

Current Affair (04 January, 2022)

(1) AFSPA Extended in Nagaland

News :- The Konyak Civil Society Organizations, the guardian umbrella of organizations of the Konyaks, has slammed the extension of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958 (AFSPA). The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958 has been extended in Nagaland for six months from 30th December 2021.

Konyak

About:

The Konyak are the largest tribe, followed by Ao, Tangkhul, Sema, and Angami in Nagaland. Other Naga tribes include Lotha, Sangtam, Phom, Chang, Khiemnungam, Yimchungre, Zeliang, Chakhesang (Chokri), and Rengma. The term 'Konyak' is believed to have been derived from the words 'Whao' meaning 'head' and 'Nyak' meaning 'black' translating to 'men with black hair'. They can be grouped into two groups, namely 'Thendu', which means the 'Tattooed Face' and 'Thentho', meaning the 'White face'.

Habitat:

Reside mostly in the Mon district also known as 'The Land of The Anghs', they are also found in some districts of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Myanmar. In Arunachal Pradesh, they are known as the Wanchos ('Wancho' is a synonymous term for 'Konyak'). Ethnically, culturally, and linguistically the Noctes and Tangsa of the same neighbouring state of Arunachal Pradesh, are also closely related to the Konyaks.

Festivals Celebrated:

The three most significant festivals were Aolingmonyu, Aonyimo and Laoun-ongmo. Aolingmonyu is celebrated in the first week of April after sowing of seeds, and this marks the beginning of a new year. Its religious significance is to appease God for a prosperous harvest. The Aonyimo is celebrated in July or August after the harvest of the first crops such as maize and vegetables. The Laoun-ongmo is a thanks-giving festival and is celebrated after all agricultural activities are completed.

Key Points

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958:

Background:

A reincarnation of the British-era legislation that was enacted to quell the protests during the Quit India movement, the AFSPA was issued by way of four ordinances in 1947. The ordinances were replaced by an Act in 1948 and the present law effective in the Northeast was introduced in Parliament in 1958 by the then Home Minister, G.B. Pant. It was known initially as the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act, 1958. After the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland came into being, the Act was adapted to apply to these States as well.

About:

The ASFPA gives unfettered powers to the armed forces and the Central armed police forces deployed in "disturbed areas" to kill anyone acting in contravention of law and arrest and search any premises without a warrant and with protection from prosecution and legal suits. The law first came into effect in 1958 to deal with the uprising in the Naga Hills, followed by the insurgency in Assam.

Disturbed Areas:

The Act was amended in 1972 and the powers to declare an area as "disturbed" were conferred concurrently upon the Central government along with the States. Currently, the Union Home Ministry issues periodic "disturbed area" notification to extend AFSPA only for Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. The notification for Manipur and Assam is issued by the State governments. Tripura revoked the Act in 2015 and Meghalaya was under AFSPA for 27 years, until it was revoked by the MHA from 1st April 2018. The Act was implemented in a 20-km area along the border with Assam.

Jammu and Kashmir has a separate J&K Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1990.

Controversy Around the Act:

Human Rights Violations:

The law empowers security personnel, down to non-commissioned officers, to use force and shoot “even to the causing of death” if they are convinced that it is necessary to do so for the “maintenance of public order”.

It also grants soldiers executive powers to enter premises, search, and arrest without a warrant.

The exercise of these extraordinary powers by armed forces has often led to allegations of fake encounters and other human rights violations by security forces in disturbed areas while questioning the indefinite imposition of AFSPA in certain states, such as Nagaland and J&K.

Recommendations of Jeevan Reddy Committee:

In November 2004, the Central government appointed a five-member committee headed by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy to review the provisions of the act in the northeastern states.

The committee recommended that:

AFSPA should be repealed and appropriate provisions should be inserted in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967

The Unlawful Activities Act should be modified to clearly specify the powers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces and Grievance cells should be set up in each district where the armed forces are deployed.

Second ARC Recommendation: The 5th report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) on public order has also recommended the repeal of the AFSPA. However, these recommendations have not been implemented.

Supreme Court Views on the Act:

The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of AFSPA in a 1998 judgment (Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India).

In this judgment, the Supreme Court held that

a suo-motu declaration can be made by the Central government, however, it is desirable that the state government should be consulted by the central government before making the declaration.

the declaration has to be for a limited duration and there should be a periodic review of the declaration 6 months have expired.

while exercising the powers conferred upon him by AFSPA, the authorized officer should use minimal force necessary for effective action.

Way Forward

The status quo of the act is no longer the acceptable solution due to numerous human rights violation incidents that have occurred over the years. The AFSPA has become a symbol of oppression in the areas it has been enacted. Hence the government needs to address the affected people and reassure them of favourable action.

The government should consider the imposition and lifting of AFSPA on a case-by-case basis and limit its application only to a few disturbing districts instead of applying it for the whole state.

The government and the security forces should also abide by the guidelines set out by the Supreme Court, Jeevan Reddy Commission, and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

(2) India & Free Trade Agreements

News :- Recently, the Commerce and Industry Ministry said that India is in dialogue with Israel for concluding a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

The announcement coincides with the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Key Points

Free Trade Agreement (FTA):

It is a pact between two or more nations to reduce barriers to imports and exports among them.

Under a free trade policy, goods and services can be bought and sold across international borders with little or no government tariffs, quotas, subsidies, or prohibitions to inhibit their exchange.

The concept of free trade is the opposite of trade protectionism or economic isolationism.

India and FTAs:

After India opted out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in November 2019, the 15-member FTA grouping that includes Japan, China and Australia, FTAs went into cold storage for India.

But in May 2021 came the announcement that India-European Union talks, which had stalled in 2013, would be resumed.

Both sides are now engaged in internal preparations to take these various strands of work forward.

Bilateral free trade agreements of India are being negotiated with the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada.

The agreement with the UAE was 'close to finalisation' while the FTA with Australia was at a 'very advanced stage.'

Other Important Trade Agreements of India:

Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) between India and Mauritius.

South Asia Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA): It is for promoting trade amongst the member countries came into effect in 1995.

South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA): A Free Trade Agreement confined to goods, but excluding all services like information technology. Agreement was signed to reduce customs duties of all traded goods to zero by the year 2016.

Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA):

Previously the Bangkok Agreement, it's a preferential tariff arrangement that aimed at promoting intra-regional trade through the exchange of mutually agreed concessions by member countries.

Issues in India's Foreign Trade Policy:

Poor Manufacturing Sector: In the recent period, manufacturing holds a share of 14% in India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

For advanced and developed nations like Germany, the US, South Korea and Japan, the comparable figures are 19%, 11%, 25% and 21%, respectively.

For emerging and developing countries like China, Turkey, Indonesia, Russia, Brazil, the corresponding figures are 27%, 19%, 20%, 13%, 9%, respectively, and for low income countries the share is 8%.

Unfavourable FTAs: In the past decade, India signed FTAs with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Malaysia.

However, it is largely believed that India's trade partners have gained more from these agreements than India.

Protectionism: The Atmanirbhar Bharat campaign has exacerbated the view that India is increasingly becoming a protectionist closed market economy.

Indo-Israel Relations

Historical Ties:

The strategic cooperation between the two countries began during the Sino-India War of 1962.

In 1965, Israel supplied M-58 160-mm mortar ammunition to India in the war against Pakistan.

It was one of the few countries that chose not to condemn India's Pokhran nuclear tests in 1998.

Economic:

India is Israel's third-largest trade partner in Asia and seventh largest globally.

Both countries currently have USD 4.14 billion of trade (April 2020 – February 2021), a figure that doesn't include the defence trade which has been increasing.

Israeli companies have invested in India in energy, renewable energy, telecom, real estate, water technologies, and are focusing on setting up Research & Development centres or production units in India. The first recipients of grants from the Israel-India Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F) were announced in July 2018, including companies working to better the lives of Indians and Israelis through efficient water use, improving communications infrastructure, solar energy use, and life-changing surgeries.

The fund aims to help Israeli entrepreneurs enter the Indian market.

Defence:

Israel has been among the top four arms suppliers to India for almost two decades now, notching military sales worth around USD 1 billion every year.

The Indian armed forces have inducted a wide array of Israeli weapon systems over the years, which range from Phalcon AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) and Heron, Searcher-II and Harop drones to Barak anti-missile defence systems and Spyder quick-reaction anti-aircraft missile systems.

The acquisitions also include a host of Israeli missiles and precision-guided munitions, from Python and Derby air-to-air missiles to Crystal Maze and Spice-2000 bombs.

At the 15th Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting on Bilateral Defence Cooperation between India and Israel, both countries agreed to form a Task Force to formulate a comprehensive Ten-Year Roadmap to identify new areas of cooperation.

Agriculture:

India and Israel have signed “a three-year work program agreement” for development in agriculture cooperation.

Covid-19 Response:

In 2020, an Israeli team arrived in India with a multi-pronged mission, codenamed Operation Breathing Space to work with Indian authorities on the Covid-19 response.

Way Forward

Given that India is not party to any mega-trade deals, this would be an important part of a positive trade policy agenda.

India’s trade policy framework must be supported by economic reforms that result in an open, competitive, and technologically innovative Indian economy.

Nationalism, populism, nativism, and protectionism exploit people’s sense of being left behind and excluded from the system.

That is why we need to focus on ensuring universal inclusion in the economic networks that allow individuals and families to achieve financial security and pursue opportunities for betterment.

(3) IRDAI Proposes a Separate Regulator for Healthcare Segment

News :- With a view to make a common tariff structure for hospitals, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has proposed a separate regulator for the healthcare segment or it must be allowed to regulate hospitals.

It has been noticed that the rate of inflation of hospital charges at present is around 10-15% and tariffs are being changed on a regular basis.

Key Points

About (Issues Related to Present Tariff Structure of Hospitals):

Varying Tariffs:

Hospitals keep changing tariffs on a regular basis. There is no body to regulate them on tariff structure and grading.

When Covid hit the country last year, patients were charged excessively by some hospitals.

Cost to Health Insurance Businesses:

If insurers continue to pay whatever the hospitals are demanding, the health insurance business will be in poor health in the long run. Already, the industry is experiencing a high number of claims.

Individual Hospital Empanelment Process:

At present, health care schemes and private insurance have individual hospital empanelment processes, which replicates various activities and contributes to inefficiency and duplication of processes.

No Infrastructure to Regulate Hospitals:

IRDAI currently doesn’t have the infrastructure to regulate hospitals. As healthcare is a state subject, it’s going to be a tough proposition for IRDAI to regulate the hospitals.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), is a statutory body formed under an Act of Parliament, i.e., Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999 (IRDAI Act 1999) for overall supervision and development of the Insurance sector in India.

Suggestions:

Even with increasing penetration, there will be a need to factor general and medical inflation and given that medical inflation operates significantly higher than CPI (Consumer Price Index) inflation, a correction cycle from a pricing standpoint will be needed.

IRDAI has proposed a unique common hospital registry, empanelment process, grading of hospitals and package cost harmonisation to promote the standardisation and effective utilisation of health care infrastructure under the insurance programme.

It is recommended to have a common empanelment portal which can be utilised by all the schemes/insurance companies with standardised empanelment criteria (and) will be hugely beneficial with special focus on standard safety and quality parameters.

Health Insurance

About Healthcare:

Healthcare has become one of the largest sectors in India in terms of revenue and employment. Booming population, rising income levels, growth in infrastructure, increased awareness, insurance policies and

India's emergence as a hub of medical tourism and clinical trials have contributed to the development of the health care sector in India.

Since the needs of this sector are increasing, to provide up to date medical facilities is vital. Government funded health insurance enables the poor in India to benefit from timely care without the burden of out of pocket expenditure.

Significance of Health Insurance:

It is a mechanism of pooling the high level of Out of Pocket expenditure (OOPE) in India to provide greater financial protection against health shocks.

Pre-payment through health insurance emerges as an important tool for risk-pooling and safeguarding against catastrophic (and often impoverishing) expenditure from health shocks.

Moreover, pre-paid pooled funds can also improve the efficiency of healthcare provision.

Issues related to Health Insurance:

Life Status is unevenly Distributed:

There has been a significant increase in life expectancy of people from 35 years to 65 years since Independence. But the status of life is unevenly distributed in different parts of the country. The health problems in India are still a cause of great concern.

Low Government expenditure :

Low Government expenditure on health has constrained the capacity and quality of healthcare services in the public sector.

It diverts the majority of individuals – about two-thirds – to seek treatment in the costlier private sector.

Significant Population is missed:

At least 30% of the population, or 40 crore individuals are devoid of any financial protection for health.

Related Government Schemes:

Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY): It offers a sum insured of Rs. 5 lakh per family for secondary care (which doesn't involve a super specialist) as well as tertiary care (which involves a super specialist).

(4) Open Source Software Platform

News :- Recently, the Github, an open-source software repository service was used to create and share an offensively named app that sexually harassed a women in India.

The app used pictures of the women stolen from their social media handles and invited "users" to bid for them.

GitHub has blocked the user, and the Indian Computer Emergency Response System (Cert-In), has been asked to form "a high-level committee.

GitHub:

GitHub is the world's largest open-source developer community platform where users upload their projects and code for others to view, edit, and tweak.

The platform uses the software Git, which was created in 2005 by Linus Trovalds, the developer of the open-source operating system Linux, to track changes in a set of files and for coordination in software.

Key Points

Meaning of Open-Source: The term open source refers to something people can modify and share because its design is publicly accessible.

Underlying Principles: Open source projects, products, or initiatives embrace and celebrate principles of Open exchange,

Collaborative participation,

Rapid prototyping,

Transparency,

Meritocracy, and

Community-oriented development.

Open Source Software: Open source software (OSS) is software that is distributed with its source code, making it available for use, modification, and distribution with its original rights.

Source code is the part of software that most computer users don't ever see.

It's the code computer programmers manipulate to control how a program or application behaves.

OSS typically includes a licence that allows programmers to modify the software to best fit their needs and control how the software can be distributed.

The idea of making source code freely available originated in 1983 from an ideological movement informally founded by Richard Stallman, a programmer at MIT.

Examples of Linux, Mozilla Firefox, VLC media player, Sugar CRM, etc.

Closed Source or Proprietary Software: Closed source software is software that holds the source code safe and encrypted.

Meaning, the user can't copy, modify, or delete parts of the code without some type of consequence.

Note:

While the operating system of Apple's iPhones (iOS) is closed source, meaning it cannot be legally modified or reverse engineered, Google's Android operating system is open-source, and therefore it is possible by smartphone manufacturers such as Samsung, Xiaomi, OnePlus, etc to modify it for their hardware.

Government Policy on OSS:

The Government of India had issued a Policy on Adoption of Open Source Software in 2015.

Free and Open Source Software for Education (FOSSEE) Project: It is a project promoting the use of open source software in educational institutions.

It does that through instructional material, such as spoken tutorials, documentation, such as textbook companions, awareness programmes, such as conferences, training workshops, and internships.

The government has also made the android version of the Aarogya Setu app open source.

Promoting OSS is a part of GovTech 3.0.

GovTech 3.0 is focussed on Open Digital Ecosystems (ODEs), the underlying philosophy suggests that the government should focus on creating the "digital commons".

Way Forward

The government must take urgent, exemplary action against the perpetrators. Simply taking down the app, without imposing costs on such criminal behaviour, will lead to encouragement of impunity.

(5) Defence Research and Development Organisation

News :- Recently, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has celebrated the 64th Foundation Day on 1st January, 2022.

Key Points

About:

DRDO is the R&D (Research and Development) wing of the Ministry of Defence with a vision to empower India with cutting-edge defence technologies.

Its pursuit of self-reliance and successful indigenous development and production of strategic systems and platforms such as Agni and Prithvi series of missiles, Light Combat Aircraft, Tejas, multi-barrel rocket launcher, Pinaka, air defence system, Akash, a wide range of radars and electronic warfare systems, etc. have given quantum jump to India's military might, generating effective deterrence and providing crucial leverage.

Formation:

It was formed in 1958 from the amalgamation of the Technical Development Establishment (TDEs) of the Indian Army and the Directorate of Technical Development & Production (DTDP) with the Defence Science Organisation (DSO).

DRDO is a network of more than 50 laboratories which are deeply engaged in developing defence technologies covering various disciplines, like aeronautics, armaments, electronics, combat vehicles, engineering systems etc.

Various Programmes of DRDO:

Integrated Guided-Missile Development Programme (IGMDP):

It was one of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's major works to make Indian defence forces self-sufficient in the field of missile technology.

The missiles developed under IGMDP are: Prithvi, Agni, Trishul, Akash, Nag.

Mobile Autonomous Robot System:

MARS is a smart robust robot to handle land mines and Inert Explosive Devices (IEDs) which helps the Indian Armed Forces to disarm them from far distances despite hostile surroundings.

With some add-ons, this system can even be used to dig the ground for the object and defuse the Improvised Explosive Device by various methods.

Highest Terrestrial Centre in Ladakh

DRDO's centre in Ladakh is at 17,600 feet above sea level at Changla near Pangong lake which is intended to serve as a natural cold storage unit for the preservation of natural and medicinal plants.

Issues with DRDO:**Inadequate Budgetary Support:**

The Standing Committee on Defence during 2016-17, expressed concerns over the inadequate budgetary support for the ongoing projects of DRDO.

The committee noted that out of the total defence budget, the share of DRDO was 5.79 % in 2011-12, which reduced to 5.34 % in 2013-14.

Inadequate Manpower:

The DRDO also suffers from inadequate manpower in critical areas to the lack of proper synergy with the armed forces.

Cost escalation and long delays have damaged the reputation of DRDO.

Big on Promise and Small on Delivery:

DRDO is big on promise and small on delivery. There is no accountability. Nobody is taken to task for time and cost overruns.

In 2011, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) put a serious question mark on DRDO's capabilities, citing the organisation has a history of its projects suffering endemic time and cost overruns.

Obsolete equipments:

DRDO is just tinkering with World War II equipment instead of working on cutting-edge technology.

Recent Developments:

Extreme Cold Weather Clothing System (ECWCS)

'Pralay'.

Controlled Aerial Delivery System.

Pinaka Extended Range (Pinaka-ER) Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS).

Supersonic Missile Assisted Torpedo System (SMART).

Advanced Chaff Technology.

Akash-NG & MPATGM.

Way Forward

DRDO should be restructured in a leaner organisation as suggested by the committee chaired by P. Rama Rao for external review of the agency in February 2007.

The committee recommended setting up a commercial arm of the organisation to make it a profitable entity, besides cutting back on delays in completing projects.

DRDO former chief V.K. Saraswat has called for the setting up of a Defence Technology Commission as well as a bigger role for DRDO in picking production partners for products developed by the agency.

DRDO should be able to select a capable partner company from the outset, from the private sector if necessary.

In Its document "DRDO in 2021: HR Perspectives", DRDO has envisaged a HR policy which emphasized on free, fair, and fearless Knowledge Sharing, Open book management style and Participative Management.

This is a step in the right direction.