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Daily Current Affairs
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1 Supreme Court Restrains ED from Accessing Seized Digital Devices

Context: In a **landmark ruling**, the **Supreme Court (SC)** has prohibited the **Enforcement Directorate (ED)** from accessing or copying data from electronic devices seized during raids on **Santiago Martin**, widely known as the "lottery king," his associates, and employees.

This judgment underscores the **protection of fundamental rights**, including the **right to privacy**, and could shape future guidelines on how digital devices are handled during investigations.

What is the Enforcement Directorate (ED)?

Background:

- The **ED** originated in **1956** as an **Enforcement Unit** under the Department of Economic Affairs to address violations of the **Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947**.

- In **1957**, it was renamed the **Enforcement Directorate**, and by **1960**, its control shifted to the **Department of Revenue**.

About the ED:

- The ED is a **specialized financial investigation agency** under the **Ministry of Finance** tasked with enforcing:

    o The **Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA)**, a **civil law**.

    o The **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA)**, a **criminal law**.

- **Headquarters**: New Delhi

- **Governance**: Operates under the **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) Act, 2003**.

Composition:

- Staffed by officers from the **Indian Revenue Service (IRS)**, **Indian Police Service (IPS)**, and **Indian Administrative Service (IAS)**.

- The Director of Enforcement, appointed by the **Central Government**, serves a **two-year term** as mandated by the **CVC Act**.

Background of the Case:

The ED's Operation:

- In **November**, the ED conducted raids at **22 locations** across six states following a complaint by the **Meghalaya Police**.

- Allegations targeted **Future Gaming and Hotel Services Pvt Ltd** for monopolizing the lottery business in Meghalaya.

- Raids uncovered **12.41 crore** in cash.

Political Contributions by Future Gaming:

- The company was a major purchaser of electoral bonds, contributing **1,368 crore** between 2019 and 2024.

    o **Trinamool Congress**: 542 crore

- o **DMK**: 503 crore
- o **YSR Congress**: 154 crore
- o **BJP**: 100 crore

Supreme Court's Order:

Key Directives:

- A two-page order by Justices **Abhay S Oka** and **Pankaj Mithal** barred the ED from accessing data from devices seized from **Santiago Martin** and his associates.
- The order also **stayed summons** under the **PMLA**, which required individuals to appear for data extraction.
- The case is now being heard alongside similar petitions from **Amazon India** and **Newsclick** regarding digital device seizures.

Petitioners' Arguments:

- The plea emphasized **violations of privacy** and constitutional rights due to unregulated access to sensitive **personal** and **business data**.
- It called for safeguards against **indiscriminate data collection** during investigations.

Implications for ED Investigations:

ED's Response:

- Senior ED officials acknowledged the SC's decision as "unprecedented" but assured it would not impact their investigations.
- The agency highlighted its reliance on other evidence and property attachments worth ₹**622 crore**.

Legal Implications:

- The ruling establishes a precedent emphasizing the **right to privacy** and the need for structured guidelines on handling **digital evidence**.
- Lawyers, including former Attorney General **Mukul Rohatgi**, highlighted concerns about data misuse and the lack of procedural safeguards.

Broader Concerns:

Nature of Seized Devices:

- The ED seized **17 mobile phones**, **hard drives**, **pen drives**, and **email backups** containing sensitive financial, medical, and business records.

Tax Compliance:

- **Future Gaming** reported paying **28,205 crore in GST** for state lottery operations, asserting its compliance with tax laws.

Call for Clear Guidelines:

- The petition urged the need for procedural standards to protect **privacy rights** and prevent unwarranted data access during investigations.

Conclusion: The **Supreme Court's order** reinforces the significance of safeguarding **digital privacy** in legal proceedings. As this case unfolds, it may pave the way for new **legal frameworks** that balance investigative needs with the protection of **constitutional rights** in an era where sensitive data is predominantly digitized.

2 **A Beginner's Guide to Quantum Computing**

Context: Quantum computers are **revolutionary devices** that utilize the principles of **quantum mechanics** to solve problems far faster than traditional computers. First proposed by physicist **Richard Feynman in 1982**, the idea arose from the observation that **classical computers struggle to simulate quantum systems** effectively.

Basics of Quantum Computing:

Classical Computers:

- Operate using **bits**, which represent **0 or 1**.

- Use the **binary system** to process and store information.

Quantum Computers:

- Operate using **qubits** (quantum bits), which can exist in states of **0, 1, or both simultaneously** (a phenomenon known as **superposition**).

- Leverage two core principles of **quantum mechanics**:

1. **Superposition**

   o **Qubits can hold multiple states at the same time.**

   o Analogy: A spinning coin is both **heads and tails** until it stops spinning (or is measured).

2. **Entanglement**

   o **Links two or more qubits so their states are connected**, regardless of the distance between them.

   o Example: Opening one glove box instantly tells you the type of glove in another box.

These properties enable quantum computers to process vast amounts of data simultaneously, providing a significant speed advantage over classical computers.

Milestones in Quantum Computing:

- **1994: Shor's Algorithm:** Proved quantum computers can factor large numbers efficiently, challenging traditional cryptographic methods.

- **2019: IBM's Q System One:** The **first commercial quantum computer**, utilizing quantum gates to manipulate qubits.

- **Google's Sycamore Processor:** Achieved **quantum supremacy**, solving a problem in **200 seconds** that would take a supercomputer **10,000 years**.

- **2023: Google's Willow Quantum Chip:**

   Introduced **error-corrected qubits**, allowing scaling improvements.

   o Completed a calculation in **5 minutes** that would take a supercomputer **10 trillion trillion years**.

Current Challenges in Quantum Computing:

1. **Cost and Complexity:**

o Building quantum computers is **expensive** and requires cutting-edge technology.

2. **Stability Issues:**

   o **Qubits are prone to errors** due to environmental noise, causing them to lose their superposition (a problem called **decoherence**).

3. **Error Correction:**

   o Developing reliable error-correction mechanisms is a **major hurdle** for scalability.

4. **Scale Requirements:**

   o Practical applications, such as **drug discovery** or **climate modeling**, require millions of qubits, which remain unfeasible with current technology.

India's Quantum Mission:

India launched the **National Quantum Mission (NQM)** in 2023, with an allocation of ₹**6,000 crore over eight years** to drive advancements in quantum technologies.

Key Objectives:

1. **Development of Quantum Technologies:**

   o Build quantum computers with **50 to 1,000 physical qubits** over the next eight years.

   o Focus on **scalable quantum hardware** and **error correction mechanisms**.

2. **Quantum Communication:**

   o Establish a **secure quantum communication network** for strategic locations.

   o Develop **satellite-based Quantum Key Distribution (QKD)** systems to enhance data security.

3. **Quantum Materials and Sensors:**

   o Design and fabricate **quantum materials** for specialized applications.

   o Develop sensors for precision tasks like **meteorology**, **healthcare**, and **navigation**.

4. **Quantum Algorithms and Applications:**

   o Research quantum algorithms for **optimization problems**, **cryptography**, and **artificial intelligence**.

   o Apply quantum technologies to areas such as **drug discovery**, **climate modeling**, and **financial forecasting**.

Conclusion:

Quantum computing represents the next frontier in technological innovation, with the potential to revolutionize fields from **cryptography** to **healthcare**. While significant challenges remain, the global race to harness quantum capabilities is well underway, with countries like **India making significant investments** to lead in this transformative domain.

3 Khel Ratna Award Controversy

Context: The exclusion of **Manu Bhaker**, a double Olympic medallist in shooting, from the list of nominees for the **Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award** has sparked a significant controversy. Following public outcry, both Bhaker and the **Sports Ministry** issued clarifications to address the situation.

About the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award:

Named After:

- The award honours **Major Dhyan Chand** (1905–1979), one of India's greatest field hockey players.

Established:

- **Inception:** Introduced in **1991–1992**, originally called the **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award**.
- **Renamed:** In **2021**, the award was renamed to celebrate the legacy of Major Dhyan Chand.

Significance:

- Recognized as **India's highest sporting honour**, it is presented annually by the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**.

Eligibility Criteria:

1. **Outstanding Performances:**
   o Awarded to athletes who excel at **international competitions**, such as the **Olympics**, **Asian Games**, **Commonwealth Games**, **World Championships**, and **World Cups**, over the preceding four years.
   o Special consideration is given to achievements during major global events in their respective years.

2. **Exclusions:**
   o Athletes involved in **doping charges** or under **investigation** are ineligible.

General Rules and Conditions:

- **One-Time Recognition:**
   o The award can be conferred **only once** to an individual.
- **Annual Selection:**
   o Typically, only **one award** is presented each year, except in exceptional circumstances.
- **Posthumous Awards:**
   o The award can be given **posthumously** when necessary.
- **Revocation:**
   o The government reserves the right to **cancel or annul** the award for violations, including doping.

Award Benefits:

1. **Cash Prize:**
   o A sum of **25,00,000**, exempt from **income and wealth tax**.
2. **Certificate of Honour:**
   o A **recognition certificate** presented to the awardee.
3. **Medal:**
   o A **prestigious medal** symbolizing excellence in sports.

Conclusion:

The controversy surrounding Manu Bhaker's exclusion has brought attention to the **selection process and criteria** for the Khel Ratna Award. It highlights the need for **transparency and fairness** to uphold the credibility of India's **highest sporting honour**.

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4 The Popcorn Tax Debate: GST Controversy in India

Context: The **GST Council** has introduced varying tax rates on **popcorn**, sparking debate over its rationale and implications:

1. **Non-branded, salted/spiced popcorn:** 5% GST
2. **Pre-packaged and branded popcorn:** 12% GST
3. **Caramel popcorn (sugar confectionery):** 18% GST

The Rationale:

- According to **Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman**, products with added sugar attract higher tax rates.

Criticism of the Popcorn Taxation:

Unnecessary Complexity:

- Differentiating tax rates based on **content and branding** complicates the **GST framework**, undermining the intent of a simplified tax system.

Minimal Revenue Impact:

- **Former Chief Economic Advisers** argue that the negligible revenue generated does not justify the inconvenience caused to businesses and consumers.

Compliance Challenges:

- Classifying popcorn varieties, such as **salted caramel popcorn**, adds confusion and enforcement difficulties.

Public Backlash:

- Media and critics have ridiculed the **three-tier tax structure** for a basic snack, calling it excessive and unnecessary.

Understanding GST: The Backbone of India's Indirect Tax System:

Introduced by the 101st Constitutional Amendment Act (2017):

The **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** replaced multiple indirect taxes, streamlining the taxation system in India.

Key Features of GST:

1. **One Nation, One Tax:**
   - GST unified various taxes like **excise duty, VAT, and service tax** under a single framework.
2. **Dual Tax Structure:**
   - **CGST:** Collected by the Central Government.
   - **SGST:** Collected by State Governments.
   - **IGST:** Levied on inter-state transactions, apportioned between the Centre and states.
3. **Destination-Based Tax:**
   - GST is applied at the **point of consumption**, not at the source of origin.
4. **Tax Slabs:**
   - Tax rates range from **0%, 5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%**, based on the type of goods/services.
5. **Governance:**
   - **GST Council:** The apex body for decision-making on GST matters.

o **GST Network (GSTN):** IT infrastructure for managing GST operations.

Achievements of GST:

- **Broader Taxpayer Base:** Increased registration and compliance among businesses.
- **No Cascading Effect:** Taxes are levied on **value addition**, with input tax credit reducing double taxation.
- **Simplified Compliance for Small Businesses:** Initiatives like the **Composition Scheme** lower the tax burden.
- **Efficient Commerce: E-way bills** have streamlined inter-state and intra-state trade.

Challenges in GST Implementation:

Multiplicity of Tax Slabs:

- Classification issues, such as the **popcorn controversy**, highlight GST's complexity.

Excluded Products:

- Items like **alcohol and petroleum** remain outside the GST framework.

Reduced Tax Powers for States:

- States face limitations in imposing independent indirect taxes.

Revenue Shortfalls:

- **Delayed compensation** for states' revenue losses has hindered fiscal planning.

Conclusion:

The **popcorn tax controversy** reflects the broader challenges within India's GST system, from **complex tax slabs** to **compliance difficulties**. Simplifying the framework and ensuring fair practices are essential for maintaining public trust and achieving the goals of **"One Nation, One Tax."**

5 **Report on Domestic Migration: Changing Trends in India**

Context: A recent report titled **'400 Million Dreams'**, released by the **Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)**, provides insights into the evolving patterns of **domestic migration** in India since the **2011 Census**.

What is Domestic Migration?

Internal migration refers to the movement of people within a country, often driven by:

- **Push Factors:** Lack of jobs, natural disasters, poor education, and inadequate healthcare.
- **Pull Factors:** Better economic opportunities, higher living standards, and peaceful environments.

Key Findings of the Report:

Decline in Domestic Migrant Numbers:

- Migration numbers have dropped by **12%**, from **45.57 crore** in 2011 to **40.20 crore** in 2023.
- The **migration rate** has declined from approximately **38%** to an estimated **29%** in 2023.

Migration Dynamics:

- **Short-distance migration** dominates, as **distance negatively impacts labour mobility**.
- Migration originates mainly from regions surrounding **urban hubs** like **Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, and Kolkata**.

Major Migration Routes:

- **Top corridors:** Uttar Pradesh to Delhi, Gujarat to Maharashtra, Telangana to Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar to Delhi.

Shifts in Migrant Distribution:

- **States with Increased Share of Migrants:** West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Karnataka.
- **States with Decreased Share of Migrants:** Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

Reasons for Decline in Migration Numbers:

Improved Infrastructure:

- Enhanced **roads, education, healthcare, and public transport** at the place of origin reduce the need for migration.

Localized Economic Growth:

- Growth in rural economies has generated **job opportunities closer to home**, minimizing migration.

Government Initiatives for Domestic Migrants

Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979:

- Protects migrants from **exploitation** and ensures fair **employment conditions**.

Ayushman Bharat – PMJAY:

- Offers **5 lakh health coverage** for secondary and tertiary care, benefiting migrant workers and their families.

One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC):

- Ensures **nationwide portability** of ration cards, enabling migrants to access **subsidized food grains** anywhere in India.

Conclusion:

The report underscores a significant shift in **domestic migration patterns**, influenced by **better infrastructure**, localized growth, and targeted government initiatives. While migration has reduced, continued focus on improving living standards and providing equitable opportunities across regions remains crucial for fostering inclusive growth.

6 | Ministry of Environment Introduces Draft Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2024

Context: The **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** has unveiled the **Draft Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2024**, aimed at tackling the adverse impacts of **unmanaged solid waste**. Set to come into effect from **1st October 2025**, the new rules focus on implementing the principles of **circular economy**, strengthening the monitoring process, and addressing waste management challenges in both **urban** and **rural areas**.

Key Highlights of the Draft SWM Rules, 2024:

1. **Waste Segregation and Disposal:**
   o All **waste generators** must **separately store** construction and demolition waste on-site and dispose of it in line with the **Construction and Demolition Waste Management Rules, 2016**.

2. **Bulk Waste Generators' Responsibilities:**
   o Bulk waste generators are required to **obtain Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility Certificates** from the local bodies to ensure **environmentally sound** collection and transportation of waste, including **sanitary waste**.

3. **Restrictions on Landfill Disposal:**
   o Non-recyclable waste with a **calorific value** of **1500 Kcal/kg** or higher must **not** be disposed of in landfills, pushing for better recycling and energy recovery practices.

4. **Centralized Online System by CPCB:**
   o The **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** will implement a **centralized online system** for the **registration** and **annual returns** of all obligated entities under the SWM rules.

5. **Registration for Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facilities:**
   o Operators of **Treatment, Storage, Disposal Facilities (TSDFs)** must register on the centralized online portal to enhance transparency and accountability in waste management.

6. **Ban on Agricultural Waste Burning:**
   o Local bodies will be required to **prevent the open burning** of **agriculture and horticulture waste**, with stringent penalties for individuals caught violating the ban.

Challenges in Solid Waste Management:

While these new rules aim to improve the overall waste management process, several challenges persist:

- **Lack of proper collection and segregation** at the source of waste generation.
- **Indiscriminate disposal** of **electronic waste**.
- **Financial constraints** affecting the efficient collection, transportation, and disposal of waste.

Conclusion:

The **SWM Rules, 2024** represent a significant step towards improving solid waste management in India by integrating sustainability practices and strengthening monitoring mechanisms. However, successful implementation will require overcoming significant logistical, financial, and behavioral challenges. The shift towards a **circular economy** and responsible waste management is crucial for the country's long-term environmental health.