

HOW IS INDIA PLANNING TO END CHILD MARRIAGE?

In News:

- The steering committee of a global programme to end child marriage is on a visit to India to witness state interventions which have helped reduce the prevalence of child marriage.
- This visit is in view of an estimated increase in number of child marriages due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Child Marriages in India:

- In India, child marriage reduced from 47.4% in 2005-06 to 26.8% in 2015-16.
- In the last five years, it declined by 3.5% points to reach 23.3% in 2020-21, according to the latest National Family Health Survey-5 data.
- There is a growing trend for decline in the overall prevalence of child marriage, but 23.3% is still a disturbingly high percentage in a country with a population of 141.2 crore.
- **Eight States** have a higher prevalence of child marriage than the national average —
 - West Bengal, Bihar and Tripura top the list with more than 40% of women aged 20-24 years married below 18, according to NFHS data.
- Some States have shown a reduction in child marriages, like Madhya Pradesh (23.1% in 2020-21 from 32.4% in 2015-16), Rajasthan (25.4% from 35.4%) and Haryana.

Global Scenario:

- According to data from UNICEF, the total number of girls married in childhood stands at 12 million per year.
- The **2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals** aim to eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations, under **goal 5**.

Legal Intervention in India:

- There are several laws including the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** and the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012**, which aim at protecting children from violation of human and other rights.

- The **Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021** seeks to **increase the marriage age of women from existing 18 years to 21 years.**

Why minimum age of marriage for females should be increased?

- Lack of access to education and employment:
 - Women face inequalities when it comes to access to education and employment as a consequence of their early marriages.
 - It is often the case that women are denied access to education and an economic means of livelihood after entering into the institution of marriage at an early age.
 - Increasing the minimum age for marriage will lead to more women pursuing higher education and opt for employment.
- Impact of early marriage on health of women and children:
 - An early age of marriage and consequent early pregnancies have a substantial impact on the nutritional levels of mothers and their children, along with their overall health and mental wellbeing.
 - Underage mothers are at a higher risk of reproductive health challenges, malnutrition, postpartum haemorrhage, and a susceptibility to sexually transmitted diseases.

Schemes/ Policies for preventing Girl child marriage:

- **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY) –**
 - Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY), was launched in 2015, in order to promote the welfare of girl child.
 - It encourages parents to invest and build funds for the future studies and marriage expenses of the girl's children.
- **Balika Samriddhi Yojana –**
 - Balika Samriddhi Yojana is another central government scheme to support girls in financially vulnerable sections of society.
 - This scheme ensures the enrolment and retention of girl child in primary and secondary schools.
 - It aims at the prosperity of a girl's child and provides them with a better quality education.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao –**

- Among all the other girl's child welfare schemes, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao is the most popular.
 - This scheme celebrates girl children, literally translating to Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl child. It believes in women empowerment and creating an inclusive ecosystem for the same.
 - This scheme is **to promote girl children's safety before and after they are born.**
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WHAT IS THE STATUS OF REMOTE VOTING FOR NRIS?

In News:

- Recently, the Supreme Court disposed of a batch of petitions seeking remote voting for non-resident Indians (NRIs).
- This disposal came after the assurance of the Attorney General that the Centre was looking at ways to facilitate distance voting for NRIs.

Voting for NRIs

Size of the NRI electorate

- According to estimates, India has the largest diaspora population, with nearly 1.35 crore non-resident Indians spread across the globe.
- Many of them are in the Gulf countries, the U.S. and the U.K.
- In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, 99,844 NRIs registered and 25,606 electors turned up to vote, with a majority hailing from Kerala (25,534).
- Of the registered overseas electors, 90% belonged to Kerala. Others registered are from Gujarat, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu among other States.

Reason for low NRI registration and voting

- India had amended the Representation of the People Act in 2010 to enable eligible NRIs who had stayed abroad beyond six months to vote.
- However, this amendment put a condition that these NRI electors will have to visit the polling booth in person.
- This is the major reason behind the low percentage of NRI registration and voting.

The debate around NRI Voting

- Many observers support the idea that NRIs must visit the pooling booth in person. As per them, those who migrated abroad should not be given special privileges in voting.
- There is other School of thought which argue that NRIs should not be deprived of the franchise because they exercised their right to freely practise a profession or trade.
- Another question raised is whether expatriates who have been living abroad for a long period of time, say upwards of two years, should be given voting rights.
- Other democracies allow absentee voting if overseas electors are not abroad for a specified period and/or if they mention an “intent to return”.
 - Absentee voting enables persons who cannot appear at their designated polling places to vote from another location.
 - The usual method of absentee voting is by mail, although provision is sometimes made for voting at prescribed places in advance of the polling date.

Steps taken by the government so far

- Since the in-person proviso of the amended Act discouraged many, petitions were filed in the Supreme Court between 2013 and 2014 by NRIs.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) formed a committee in 2014 on the Court’s direction to explore the options for overseas electors.
- The committee narrowed it down to two remote voting options — e-postal ballot and proxy voting.
 - **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)**
 - ETPBS involves the NRI voter sending an application to the returning officer in person or online. The returning officer will send the ballot electronically.
 - The voter can then register their mandate on the ballot printout and send it back with an attested declaration.
 - The voter will either send the ballot by ordinary post or drop it at an Indian Embassy where it would be segregated and posted.
 - **Proxy voting**

- Proxy voting enables voters to appoint proxies to vote on their behalf.
- In India, ETPBS voting and proxy voting are currently available to service voters, like those in the armed forces or diplomatic missions.
- In 2017, however, the government introduced a Bill to amend the Representation of People Act to remove the condition of in-person voting for NRIs and enable them to vote through proxies.
- The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha in 2018 but never introduced in the Upper House, eventually lapsed with the 16th Lok Sabha.

Current status

- In 2020, the ECI wrote to the Law Ministry that it was “technically and administratively ready” to facilitate ETPBS for NRIs in the 2021 Assembly elections in five States.
- However, the MEA flagged huge logistical challenges relating to identity verification of voters, absence of polling agents, the burden on embassy staff etc.
- Later, the Law Ministry in March 2022 said that the Centre was exploring the possibility of allowing online voting for NRIs.
- Recently, in November 2022, the government has given assurance in the Supreme Court that it is looking into various options to enable distance voting.
- It is yet to be seen, however, if any of the remote voting options materialise before the 2024 elections.

GOVERNOR

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader TR Baalu has recently urged “all like-minded MPs” to support a proposal to remove Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi.



About:

Governor’s appointment, removal:

- **Article 155 and 156:** Under Article 155 and 156 of the Constitution, a Governor is appointed by the President and holds office “during the pleasure of the President”.

- If this pleasure is withdrawn before completion of the five-year term, the Governor has to step down.
- As the President works on the aid and advice of the Prime Minister and the council of ministers, in effect, the Governor can be appointed and removed by the central government.
- Thus, a Governor is a representative of the Union government in states.
- **Article 163:** Article 163 of the Constitution says the Governor will normally be aided and advised by the Council of Ministers except in those functions which require his discretion.
- While the Governor's duties and responsibilities lie in a particular state, there is no provision for impeaching the Governor.

Disagreements:

- There are no provisions laid down in the Constitution for the manner in which the Governor and the state must engage publicly when there is a difference of opinion.
- The management of differences has traditionally been guided by respect for each other's boundaries.

Cases:

- Since the Governor holds office "on the pleasure of the President", questions have been raised time and again on whether the Governor has any security of tenure, and if the President is obligated to show reasons for recalling a Governor.
- In **Surya Narain Choudhary vs Union of India (1981)**, the Rajasthan High Court held that the pleasure of the President was not justiciable, the Governor had no security of tenure and can be removed at any time by the President withdrawing pleasure.
- In **BP Singhal vs Union of India (2010)**, the Supreme Court elaborated on the pleasure doctrine. It upheld that "no limitations or restrictions are placed on the 'at pleasure' doctrine", but that "does not dispense with the need for a cause for withdrawal of the pleasure".
- The President can remove the Governor from office "at any time without assigning any reason and without giving any opportunity to show cause", the power to remove can't be exercised in an "arbitrary, capricious or unreasonable manner".

THE MALABAR EXERCISE

The Navy chiefs of India, Australia, Japan and the U.S., which comprise the Quadrilateral (Quad) grouping, met in Japan recently and exchanged views on “further enhancing interoperability” in future editions of the Malabar multilateral naval exercise.



About:

- Malabar is a multilateral naval exercise that began in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between the navy fleets of India and the United States.
- It includes simulated war games and combat manoeuvres.
- Since 2007, MALABAR has been held alternatively off Indian Coast and in the Western Pacific.
- The exercise has been held every year since 2002 (there was a gap after the 1992, 1995, and 1996 editions due to India's nuclear testing).
- It was expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.
- Currently, the Malabar exercise is among the navies of India, Japan, the US and Australia.

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST

According to a study conducted by the UN body, a third of the glaciers on the UNESCO World Heritage list are under threat, regardless of efforts to limit temperature increases.



About:

- The study said it was still possible to save the other two-thirds if the rise in global temperature did not exceed 1.5°C compared to the pre-industrial era.
- In addition to drastically reduced carbon emissions, the UNESCO is advocating for the creation of a new international fund for glacier monitoring and preservation.
- Such a fund would support comprehensive research, promote exchange networks between all stakeholders and implement early warning and disaster risk reduction measures, the study said.
- Half of humanity depends directly or indirectly on glaciers as their water source for domestic use, agriculture, and power.

- Glaciers are also pillars of biodiversity, feeding many ecosystems.
- This study highlights the urgent need to cut greenhouse gas emissions and invest in nature-based solutions, which can help mitigate climate change.
- As many as 50 UNESCO World Heritage sites are home to glaciers, representing almost 10% of the Earth's total glacierised area.
- The UNESCO study, in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), showed that these glaciers have been retreating at an accelerated rate since 2000 due to CO2 emissions, which are warming temperatures.
- They are currently losing 58 billion tonne of ice every year — equivalent to the combined annual water use of France and Spain — and are responsible for nearly 5% of observed global sea level rise.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites:

- A World Heritage Site (WHS) is a landmark or area with legal protection by an international convention administered by the UNESCO under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, established in 1972.
- These sites are designated by UNESCO for having cultural, historical, scientific or other forms of significance.
- The sites, classified as cultural, natural and mixed (meeting both cultural and natural criteria) heritage around the world, are considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.

TOKHÜ EMONG BIRD COUNT (TEBC)

Nagaland is hosting the first edition of the Tokhü Emong Bird Count (TEBC) between November 4 to 7, a four-day documentation event to list birds in the state.



About:

- It is the first avian documentation exercise taken by Nagaland to go beyond Amur falcons.



CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK



- The event is being held during the Tokhü Emong post-harvest festival of the Lotha Nagas to spread awareness about Nagaland’s bird diversity.
- This event is being organised in collaboration with the Wokha Forest Division and the Divisional Management Unit, Nagaland Forest Management Project (NFMP), Wokha, and Bird Count India.
- The TEBC falls within the Salim Ali Bird Count, a nationwide event conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society.

