President and Vice-President:** This article stipulates that disputes regarding the election of the President and Vice-President shall be resolved by the Supreme Court.

Comparison: Vice President of India vs. USA

- **India:**
  - **Role:** The Vice President is the second-highest constitutional officer and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.
  - **President's Replacement:** Temporarily assumes the President's role if the office is vacant, for a maximum of six months.
  - **Elections:** Elected by an electoral college of Parliament members, not by popular vote.
  - **Rajya Sabha Functions:** Presides over debates and votes in case of a tie.
- **USA:**
  - **Role:** The Vice President is second-in-command in the executive and President of the Senate.
  - **President's Replacement:** Becomes President if the office is vacant, serving the remainder of the term.
  - **Elections:** Elected alongside the President by popular vote.
  - **Senate Functions:** Can cast a tie-breaking vote but does not participate in daily Senate business.

Power Packed News

Former Chilean President awarded Indira Gandhi Peace Prize

- The recently announced 2024 Indira Gandhi Peace Prize will be awarded to Virginia Michelle Bachelet Jeria. Bachelet, who is the former President of Chile, has been given this honor for her global efforts for human rights.
- The announcement was made by an international jury, chaired by Shivshankar Menon (former National Security Adviser and External Affairs Minister).
- Bachelet has played many important roles in her career including serving as the founding head of UN Women, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, serving twice as the first woman president of Chile (2006-2010 and 2014-2018) and has been a strong voice for the rights of the most vulnerable groups and gender equality in her country and around the

world. Bachelet was born on September 29, 1951 in La Sistema, Santiago Province, Chile.

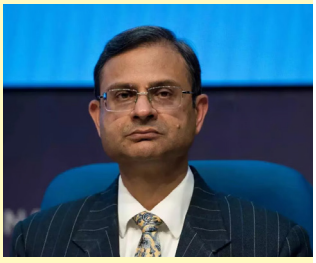
- The award is given for her invaluable contribution in the field of peace, human rights, and development.
- The award is given annually to recognize individuals and organizations for their efforts to promote international peace, development and a new international economic order. The award consists of Rs 25 lakh in cash and a citation. The award was established in 1986 by the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust.

Bangladesh won Under-19 Asia Cup

- Bangladesh won the Under-19 Asia Cup title by defeating India by 59 runs. In the final match held in Dubai, Bangladesh dismissed India for 139 runs in 36 overs. For the Indian team, captain Mohammad Aman scored the highest score of 26 runs, while Hardik Raj added 24 runs.
- The Under-19 Asia Cup is a tournament organized by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), in which youth cricket teams of Asia play.
- The tournament was first held in Bangladesh in 1989. In 2007, it was renamed as ACC Under-19 Elite Cup.

RBI Governor

- Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra has taken charge as the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). His tenure will be three years. He succeeds Shaktikanta Das, who completed his six-year tenure as RBI governor.
- Sanjay Malhotra played a key role in formulating tax policies, including direct and indirect taxes. He has held various key positions in sectors such as finance, taxation, power, information technology and mining.
- Shaktikanta Das' term ends on December 10, 2024. He took over as the 25th Governor of RBI on December 12, 2018 and his term was extended in 2021.

Kalaignar Handicrafts Scheme

- The Tamil Nadu government launched the Kalaignar Handicrafts Scheme to support artisans and craftsmen.
- Under this scheme, artisans will get credit support of up to Rs 3 lakh. A 25% subsidy (maximum Rs 50,000) will be provided on the loan. Beneficiaries will get the benefit of 5% interest subsidy.
- The minimum age of the beneficiary should be 35 years to apply.
- The scheme is designed to benefit people from all sections engaged in 25 types of occupations/ crafts.
- The scheme aims to expand existing businesses and promote skill and enterprise development.
- In 2023, the central government launched the PM Vishwakarma Yojana, which provides comprehensive support to artisans of 18 occupations.