

WHAT IS THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL OFFENCES (POCSO) ACT?

The Law Commission recently advised the government not to change the existing minimum age of consent under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act.



About Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act:

- It is the **first comprehensive law in India dealing specifically with the sexual abuse of children**, enacted in 2012.
- It is **administered by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD)**.
- **Objective:** The Act was designed to **protect children aged less than 18 from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography offences** and provide for the establishment of Special Courts for the trial of such offences and related matters and incidents.

Salient Features:

- **Gender-neutral law:** The POCSO Act establishes a gender-neutral tone for the legal framework available to child sexual abuse victims by **defining a child as “any person” under the age of 18**.
- It **defines various types of sexual abuse**, such as penetrative and non-penetrative assault, as well as sexual harassment and pornography.
- It **considers a sexual assault to be aggravated in certain circumstances**, such as **when the abused child is mentally ill or when the abuse is committed by someone in a position of trust or authority over the child**, such as a family member, etc.

Safeguards to victims: The Act incorporates child-friendly procedures for reporting, recording of evidence, investigation and trial of offences. These include:

- **Recording the statement of the child at the residence of the child or at the place of his choice, preferably by a woman police officer** not below the rank of sub-inspector.
- **No child is to be detained in the police station at night** for any reason.
- **Police officers to not be in uniform** while recording the statement of the child.

- **The statement of the child is to be recorded as spoken by the child.**
- **Medical examination of the child is to be conducted in the presence of the parent of the child or any other person in whom the child has trust or confidence.**
- **No aggressive questioning or character assassination of the child in-camera trial of cases.**
- **The Act specifically laid down that the child victim should not see the accused at the time of testifying and that the trial be held in camera.**
- **It also required that the Special Court complete the trial, as far as possible, within a period of one year from the date of cognisance.**

Amendment to the Act:

- **The Act was amended for the first time in 2019 to enhance the punishments for specific offences in order to deter abusers and ensure a dignified childhood.**
- **This amendment enhanced the punishment to include the death penalty for aggravated penetrative sexual assault of the child.**
- **It also provides for levy of fines and imprisonment of up to 20 years to curb child pornography.**

DACHIGAM NATIONAL PARK



The Union Ministry of Forests, Environment & Climate Change recently unveiled the draft notification for an eco-sensitive zone around Dachigam national park.

About Dachigam National Park:

- **Location:** It is located 22 km (kilometers) from **Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir.**
- It covers an area of **141 sq km (square kilometers).**
- **The name literally stands for ‘ten villages’, which could be in memory of the ten villages that were relocated in order to create the park.**
- It was **initially established to ensure the supply of clean drinking water to Srinagar city.**
- A protected area since 1910, it was **declared a national park in 1981.**

- The park is situated at **altitudes ranging from 5500 ft to 14,000 ft.**
- The park is best known as the home of the Hangul, or Kashmir stag. It holds the **last viable population of the vulnerable hangul** in the world.
- **Terrain:** Ranges from **gently sloping grasslands to cliffs and sharp rocky outcrops.**
- **Flora:** Includes wild cherry, apple, pear, peach, plum, apricot, chestnut, willow, walnut, oak, pine, birch, poplar, chinar, and elm.
- **Fauna:**
 - Besides Hangul, Dachigam is also famous for its populations of **musk deer, leopard, Himalayan Grey Langur, leopard cat, Himalayan Black Bear, yellow-throated marten**, among others.
 - It is the residence of raptors such as the **Eurasian eagle owl, Lammergeier, Eurasian griffon** and white-rumped vulture.

Key Facts about Kashmir Stag:

- It is also called Hangul, which is a **subspecies of Central Asian red deer endemic to Kashmir and surrounding areas.**
- It is **found in dense riverine forests in the high valleys and mountains of Jammu and Kashmir and northern Himachal Pradesh.**
- In Kashmir, it is found primarily in the **Dachigam National Park** where it receives protection.
- A small population has also been **witnessed in Overa-Aru Wildlife Sanctuary** in south Kashmir.
- **Conservation status**
 - **IUCN: Critically Endangered**
 - **CITES : Appendix I**

INTERNET COOKIES



In the digital realm, cookies help in personalisation and user convenience and also play a pivotal role in shaping any online experience.

About Internet cookies:

- Cookies contain tiny **amounts of data about users in text files** that act like a website's memory.
- As soon as we use a server, tiny amounts of data start getting stored inside a cookie.
- The website **uses it to identify users and their devices**, which also stores these cookies.
- Whenever a user visits the same website, the cookies identify him/her and make it show relevant information.

Types of cookies

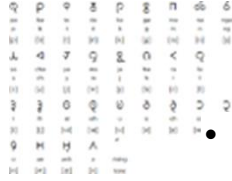
- **Session cookies:** These are **temporary cookies** like post-it notes for websites.
- They are stored in your computer's memory only during your browsing session. Once you close your browser, they vanish.
- These can help websites remember your actions as you navigate, like items in your shopping cart.
- **Persistent cookies:** These are the digital equivalent of bookmarks.
- They stay on your device after your browsing session ends.
- Persistent cookies remember your login information, language preferences, and even the ads you have interacted with. They are handy for a more personalised web experience.
- **Secure cookies:** These are only sent over encrypted connections, making them safer from prying eyes. Secure cookies are often used for sensitive data like login credentials.

Uses of cookies

- They act as **digital ID cards**, aiding in user authentication by allowing websites to recognise and keep you logged in during your visit.
- They foster a **sense of personalisation**, recalling your preferences such as language choice or website theme.
- They function as **the digital equivalent of a persistent shopping cart**, ensuring that items you have added online remain there when you return.

TOTO LANGUAGE

Recently, **Toto Shabda Sangraha**, a dictionary has been compiled to save a language from extinction.



About Toto language:

- It is a **Sino-Tibetan language** spoken by the tribal Toto people and is written in the Bengali script
- A prominent community member **Dhaniram Toto developed a script** as recently as in 2015.
- It is **spoken by** barely 1,600 people living in parts of **West Bengal bordering Bhutan**.

Key facts about Toto Shabda Sangraha

- The dictionary has **been compiled by Bhakta Toto**, a bank employee-cum-poet, and published jointly by the trust and Bhasha Samsad
- The dictionary is a step in the direction of **preserving the language**, alive so far only orally, by putting its vocabulary in print.
- Toto words, to be **translated into Bengali and English**, will be composed in the Bengali script, considering that the Toto script is still in a nascent stage and members of the tribe are more familiar with the Bengali script.

WINTER POLLUTION FOR DELHI | CAUSES, MEASURES & WAY AHEAD

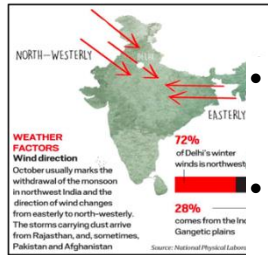
Why in News?

- Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a 15-point action plan to deal with air pollution during winter, when the city struggles with smog, poor visibility, and a drop in air quality mainly due to meteorological factors and stubble burning.

Factors that cause Air Pollution in Delhi & the Indo Gangetic Plains:

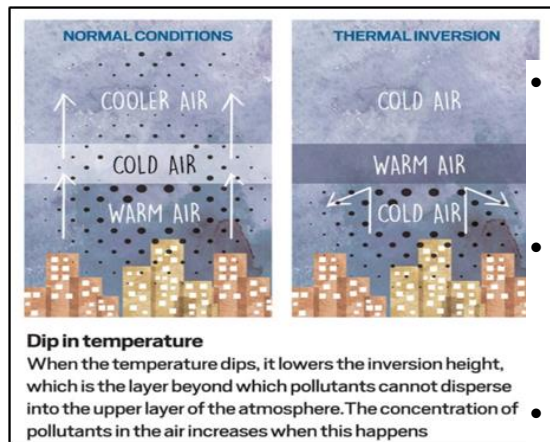
- Air pollution in Delhi and the whole of the Indo Gangetic Plains is a complex phenomenon that is dependent on a variety of factors.
- Especially in the **months of October and November every year**, the region's air quality starts to dip significantly.

Wind Direction:



- Winds from the Bay of Bengal blow northwards, carrying smoke from the rest of the country towards the Himalayas, before hitting a block there.
- This wind deposits particulate matter, including smoke and dust, along the northern belt of states adjoining the mountain range, with no room for dispersal away from the region.

Temperature Inversion:



- Along with the change in wind direction, the dip in temperatures is also behind the increased pollution levels.
- As temperature dips, the inversion height — which is the layer beyond which pollutants cannot disperse into the upper layer of the atmosphere — is lowered.
- An inversion traps air pollution such as smog close to the ground. An inversion can also suppress convection by acting as a "cap".
- The concentration of pollutants in the air increases when this happens.

Dry and Still Air during Winters:

- Normally, rain and wind work to reduce air pollution. The wind disperses the pollutants while rains wash away the particulate matters which then settle on the ground.
- But, during the winter months, both rain and strong winds are unavailable. In absence of that, the pollutants remain suspended in the air similar to a white sheet.

Stubble Burning:

- Farm fires in Punjab and Haryana — resulting from the burning of crop residue to prepare farms for Rabi sowing and tackle pests — is one of the major factors stoking the dense smog that envelops north India every winter.

- A 2015 study on Delhi's air pollution conducted by IIT-Kanpur states that **17-26% of all particulate matter in Delhi in winters is because of biomass burning.**
- Over the years, the **System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)** has developed a system to calculate the contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's pollution.
 - SAFAR is a national initiative by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) to measure the air quality of a metropolitan city, by measuring the overall pollution level and the location-specific air quality of the city.
- In 2020, as per SAFAR, **during peak stubble burning incidents, its contribution to air pollution rose to 40%.**

Measures to Reduce Air Pollution in the Region:

- While factors such as location, wind speed, temperature inversion, etc. are natural phenomenon.
- However, man-made causes for air pollution in Delhi and the NCR region such as stubble burning, construction, etc. can be eliminated with necessary measures:

Preventing Stubble Burning:

- Over the years, the governments of Punjab and Haryana have taken different steps to curb this practice.
- This includes incentives for industries to use the residue (by both states), and monetary benefits for farmers (financial constraints have proved an impediment in Punjab), besides awareness campaigns.
- Furthermore, the Central Government has subsidised machinery meant to tackle the stubble.
- Plants that utilize paddy straw as fuel for creating energy are coming up in Punjab.
- At the same time, collection and export of this straw would enable business opportunities for the farmers and interested parties.

Preventing Construction-related Pollution:

- Construction is one of the leading sources of pollution in the region, with very little policies in place to maintain certain environmental standards.
- In countries like Hong Kong, **a netted mesh across the construction area can often be seen, this would reduce the amount of material, which is blown into the air.**

- While some of the developers in the National Capital Region, do follow these practices, more often than not, in an effort to save their margins these practices will be ignored unless mandated by the government to follow.
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GLOBAL DISPUTE SETTLEMENT, INDIA AND APPELLATE REVIEW

Context

- The recently concluded G-20 Declaration **reiterated the need to pursue reform of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)** to improve all its functions and conduct proactive discussions.
- While the commitment is heartening, whether it will have an appellate process or just be a one-stage panel process remains to be seen **given Washington's continued opposition to an appellate review process.**

WTO (World Trade Organisation)

- It is an international institution that **oversees the rules for global trade among nations.**
- **WTO has 164 member countries**[with Liberia and Afghanistan the most recent members, having joined in 2016] and 25 observer countries and governments.
- It officially began **operations on January 1, 1995**, in accordance with the 1994 **Marrakesh Agreement**, thus replacing the 1948 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The major functions of WTO are:

- Administering WTO trade agreements.
- Forum for trade negotiations.
- Handling trade disputes.
- Monitoring national trade policies.
- Technical assistance and training for developing countries.
- Cooperation with other international organisations.

Organisational Structure of WTO

- The highest authority of the WTO is the **Ministerial Conference**, which is composed of all member states and usually convenes biennially (every two years) and **consensus** is emphasised in all its decisions.
- The daily work is handled by three bodies (whose membership is the same) -
 - The General Council
 - **The Dispute Settlement Body**
 - The Trade Policy Review Body
- The only difference is the terms of reference under which each body is constituted.

The Dispute Settlement Body (DSB)

- **The General Council convenes as the DSB** to deal with disputes between WTO members. The DSB has authority to establish dispute settlement panels.
- **DSB decides the outcome of a trade dispute** on the recommendation of these panels and possibly on a report from the **Appellate Body** - that hear appeals from reports issued by panels.
- **Only the DSB has the authority to make these decisions**, panels and the Appellate Body can only make recommendations.

Conclusion

- **India's quest has always been to establish a rule-based global order**, it should support an appellate review which will usher in greater confidence for states and investors in international investment law.
- For those same reasons, **India should also push for the restoration of the WTO appellate body towards achieving the goal of a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system at the WTO.**