

Places of Worship (special Provisions) Act, 1991

Why in News?

- The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 has been in the news because the Supreme Court of India is considering its validity. The Act prohibits changes to the religious character of structures that existed before 1947.

Background

- When the Babri-Masjid Ram Janmabhoomi dispute gained momentum, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other Hindu organisations took up the case of two other mosques — the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi and the Shahi Idgah in Mathura.
- In September 1991, the P.V. Narasimha Rao government enacted a special law to freeze the status of places of worship as they were on August 15, 1947.
- The law kept the disputed structure at Ayodhya out of its purview as it was then an ongoing litigation.

About Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991

- It is described as an Act to prohibit conversion of any place of worship and to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship.
- The Act declares that the religious character of a place of worship shall continue to be the same as it was on August 15, 1947.
- It says that no person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section.
- Exemption:
 - The disputed site at Ayodhya was exempted from the Act. Due to this exemption, the trial in the Ayodhya case proceeded even after the enforcement of this law.
 - Any place of worship which is an ancient and historical monument, or an archaeological site covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
 - A suit that has been finally settled or disposed of.
 - Any dispute that has been settled by the parties or conversion of any place that took place by acquiescence before the Act commenced.
- Criticism:
 - The law has been challenged on the ground that it bars judicial review, which is a basic feature of the Constitution.
 - It imposes an “arbitrary irrational retrospective cut-off date,” and abridges the right to religion of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

What is the Status of the Ongoing Cases on the Gyanvapi Mosque?

- A suit was filed in 2022 in the Varanasi district court by a group of Hindu women worshippers seeking to assert their right to worship deities they claim are still found on the premises of the Gyanvapi mosque.
- The plaintiffs say they have a right to worship Ma Sringar Gauri, Ganesh, Hanuman and other “visible and invisible” deities.
- Also pending is another batch of suits filed in 1991 seeking a declaration that a part of the site of the Gyanvapi mosque belongs to Lord Vishweshwar.
- The main basis for the suits is that the Hindu side says that an old temple of Lord Vishweshwar lies at the centre of the Gyanvapi compound.
- Court’s Judgement:
 - So far, court orders have favoured the position that these suits are not barred by the Places of Worship Act.
 - On the district court’s order, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has conducted a survey of the premises.
 - The ASI’s report, submitted to the Varanasi district court, claims that a temple existed there prior to the construction of the mosque.
 - Subsequently, the court has allowed the conduct of Hindu prayers at a cellar on the premises.

What is the Status of the Ongoing Cases on the Mathura’s Shahi Idgah?

- The suits in Mathura pertain to the Shahi Idgah mosque that stands adjacent to the Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple there.
- These suits claim that the mosque was built over the birthplace of Lord Krishna. The mosque committee, however, denies the allegation.
- The dispute was settled through a compromise between the Sri Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sansthan and the Shahi Idgah Trust in 1968, and implemented through a decree in 1974.
- As part of the settlement, the Sansthan had given up a portion of the land to the Idgah.
- The current suits challenge this compromise as ‘fraudulent’ and seek the transfer of the entire parcel of land to the deity.
- The Allahabad High Court has transferred to itself all suits pertaining to the Mathura dispute.

Why Did the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act Not Cover Gyanvapi and Shahi Idgah?

- In both disputes, the respective mosque committees sought rejection of the suits on the ground that the Places of Worship Act prohibits such litigation.
- However, court orders so far say the Act does not bar these suits and that they must go on.
- In the Gyanvapi worshippers’ case, the ruling is that the suits aimed to assert the right of worship of the Hindu deities and did not seek to convert the status of the mosque.
- The Allahabad High Court has taken the view that the Act does not define the term ‘religious character’.
- A structure cannot have the dual character of being both Hindu and Muslim, and that only an examination of evidence can determine its religious character.

- The Act cannot be an absolute bar on proceedings to ascertain its religious character, it held.
- Regarding the Mathura dispute, the district court has taken the view that the suits are not barred by the Places of Worship Act, as what is under challenge is the compromise decree based on the 1968 agreement.
- As the decree was drawn up before the commencement of the 1991 Act, it is not applicable to the case, it has held.

ECONOMY

Importance of Fiscal Consolidation

Why in News?

- Union Finance Minister announced during her Budget speech that the Centre would reduce its fiscal deficit to 5.1% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024-25.
- She further added that the fiscal deficit would be pared to below 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26.

What is Fiscal Deficit?

- About
 - Fiscal deficit refers to the shortfall in a government's revenue when compared to its expenditure.
 - When a government's expenditure exceeds its revenues, the government will have to borrow money or sell assets to fund the deficit.
- Statistics for 2024-25
 - In 2024-25, the government's tax receipts are expected to be ₹26.02 lakh crore while its total revenue is estimated to be ₹30.8 lakh crore.
 - Taxes are the most important source of revenue for any government.
- The Union government's total expenditure, on the other hand, is estimated to be ₹47.66 lakh crore.
- Focus on keeping the fiscal deficit under control rather than on generating a fiscal surplus
 - When a government runs a fiscal surplus, on the other hand, its revenues exceed expenditure. It is, however, quite rare for governments to run a surplus.
 - Most governments today focus on keeping the fiscal deficit under control rather than on generating a fiscal surplus or on balancing the budget.
 - This is because a controlled deficit policy is said to be expansionary.
 - In such policy the government spends more on budget items such as infrastructure.
 - Such policies are typically used to boost productivity and the economy.
- Fiscal deficit is not national debt
 - The national debt is the total amount of money that the government of a country owes its lenders at a particular point in time.
 - The national debt is usually the amount of debt that a government has accumulated over many years of running fiscal deficits and borrowing to bridge the deficits.

How does Government fund its Fiscal Deficit?

- Money from bond market
 - In order to fund its fiscal deficit, the government mainly borrows money from the bond market.
 - In this market, lenders compete to lend to the government by purchasing bonds issued by the government.
 - In 2024-25, the Centre is expected to borrow a gross amount of ₹14.13 lakh crore from the market, which is lower than its borrowing goal for 2023-24.
- Role of RBI
 - Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is also a major player in the credit market, although it may not always directly purchase government bonds.
 - The RBI may still purchase government bonds in the secondary market, from private lenders who have already purchased bonds from the government.
 - So, when a government borrows from the bond market, it not only borrows from private lenders but also indirectly from the central bank.
 - The RBI purchases these bonds through what are called 'open market operations' by creating fresh money.
 - This in turn can lead to higher money supply and also higher prices in the wider economy over time.

Challenges in raising the funds through bonds

- Rate of borrowing
 - Government bonds are generally considered to be risk-free as the government can — under the worst-case scenario — get help from the central bank, which can create fresh currency to pay off the lenders.
 - So, governments generally do not find it hard to borrow money from the market.
 - The bigger problem is the rate at which they are able to borrow the money.
 - As a government's finances worsen, demand for the government's bonds begins to drop forcing the government to offer to pay a higher interest rate to lenders, and leading to higher borrowing costs for the government.
- Role of monetary policy
 - Monetary policy also plays a crucial role in how much it costs governments to borrow money from the market.
 - Central bank lending rates which were near zero in many countries before the pandemic have risen sharply in the aftermath of the pandemic.
 - This makes it more expensive for governments to borrow money and could be one reason why the Centre is keen to bring down its fiscal deficit.

Why does the fiscal deficit matter?

- Relationship between fiscal deficit and inflation
 - There is a strong direct relationship between the government's fiscal deficit and inflation in the country.

- When a country's government runs a persistently high fiscal deficit, this can eventually lead to higher inflation as the government will be forced to use fresh money issued by the central bank to fund its fiscal deficit.
- The fiscal deficit recently reached a high of 9.17% of GDP during the pandemic and has since improved significantly and is projected to drop to 5.8% now.
- Indicator of fiscal discipline maintained by the government
 - The fiscal deficit also signals to the market the degree of fiscal discipline maintained by the government.
 - A lower fiscal deficit may thus help improve the ratings assigned to the Indian government's bonds.
 - When the government is able to fund more of its spending through tax revenues and borrow less, this gives more confidence to lenders and drives down the government's borrowing cost.
- Ability of the government to manage its overall public debt
 - A high fiscal deficit can also adversely affect the ability of the government to manage its overall public debt.
 - In December, the International Monetary Fund warned that India's public debt could rise to more than 100% of GDP in the medium term due to risks.
 - Although, the Centre disagreed with the assessment.
 - It is also worth noting that the Centre has been keen on tapping the international bond market.
 - A lower fiscal deficit may help the government to more easily sell its bonds overseas and access cheaper credit.

What lies ahead?

- The Centre plans to bring down its fiscal deficit in 2024-25 to 5.1% of GDP despite having plans to boost capital expenditure and to spend on other programmes.
- So, most of the revenue to fund such spending will have to come from tax collections.
 - The Centre expects tax collections to rise by 11.5% in 2024-25.
 - It has also projected a cut in expenditure on fertilizer subsidy, from ₹1.88 lakh crore in 2023-24 to ₹1.64 lakh crore in 2024-25.
 - The amount spent on food subsidy is also projected to drop from ₹2.12 lakh crore in 2023-24, to ₹2.05 lakh crore in 2024-25.

PRELIM FACTS

1. New Ramsar sites

- Recently, the union Environment Minister said that five more Indian wetlands have been added to the global list of wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

About New Ramsar site:

- Of the five wetlands added to the Ramsar list, MagadiKere Conservation Reserve, Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve, and Aghanashini Estuary are in Karnataka and Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary and Longwood Shola Reserve Forest are in Tamil Nadu.
- Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve
 - It is a human made Village Irrigation Tank built centuries back.
 - It is an ecologically important wetland and rich in biodiversity.
 - It supports more than 1% of the biogeographic population of Painted Stork and Black-headed Ibis.
- Aghanashini Estuary
 - It is formed at the confluence of Aghanashini River with the Arabian Sea.
 - The brackish water of the Estuary provides diverse ecosystem services including flood and erosion risk mitigation, biodiversity conservation and livelihood support.
 - The wetland helps in traditional fish farming in the estuarine rice fields (locally known as Gazni rice fields), bivalve shell collection and salt production.
- MagadiKere Conservation Reserve
 - It is a human-made wetland which was constructed to store rainwater for irrigation purposes.
 - The wetland harbours two vulnerable species, namely Common pochard and River tern and four near-threatened species, namely Oriental Darter Black-headed Ibis Woolly-necked Stork and Painted Stork
 - It is also one of the largest wintering grounds for the Bar-headed goose.
- Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary
 - It is one of the largest inland wetlands of Tamil Nadu, and is a significant source of groundwater recharge for the area.
- The Longwood Shola Reserve Forest
 - It derives its name from the Tamil word, "Solai", which means a 'tropical rain forest'.
 - The 'Sholas' are found in the upper reaches of the Nilgiris, Anamalais, Palni hills, Kalakadu, Mundanthurai and Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu.
 - These forested wetlands serve as habitats for the globally endangered Black-chinned Nilgiri Laughing thrush and Nilgiri Blue Robin and vulnerable Nilgiri Wood-pigeon.

2. Green Roofs

- According to recent research, green roofs treated with mycorrhizal fungi foster a more diverse soil community that is more likely to support long-term green roof sustainability.

About Green Roofs:

- Green roofs, also known as 'vegetated roofs' or 'living roofs' — are ballasted roofs consisting of a waterproofing membrane, growing medium (soil), and vegetation (plants) overlying a traditional roof.
- The layers of green roof systems must, like any roof, accommodate drainage, stormwater management, and protect the building from the elements with a waterproof membrane.

- But they also must create a growing area and potentially provide support, irrigation, and root protection barriers while staying as light as possible.
- Two types of green roofs exist: intensive and extensive.
 - Intensive green roofs are essentially elevated parks. They can sustain shrubs, trees, walkways and benches with their complex structural support, irrigation, drainage, and root protection layers.
 - Extensive green roofs are relatively light. They support hearty native ground cover that requires little maintenance. Extensive green roofs usually exist solely for their environmental benefits and don't function as accessible rooftop gardens.
- Benefits:
 - Green roofs last longer than conventional roofs, reduce energy costs with natural insulation, create peaceful retreats for people and animals, and absorb storm water, potentially lessening the need for complex and expensive drainage systems.
 - On a wider scale, green roofs improve air quality and help reduce the Urban Heat Island Effect, a condition in which city and suburban developments absorb and trap heat.

Key Facts about Fungi:

- Fungi, along with Animalia (animals), Plantae (plants), Protista, Archaea/Archaeobacteria, and Bacteria or Eubacteria, form the six 'kingdoms' of biology.
- They are eukaryotic organisms, i.e., their cells contain membrane-bound organelles and clearly defined nuclei.
- Reproduction: Fungi usually reproduce both sexually and asexually.
- Distribution:
 - Fungi are either terrestrial or aquatic, the latter living in freshwater or marine environments.
 - They are found in all temperate and tropical regions of the world where there is sufficient moisture to enable them to grow.
 - A few species of fungi live in the Arctic and Antarctic regions, although they are rare and are more often found living in symbiosis with algae in the form of lichens.
- Importance of fungi:
 - They help in breaking down dead organic material, they continue the cycle of nutrients through ecosystems.
 - Fungi, as food, play a role in human nutrition in the form of mushrooms.
 - They also act as agents of fermentation in the production of bread, cheeses, alcoholic beverages, and numerous other food preparations.
 - Secondary metabolites of fungi are used as medicines, such as antibiotics and anticoagulants.

3. Martand Sun Temple

- Members of a little-known Hindutva group forced their way into the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected Martand sun temple recently.

About Martand Sun Temple:

- It is a Hindu temple located near the city of Anantnag in the Kashmir Valley of Jammu and Kashmir.
- It is dedicated to the Sun God. Martand is another Sanskrit synonym for Surya.
- It was built by King LalitadityaMuktapida around the 8th Century CE. LalitadityaMuktapida was the third ruler of the Karkota Dynasty.
- Features:
 - It has a unique architecture where local Kashmiri style is blended with the architectural styles of Gupta, Chinese, Gandhara, Roman, and Greek.
 - The temple is located on top of a plateau and has been constructed entirely out of stone.
 - It covers an area of 32,000 square feet.
 - It stands in the middle of a large courtyard with 86 fluted columns. The courtyard is connected to the main shrine, where Sun God's idol was installed.
 - The construction of the main shrine was such that during most of the days' time, especially during sunrise and sunset, the rays would directly fall on the idol.
 - The central shrine, or vimana, stands tall at around 60 feet. It features intricate carvings and sculptures that depict various Hindu gods and goddesses.
 - There are 84 smaller shrines around the main Sun Temple. They are lined along the perimeter of the complex.
- The temple is believed to have been demolished by Sultan Sikandar Shah Miri, who ruled Kashmir from 1389 to 1413.

4. eROSITA

- Recently, the German eROSITA consortium has released the data for its share of the first all-sky survey by the soft X-ray imaging telescope.

About eROSITA:

- The eROSITA (extended ROentgen Survey with an Imaging Telescope Array) is a wide-field X-ray telescope on-board the Russian-German "Spectrum-Roentgen-Gamma" (SRG) observatory.
- It was developed under the leadership of the Max-Planck Institute for extra-terrestrial Physics in Germany (DE).
- It is a sensitive X-ray telescope capable of delivering deep, sharp images over very large areas of the sky.
- The eROSITA telescope consists of seven identical Wolter-1 mirror modules.
- SRG was successfully launched from Baikonur on July 13 2019, and placed in a halo orbit around the L2 point.
- Functions
 - It has been performing an all-sky survey, in which the whole celestial sphere is mapped once every six months. Eight such all-sky charts are planned until December 2023.

- It is also expected to yield a sample of several million Active Galactic Nuclei, providing a unique view of the evolution of supermassive black holes within the emerging cosmic structure.
- The survey will also provide new insights into a wide range of astrophysical phenomena, including accreting binaries, active stars and diffuse emission within the Galaxy, as well as solar system bodies that emit X-rays via the charge exchange process.

5. One Stop Centre Scheme

- Recently, the union Minister for Women and Child Development said that One Stop Centres to help women who have faced violence have been established in over 700 districts across the country.

About One Stop Centre scheme:

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme formulated under the union Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).
- Objectives
 - To provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof.
 - To facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services including medical, legal, psychological and counselling support under one roof to fight against any forms of violence against women.
- Target group
 - It supports all women including girls below 18 years of age affected by violence, irrespective of caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation or marital status.
 - For girls below 18 years of age, institutions and authorities established under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 linked with the OSC
- Funding: The Scheme will be funded through Nirbhaya Fund. The Central Government will provide 100% financial assistance under the Scheme.
- Administration: The day to day implementation and administrative matters would be the responsibility of the District Collector/District Magistrate.
- The OSC will facilitate access to: Emergency Response and Rescue Services, Medical assistance, assistance to women in lodging FIR/ NCR/DIR, psycho-social support/ counseling, legal aid and counseling, shelter and Video Conferencing Facility.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Examine the concepts of inclusive growth and its relevance in the realm of socio-economic development.

Answer: According to the OECD, Inclusive growth is economic growth that is distributed fairly across society and creates opportunities for all. It goes beyond traditional measures of growth, taking into account social indicators and ensuring that marginalized groups actively participate in and benefit from the development process.



Principles of Inclusive Growth:

- Participation: ensuring that all people can contribute to and benefit from economic activity, regardless of their income, gender, ethnicity, disability, or location
- Equity: reducing inequalities in income, wealth, and opportunities, and promoting social mobility and inclusion.
- Growth: enhancing productivity, competitiveness, and innovation, and creating more and better jobs.
- Sustainability: balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives, and preserving natural resources and ecosystems for future generations
- Stability: maintaining macroeconomic stability, fiscal responsibility, and resilience to shocks and crises.

Significance in Socio-Economic Development:

- Poverty reduction and shared prosperity: Inclusive growth offers a more sustainable and equitable pathway to poverty reduction compared to trickle-down approaches.
 - By creating decent jobs, promoting social mobility, and investing in human development, it allows marginalized groups to participate in the economic ladder and enjoy a better standard of living.
- Social Stability and Cohesion: Addressing inequalities and promoting equitable opportunities can decrease social tensions, foster a sense of fairness, and strengthen social cohesion. This in turn creates a more stable environment for long-term sustainable development.

- **Increased Productivity and Innovation:** A skilled and healthy workforce, coupled with improved access to education and technology, can boost productivity and innovation within the economy. This leads to higher national income and further fuels inclusive growth.
- **Sustainable Development:** It balances economic development with environmental conservation, ensuring that future generations can also thrive.
 - Therefore, it aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all.

Conclusion

Inclusive growth is crucial for sustainable development, offering a balanced and just society where progress benefits everyone, promoting equity and prosperity.

MCQs

- Consider the following statements regarding the Defamation:
 - Defamation is considered a reasonable restriction under Article 19(2) to the freedom of speech and expression.
 - The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 has added community service as punishment for defamation. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2** (d) Neither 1 nor 2
- Consider the following statements regarding the National Green Hydrogen Mission (NGHM):
 - Under it, support to domestic manufacturing of electrolyzers is provided.
 - Green Hydrogen Hubs is one of its sub-components. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2** (d) Neither 1 nor 2
- Consider the following statements.
 - All life on Earth is carbon based.
 - Organic molecules contain carbon atoms that are bonded only to hydrogen atoms.
 - The presence of CH₃⁺ in space tells us that basic building blocks for life exists there. How many of the above statements are correct?

(a) Only one (b) **Only two**
(c) All three (d) None
- Consider the following statements with respect to 'C-CARES Web Portal':
 - It is developed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), a research and development organisation.
 - It will enable provident fund subscribers and coal companies to perform various functions, including online settlement of claims. Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) **Neither 1 nor 2**
- Consider the following statements:

Statement-I: Launched in 2008, National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) aims to achieve low-carbon and climate-resilient development for India, having 10 national missions forming the core of it.

Statement-II: India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) pledge to reduce the emissions intensity of GDP by 45% by 2030 from 2005 levels and generate 50% of electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

(a) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct, and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I.
(b) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct, and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I.
(c) Statement-I is correct, but Statement-II is incorrect.
(d) **Statement-I is incorrect, but Statement-II is correct.**
- Consider the following statements:
 - Brainware integrates brain organoids with microelectrodes, forming an 'Organoid Neural Network (ONN)' that directly incorporates living brain tissue into the computing process.
 - Brain organoids are 3D tissues that simulate the structure and function of the human brain and are derived from human embryonic stem cells. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) **Both 1 and 2** (d) Neither 1 nor 2
- With reference to the features of the Ayodhya Ram temple, which of the following statements are correct?
 - It has been built in the Nagara style of architecture.
 - Bansi Paharpur Pink Sandstone are intricately used for inlay work.
 - No iron is used in the construction.
 - There are total of five mandaps (halls) in the temple.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only (b) 1 and 3 only
(c) **1, 3 and 4 only** (d) 1 and 4 only
- Consider the following:
 - Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve
 - Aghanashini Estuary
 - MagadiKere Conservation Reserve
 - The Longwood Shola Reserve Forest
 - Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary

How many of the above-mentioned sites were recently added to Ramsar sites?

(a) Only two (b) Only three
(c) Only four (d) **All five**
- Which one of the following staining techniques helps differentiate between gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria?

(a) Acid-fast staining (b) Capsule staining
(c) **Gram staining** (d) Flagella staining
- With reference to the E Ink Displays, consider the following statements:
 - E Ink displays are a type of electronic paper display technology that mimics the appearance of traditional ink on paper.
 - It uses millions of tiny microcapsules filled with positively charged white particles and negatively charged black particles suspended in a clear fluid.
 - It uses a backlight and reflects lights the same as happened in LCD and LED displays.

How many of the above statements are correct?

(a) Only one (b) **Only two**
(c) All three (d) None