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PROPOSED NEW SEED ACT: STRENGTHENING INDIA'S SEED REGULATION

Context

- Recently, the Union Agriculture Minister is consulting farmer organisations on a proposed **new Seed Act** to curb fake seeds, improve traceability and strengthen accountability across India's seed supply chain.

About the Proposed New Seed Act

- The proposed legislation **seeks to replace the Seeds Act, 1966**, and create a stronger, uniform and technology-enabled regulatory framework for seeds and planting material.
- The existing law is **nearly six decades old**, while the **Seeds Control Order came into force in 1983**.
- The government sought public suggestions on the draft in **late 2025** and received around **18,000 suggestions** from farmers and farmer organisations.
  - Around **20 farmer organisations**, representing almost all States, have submitted suggestions during recent consultations.

Why Was a New Act Needed?

- **Outdated Regulatory Framework:** Indian agriculture has undergone major changes since 1966, including technological advances, expansion of private seed markets and emergence of new varieties.
  - The existing framework is considered inadequate for these developments.
- **Large Regulatory Gap:** According to the Agriculture Minister, **nearly 70% of seeds currently fall outside the ambit of the existing Seed Act**, creating significant challenges for effective quality control.
- **Fake & Substandard Seeds:** Sale of counterfeit and poor-quality seeds can result in crop failure, loss of farm income and indebtedness.
  - Existing penalties and mechanisms for fixing responsibility have been considered inadequate.
- **Lack of Uniformity:** Seed-related procedures differ across States, creating regulatory inconsistencies and difficulties in ensuring uniform standards.

Key Features of the Proposed Seed Act

- **National Registration & QR-based Traceability:** All seeds and planting material would require registration in a **national register**.
  - Sale of unregistered seeds would be prohibited.
  - Each seed packet would carry a **QR code** enabling farmers to trace its origin, manufacturer, laboratory clearance and movement through the supply chain.
- **Protection of Farmers' Traditional Seed Rights:** Farmers would continue to have the right to **use, exchange and sell traditional and farmers' varieties**.
  - Registration of traditional seeds would not be mandatory, though farmers could voluntarily register their varieties.
  - Farmers producing seeds for personal use, village-level distribution or even for a company would not require digital registration under the proposed provisions.
- **Stricter Penalties:** Violations would be divided into **three categories:**
  - **Minor Violation**: Warning for first offence; up to ₹**50,000** for second;
  - **Deliberate Violations:** Such as failure to affix QR code, incorrect branding or non-disclosure of required information; ₹**1 lakh** for first; ₹**2 lakh** for second offence;
- **Serious Offences:** Including fake seeds, operating without registration and deliberate fraud; Up to ₹30 lakh and imprisonment
- **Greater Role For States:** State governments would be empowered to release new varieties on recommendations of State-level committees while adhering to national standards.
  - All varieties would be maintained in a **single national online register** accessible to both the Centre and States.
- **Seed Security Fund & Compensation:** Every State would establish a **Seed Security Fund**, into which penalties and recoveries under the Act would be deposited.
  - For verified seed failure and consequent farmer losses, a verification committee would facilitate **compensation within 15 days**.
  - Farmers would also retain their right to seek compensation under the **Consumer Protection Act**.

Related Issues & Concerns

- **Over-regulation:** Mandatory registration and digital traceability could increase compliance costs, particularly for small seed producers.
- **Digital Divide:** QR-based systems need to remain accessible to farmers with limited digital literacy and connectivity.
- **Centre–State Coordination:** Uniform national standards must be balanced with State-specific agro-climatic requirements.
- **Farmer Rights:** Regulation must not inadvertently restrict traditional seed saving, exchange and community seed systems.
- **Implementation Capacity:** Effective seed testing, laboratories, inspections and grievance redressal are essential for the law to work in practice.

Way Forward

- The proposed Act should adopt a **farmer-centric, risk-based regulatory approach**. Extensive stakeholder consultation, transparent testing standards, adequate laboratory capacity and simple digital systems are necessary.
- Compensation mechanisms should be genuinely time-bound, while traditional seed systems and farmers' rights must remain protected.

Source: DD News

REGISTERED UNRECOGNISED POLITICAL PARTIES (RUPP) REGULATION

Context

- A 'BBC News Hindi' investigation has revealed that **six Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPP)** had received donations of around 1,700 crores for the year 2023-24.

About Political Parties

- Political parties are an **association or body of individuals that can be formed by citizens.**
- **Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act)** lays down the requirements for registration of a political party with the Election Commission (EC).
  - After satisfactory scrutiny of the documents submitted, the EC registers a political party as a RUPP.
- The RUPPs enjoy the following benefits:
  - tax exemption for donations received under Section 12 of the Income Tax Act, 2025,
  - common symbol for contesting general elections to the Lok Sabha/State Assemblies,
  - and 20 'star campaigners' during the election campaign.
- **Donations to RUPPs:** The RUPPs are required to **maintain the details of individual donors above twenty thousand rupees** in a financial year and submit them to the poll body every year.
  - The RUPPs, under the Income Tax Act, 2025, are required to accept donations in excess of two thousand rupees only through cheque or bank transfers.
  - As per section 29C of the Representation of the People Act, failure to furnish these details will result in losing income tax exemption.

Concerns

- As per the EC notification, India had **more than 2,800 RUPPs** as of July, but **only around 750 contested the 2024 general elections.**
  - This has resulted in the moniker — **'letter pad parties'** — for the rest of the RUPPs.
  - Poor compliance with statutory requirements, coupled with a lack of transparency, results in these 'letter pad' parties being used as an **opaque channel for tax evasion and money laundering.**
- **Deregistration of Such Parties:** The RP Act does not confer explicit powers on the EC to de-register a political party if it fails to contest elections, conduct inner-party elections, or lodge requisite returns.
  - In the **Indian National Congress vs Institute of Social Welfare & Ors (2002)**, the Supreme Court held that the EC does not have the power to de-register any political party under the RP Act.
  - **It may de-register only under exceptional circumstances,** such as registration obtained by fraud, the political party ceasing to have allegiance to the Constitution, or being declared unlawful by the government.

Recommended Reforms

- **The Law Commission, in its 255th report,** had recommended amendments for de-registration of a political party if it fails to contest elections for ten consecutive years.
- **The EC, in its memorandum for electoral reforms (2016),** also suggested an amendment to the RP Act that would empower it to de-register a party.

- The EC had also suggested that **tax exemptions be provided only for political parties that win seats in Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly elections.**
  - This can be viewed as an undemocratic and extreme measure, as there are parties that consistently contest elections without electoral success.
  - Instead, similar to the 1% vote threshold for allotting common symbols to RUPPs, **a suitable vote percentage threshold may be stipulated by law for RUPPs to avail of tax exemptions on donations received.**

Way Ahead

- These are long-pending reforms that need to be carried out **to empower the EC to act against non-serious parties**.
- In the present digital world, it is not difficult for the Income Tax Department and other enforcement agencies to monitor the transactions of such parties and take strict action against any wrongdoing.
- This would act as a **deterrent against the misuse of the benefits and exemptions available to political parties.**

Source: TH

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE FOR VIKSIT BHARAT

Context

- The complexity of development challenges calls for collaboration among the government, communities, markets and civil society to ensure good governance.

From Government Delivery to Impactful Governance

- **Government-centric governance** often focuses on schemes, expenditure and administrative processes, whereas impactful governance focuses on whether interventions actually improve citizens' lives.
- **Wicked problems** such as **poverty, malnutrition, sanitation,** etc. involve multiple interconnected social, economic and institutional factors.
- Such problems require **decentralised decision-making**, **community participation, professional expertise and convergence across departments** rather than isolated departmental interventions.

Government initiatives for Good Governance

- **Government e Marketplace (GeM):** Facilitates online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Government Departments/ Organizations/ PSUs.
  - GeM aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement.
- **UMANG App:** Developed by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** and National eGovernance Division, the UMANG App serves as a single platform to access PAN India services of the Government.
  - It brings together major government services on a single mobile app so as to enable the accessibility of government services on mobile phones of citizens.
- **Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS):** A 24×7 online platform for time-bound redressal and monitoring of public grievances through dashboards, enhancing transparency and accountability in service delivery.
- **e-HRMS 2.0 Mobile Application:** The e-HRMS 2.0 app, available on Android and iOS, was launched to provide government employees seamless access to human resource services.

Local Governments as the Foundation of Collaborative Governance

- **The Eleventh Schedule** assigns **29 subjects to Panchayats**, while the **Twelfth Schedule** provides **18 functional areas** for municipalities.
- **Local governments** can act as **platforms for convergent action** because issues such as nutrition, sanitation, livelihoods, health and poverty are closely interconnected at the local level.
- However, effective decentralisation also requires **adequate funds, functions and functionaries** so that local governments can translate their responsibilities into meaningful outcomes.

Experiences of Community Participation

- **Women's Self-Help Groups:** The **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)** demonstrates how women's collectives can build social capital and participate in local development beyond their traditional role in savings and credit.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission:** Sustained improvements in sanitation require not only infrastructure but also community mobilisation, behavioural change and local leadership.

- **ASHA workers** demonstrate the importance of locally resident and trained frontline workers who connect public health institutions with communities.
- **Watershed and livelihood programmes:** Community participation in **watershed management and livelihood diversification** can improve the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions because local stakeholders participate in managing common resources.
- **Total literacy campaigns** demonstrated how citizen participation and decentralised mobilisation can complement formal government systems.

Key Challenges

- **Centralised decision-making:** Administrative systems tend to prefer centralised planning and standardised implementation, even when local problems call for context-specific solutions.
- **Weak institutional capacity:** Many local governments do not have sufficient technical expertise, professional staff and administrative capacities.
- **Inadequate Resources:** Devolution of duties without adequate financial and human resources reduces the efficiency of decentralisation.
- **Weak Accountability Mechanisms:** Monitoring focuses on expenditure and physical targets rather than quality of outcomes and citizen satisfaction.
- **Limited Community Validation:** The quality of public services experienced by citizens may not be adequately captured in government data.

Way Ahead

- **3Fs of decentralisation:** Local governments should be provided enough funding, functions and officials with more decision-making autonomy.
- **Local professional capacity:** Technical and management assistance should be provided by the positioning of professionals and skilled community resource workers closer to the community.
- **Connect funds to outcomes:** Financial resources should be linked to the developmental shortfalls revealed using instruments such as the Panchayat Advancement Index.
- **Social accountability:** Community validation, social audits, citizen feedback and transparent public information should supplement traditional administrative monitoring.

Source: IE

INDIA'S BLUE ECONOMY

In News

- The fisheries sector is an important pillar of the Blue Economy in India providing nearly three crore livelihoods and enhancing production, exports and coastal development.

Background

- The economic philosophy of the Blue Economy was **first introduced** in 1994 by **Professor Gunter Pauli** at the United Nations University (UNU) as a sustainable development approach that seeks to generate economic growth while reducing waste, emissions, and environmental damage.
- It gained global importance after the **Rio+20 Summit (2012)** and the adoption of UN Sustainable Development Goal 14, which promotes the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources.

Blue Economy

- It is the **sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources** for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs while at the same time safeguarding the health of the ocean ecosystem.
- In India, it includes **marine resources and infrastructure**, balancing economic development, environmental protection and national security. These include sustainable fishing and aquaculture, offshore wind energy and other renewable marine energy sources.

Importance of blue economy in India

- **Economic growth and trade**: The blue economy contributes substantially to India's GDP
  - Nearly 95% of India's trade by volume and around 70% by value is handled through ports
  - Better ports, shipping, and marine industry will boost exports and the economy.
- **Jobs**: Fisheries and related activities provide livelihoods for some 30 million people.
  - Jobs and less poverty in rural areas can be created by the fishing, tourism, processing, and skills development industries.
- **Food Security**: Fish provide a significant amount of protein and nutrients.
- **Blue carbon & climate resilience:** Mangroves and seagrasses are coastal ecosystems that store carbon and protect coastlines from storms, erosion, and the impacts of climate change.

- **Security and Sovereignty:** A strong blue economy safeguards India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and offshore assets and therefore strengthens India's maritime security.
    - It also fosters better regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean and increases India's strategic reach through investments in ports, deep-sea technology, and maritime infrastructure.

Challenges

- **Environmental Degradation**: Marine biodiversity and fish stocks are threatened by overfishing, industrial runoff, coastal erosion, and increasing ocean plastic pollution.
- **Climate Vulnerability**: Higher sea levels, warmer oceans, and more frequent tropical cyclones have a direct impact on coastal communities, port infrastructure, and traditional fishing operations.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Fragmented cold chains, ageing fishing fleets, and limited shipbuilding and repair capacity are all holding back high-value exports and deep-sea exploitation.
- **Governance and financing:** The ocean domain is governed by many ministries, often resulting in regulatory overlap.
    - In addition, private sector investments and innovative financing such as blue bonds are still to be explored.

Various Steps

- **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)** : India's fisheries sector has been given a boost by the P**radhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY).**
    - The Government reiterated its commitment to the sector by allocating a record ₹2,500 crore under PMMSY in BE 2026-27.
    - Fish production went up from 141.64 lakh tonnes in 2019-20 to a record 197.75 lakh tonnes in 2024-25.
    - The sector has shown good growth. Fisheries exports increased from ₹46,663 crore in 2019-20 to ₹73,890 crore in 2025-26.
    - The scheme has generated employment for 58 lakh persons in fisheries and aquaculture-related activities.
    - It also approved ₹2,797 crore for cold-chain and marketing infrastructure, improving post-harvest management and connectivity to the markets.
- **Deep Ocean Mission** was launched in 2021 by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) with an aim to develop technologies for exploring and sustainably utilizing the deep ocean's living and non-living wealth.
    - India launched the Samudrayaan Project- under the umbrella of the Deep Ocean Mission- to work on its first component of deep-sea exploration through a manned submersible.
    - MATSYA 6000, a self-propelled manned submersible capable of transporting three individuals to depths of up to 6,000 meters beneath the ocean surface, is being developed under this project
- **Sagarmala Programme:** Launched in 2015, the Sagarmala Programme is a flagship initiative to modernise India's maritime sector by harnessing its long coastline and inland waterways.
    - Its goal is to cut logistics costs, upgrade port infrastructure, increase trade, create jobs, and foster sustainable coastal development via port-led growth.
    - It is one of the key pillars of the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047, to support India's ambition to develop world-class ports, shipping, and waterways and emerge as a leading global maritime power by 2047.
- **Blue Revolution**: The Blue Revolution, launched in 2015, seeks to increase fish production and strengthen the fisheries value chain across inland and marine sectors by enhancing productivity, expanding infrastructure, and promoting modern practices.

Conclusion

- India's blue economy has huge potential for economic growth, employment, clean energy, and coastal resilience. However, sustainable development of the industry requires cooperation between the government, industries, and local communities, as well as responsible use of marine resources.
- Thus, the blue economy could be an important pillar for India's sustainable development and future growth.

Source: PIB

NEWS IN SHORT

DEMAT 2.0 PILOT FOR CORPORATE BOND TOKENISATION

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) have launched "Demat 2.0".

About Demat 2.0

- It is a **pilot programme** to **test the tokenisation of corporate bonds** and quicker settlement using the **central bank digital currency** and blockchain technology.
- It explores whether distributed ledger technology can integrate the securities and settlement layers to enable faster settlement and automate parts of asset servicing.
- **Demat 1.0** was introduced in **1996** and replaced physical share certificates with electronically recorded securities.

How Does the System Work?

- When a corporate bond is issued, it is produced as a digital token on the distributed ledger maintained by the securities depositories.
- When an investor purchases the bond, **ownership of the token is transferred on the ledger**, while the corresponding payment is made using the **RBI's wholesale Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC).**
- The securities and payment legs are linked through the RBI's **Unified Market Interface (UMI).**
- This permits atomic settlement, i.e., the bond and the money are exchanged instantaneously rather than via two separate settlement processes.

What is Asset Tokenisation?

- Asset tokenisation is the **process of transforming ownership or economic rights** in a real-world or financial asset into digital tokens that are recorded on a **blockchain or distributed ledger system.**
- Tokenisation can allow a **high-value asset to be divided into smaller units,** enabling investors to obtain fractional exposure to assets that would otherwise require substantial capital.

Source: IE

MERCURY MAY BE SHRINKING FASTER THAN PREVIOUSLY ESTIMATED

Context

- A recent study suggests that Mercury may have contracted by up to 23 km in diameter, around 30% more shrinkage than earlier estimates.

Why Is Mercury Shrinking?

- Mercury has an unusually **large iron-rich core** relative to its overall size, and the **gradual cooling of its interior** causes the core, mantle and crust to contract.
- As the planet's interior contracts, its surface area decreases, producing compressional geological features such as wrinkle ridges and thrust faults on the crust.
- This process is comparable to a grape becoming a raisin, where the reduction in internal volume causes the outer surface to develop wrinkles.

About Mercury

- Mercury is the **closest planet to the Sun** and the **smallest planet** in the solar system. It's only slightly larger than Earth's Moon.

- It is the second densest planet, after Earth. It has a large metallic core with a radius of about 2,074 kilometres, about **85%** of the planet's radius.
  - With a radius of 2,440 kilometres, Mercury is a little more than **1/3 the width** of Earth.

- Mercury is the fastest planet, orbit around the Sun every **88 Earth days.** It takes **59 Earth days** for the planet to **spin around once.**
- Mercury's surface temperatures are both **extremely hot and cold**. Because the planet is so close to the Sun, day temperatures can reach highs of **800°F (430°C).**
    - Without an atmosphere to retain that heat at night, temperatures can dip as low as **-290°F (-180°C).**
- Mercury **doesn't have moons and rings.**

BepiColombo Mission

- BepiColombo is an ongoing joint international mission by the **European Space Agency (ESA)** and the **Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA)** to explore the planet Mercury.
- It was launched in **2018.**

Source: IE, NASA

YUDH ABHYAS 2026

Context

- The Indian and US armies have commenced the 22nd edition of their annual bilateral military exercise, Yudh Abhyas 2026, with counter-drone systems being used for the first time.

About the exercise

- **Yudh Abhyas**, meaning "Preparing for War" in Hindi, began in **2004** as a counterinsurgency training exchange. Since then, it has been held annually, alternating between India and the USA.
- This year's exercise is being conducted across **Bikaner in Rajasthan and Auli in Uttarakhand**, exposing troops to diverse operational environments, including **desert and high-altitude terrain**.

Source: TH

KALINGA RATNA AWARD

Context

- Former Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice Dipak Misra has been conferred with the Kalinga Ratna Award-2026.

About

- Instituted in **2007**, it is an annual state-level civilian honour awarded by **Sarala Sahitya Sansad** to a worthy person from **Odisha** for outstanding contributions in any field at the national or international level.
- The award comprises a silver idol of Goddess Saraswati and a citation.
- **Past recipients** of this award include former Lok Sabha Speaker **Srijukta Rabi Ray**, former Governor of Andhra Pradesh **Biswabhusan Harichandan**, and former Union Minister for Education **Dharmendra Pradhan**.

Do you know?

Sarala Sahitya Sansad, established in **1982** in Cuttack, Odisha, is a prominent literary and cultural organisation dedicated to promoting **Odia language, literature and culture** and preserving the legacy of **Sarala Das**, the 15th-century Adi Kabi (first poet) of Odisha.

Source: AIR

PROGRAM ELECTRONIC REVIEW MANAGEMENT (USA)

Context

- The US Department of Labor has **suspended IT services giant Cognizant's filings under PERM.**

About

- **PERM, or Program Electronic Review Management,** is the system through which **employers generally obtain labour certification** before sponsoring a foreign employee for an employment-based Green Card.
- Unlike a visa application, which is primarily made by an individual, the **PERM filing is done by the employer on behalf of the worker.**
    - Before filing, an employer must obtain a prevailing wage determination for the position and carry out prescribed recruitment.
    - Once the Labour Department certifies the application, **the employer can proceed to the next stage of the Green Card process.**
    - **A green card** is an official identity document issued by the United States that grants a person the **right to live and work in the country permanently.**
- The process is intended to establish that **hiring a foreign worker permanently** will **not adversely affect** the job opportunities, wages or working conditions of US workers.
- **H-1B vs PERM:** An H-1B is a **temporary, non-immigrant work visa** that allows US employers

to employ foreign professionals in speciality occupations.

- PERM, in contrast, is part of the **process for obtaining permanent residency.**

Source: IE

BAKHIRA LAKE

In News

- Researchers have reconstructed variability in the Indian Summer Monsoon (ISM) based on magnetic minerals, grain size, geochemical and clay-mineral records from sediments of Bakhira Lake, Uttar Pradesh.

Bakhira Lake

- Bakhira Lake is located in the Ghaghara–Rapti alluvial system and represents a perennial oxbow/ floodplain wetland formed through the migration and subsequent cut-off of the Rapti River.
- It is one of the largest wetlands in Uttar Pradesh, and it was designated as a Ramsar Site in 2022.
- Its floodplain–lacustrine setting favours the accumulation and preservation of sediments derived from both the lake and surrounding catchment, making it sensitive to changes in monsoon-driven runoff, sediment transport and weathering.

Latest Study

- The study provides a unique long-term palaeoclimate record for the Central Ganga Plain and demonstrates the impact of major climatic phases including the Last Glacial Maximum, Heinrich Stadial 1, Bølling–Allerød, Younger Dryas, Holocene Climatic Optimum and late-Holocene droughts on rainfall, weathering, erosion and sediment transport and lake processes.
- The results will advance our understanding of past monsoon behaviour, help to improve future climate models and support better water-resource and agricultural management in the monsoon-dependent Central Ganga Plain.

Source: PIB