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1. The Bill to amend the law providing stringent punishment for examination malpractices, including question paper leaks, was passed in the Lok Sabha by a voice vote amid strong protests from the Opposition.

i. Key Features

The amendment strengthens the 2024 law aimed at preventing malpractices in public examinations conducted by agencies such as the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), Staff Selection Commission (SSC), Railway Recruitment Boards, Bank Recruitment Agencies, and the National Testing Agency (NTA).

- Individuals involved in question paper leaks or other examination malpractices will face imprisonment ranging from 5 to 10 years and a fine up to ₹50 lakh.
- Organized criminal groups involved in examination fraud will face 7 to 10 years of imprisonment and a fine up to ₹10 crore.
- State Governments and Union Territories are empowered to designate any Sessions Court as a Special Fast-Track Court to try examination malpractice cases.
- Special Fast-Track Courts shall conduct day-to-day hearings, and trials must be completed within three months from the date of filing the charge sheet.
- The Central Government is empowered to constitute Special Task Forces whenever necessary.
- Investigations by the Police, Central Agencies, or Special Task Forces must be completed within two months.
- State Governments and Union Territories may appoint Special Public Prosecutors to conduct prosecution in such cases.
- Appeals against any judgment, conviction, sentence, or order shall be heard by a Division Bench of the High Court, with disposal within three months.

2. Telegram founder Pavel Durov has been added to Russia's international wanted list

on allegations of aiding terrorist activities in the country.

- i. Russia's principal domestic security agency, the Federal Security Service (FSB), has alleged that Telegram has been used by Ukrainian intelligence agencies and terrorist organizations to plan and coordinate sabotage, terrorist attacks, assassinations, and cyber fraud. The FSB further alleged that Telegram's management failed to take adequate measures to curb such activities.

3. India's total telecom subscriber base increased to 134.8 crore in June, reaching a new all-time high.

- i. Bharti Airtel retained the top position in adding new telephone subscribers, outperforming its competitor Jio.
- ii. The country's total broadband subscriber base increased from 108 crore in May to 108.75 crore in June.
- iii. The total wireless telephone subscriber base increased from 129.4 crore in May to 130 crore in June, comprising:
 - Consumer SIM connections – 114.7 crore
 - Machine-to-Machine (M2M) SIMs – 13.47 crore
 - Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) connections – 1.78 crore

4. During the first innings against Pakistan, West Indies bowler Justin Greaves bowled five consecutive maiden overs, taking one wicket in each over without conceding a single run.

- He became the first cricketer in Test history to bowl five successive maiden overs while taking five wickets in those overs.

5. Commonwealth Games

- i. Indian athlete Gulveer Singh won the silver medal in the men's 10,000 metres, finishing in 27 minutes 49.78 seconds.
- ii. In women's 69 kg weightlifting, India's Harjinder Kaur won the silver medal.

6. The tenure of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) examining the 'One Nation, One Election' Bill has been extended until the end of the upcoming Winter Session of Parliament.

- i. The 129th Constitutional Amendment Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, intended to facilitate simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies, were introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2024. The INDIA alliance strongly opposed the Bills at the introduction stage.
- ii. Despite opposition, the Bills were introduced through a voice vote. Later, based on requests from various political parties, they were referred to the Parliamentary Joint Committee for detailed examination.
- iii. The 41-member Parliamentary Joint Committee, headed by BJP MP P. P. Chaudhary, is currently examining the Bills. Nationwide consultations are being conducted with the objective of implementing "One Nation, One Election" by 2029.

7. Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai introduced the Births and Deaths Registration (Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha.

- i. Under the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, registration of births and deaths is mandatory. The new Bill seeks to amend this Act.
- ii. Under the proposed amendment:
If an application for registration is made more than one year but within two years from the date of birth or death, registration can be made only after obtaining an order from the District Collector, Sub-Divisional Magistrate, or an authorized Executive Magistrate.
- iii. If registration is sought after two years, a detailed inquiry will be conducted.
- iv. Registration will be permitted only on the basis of an order issued by a Judicial Magistrate First Class.
- v. The Bill states that these provisions will encourage citizens to report and register births and deaths promptly.

8. The Central Government has clarified that certain rubber components and gaskets in BS-III petrol vehicles may require replacement when using E20 petrol.

- i. E20 petrol (containing 20% ethanol) is now available at petrol stations across the country.
- ii. Social media had circulated claims that E20 petrol damages vehicle components and reduces mileage, particularly in older vehicles not designed for E20.
- iii. Opposition parties and consumer organizations also raised these concerns, but the Government consistently denied them.
- iv. Responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari stated:
 - Studies were jointly conducted by Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the Indian Institute of Petroleum, Dehradun, the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA), and the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI).
 - The studies concluded that no engine modifications are required for motorcycles or four-wheelers using E20 petrol.
 - Experts stated that fuel efficiency depends on several factors, not merely the fuel used.
 - Vehicles manufactured between 1 April 2005 and before 2016 may require replacement of certain rubber components and gaskets, which can be carried out easily during routine servicing.
 - The use of E20 petrol does not cause problems in starting or driving vehicles.

9. The Rajya Sabha passed the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, making insults to the national song "Vande Mataram" a punishable offence.

- i. The Bill was passed by a voice vote.
Meanwhile, Opposition members staged a walkout after raising the issue of alleged police action against protesting students in Delhi.
- ii. Under the Bill:
Along with the National Flag, Constitution, and National Anthem, insulting the National Song "Vande Mataram" will also become a punishable offence.
The Bill extends to the national song the same legal protection currently enjoyed by the National Anthem.
Preventing or obstructing the singing of Vande Mataram will attract imprisonment of up to three years and a fine.
- iii. The Central Government has introduced this measure as part of the 150th anniversary

celebrations of “Vande Mataram.”

iv. Earlier, the Ministry of Home Affairs had issued guidelines in January stating that:

- All six stanzas of Vande Mataram should be sung during official government functions
- The National Song should be sung first, followed by the National Anthem.

10. India's aggressive push for ethanol blending in petrol, highlighting the significant risks to food security and water resources.

i. Energy Strategy

- Geopolitical tensions and wars in West Asia have created a compulsion for India to find alternative energy sources to reduce its heavy reliance on imported crude oil.
- While electric vehicles are being promoted as a long-term solution, the Government is currently focusing on reducing fossil fuel consumption in existing petrol and diesel engines through ethanol blending.
- India is following the lead of several developed nations that have successfully implemented ethanol-blended fuels.

ii. Concerns Regarding Engine

Performance and Water Usage

- There are widespread concerns and criticisms regarding how ethanol affects car engines and whether it significantly reduces fuel efficiency (mileage), thereby increasing overall costs for consumers.
- A major danger highlighted is the potential for severe water shortages caused by the large-scale production of ethanol.

iii. Raw Material Usage for Ethanol

- Unlike developed nations that primarily use agricultural and wood waste, ethanol production in India relies on primary food crops like rice, sugarcane, and maize.
- India produces approximately 15 crore tonnes of rice and 4.30 crore tonnes of maize annually.
- Rice allocated for ethanol production rose from 31.11 lakh tonnes in 2024–25 to 39.28 lakh tonnes by June 2025–26.
- While maize allocation for ethanol dropped from 1.31 crore tonnes in 2024–25 to 67.87 lakh tonnes in 2025–26, the diversion of rice—a staple food—has significantly

increased.

iv. Food Security vs. Fuel Production

- Union Minister of State for Petroleum, Suresh Gopi, recently confirmed in the Rajya Sabha that there is no plan to reduce the current ethanol blending targets.
- While a decision on exceeding 20% blending has not been made, the Government maintains that diverting food grains will not affect the Public Distribution System (PDS).
- Despite Government assurances, the rising price of rice is a major concern for the general public.
- Currently, 67% of India's ethanol is derived from rice and maize, while the remaining 33% comes from sugarcane juice and molasses.

v. The High Water Cost of Ethanol

Analysis of the water required to produce ethanol from different crops:

- Approximately 85% of India's water resources are already consumed by the agricultural sector.
- Producing 1 kg of rice requires 3,000 to 5,000 liters of water.
- It takes 2.5 to 3 kg of rice to produce 1 liter of ethanol, meaning a single liter of rice-derived ethanol costs an average of 11,250 liters of water.
- Producing 1 liter of ethanol from sugarcane requires 3,630 liters of water.
- Producing 1 liter of ethanol from maize requires 4,670 liters of water.

vi. Climate Risks and Groundwater Depletion

- Experts have warned that 'El Nino' effects in the Pacific Ocean may weaken the Southwest monsoon in India this year.
- A failure in the monsoon will not only hit the agricultural sector but also the industrial sectors that revolve around it.
- The current deficit in the Southwest monsoon is already causing water bodies to dry up, which will force an increased reliance on groundwater.
- Unplanned ethanol production will likely drive the groundwater table to dangerously low levels, creating a long-term ecological crisis.

vii. Conclusion

While ethanol blending is a modern necessity, it must be executed with proper planning that respects the nation's water and food security.

11. Analysis of the critical role lakes play in water security and the urgent need for their restoration in Tamil Nadu.

i. Importance and Historical Context

- Lakes are essential sources of water for drinking (for humans, birds, and animals) and agriculture.
- Storing adequate water in lakes is the primary method to increase and maintain groundwater levels.
- Historically, people were highly dedicated to creating and maintaining lakes. Special guards were appointed to monitor water levels and ensure lake banks did not breach during monsoons.
- Traditionally, desilting and strengthening banks were community-led efforts known as "Kudimaramathu".

ii. Key Statistics for Tamil Nadu and Chennai

- Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan are the two states in India with the highest number of lakes.
- There are 39,202 lakes in Tamil Nadu under the control of the Public Works Department and local bodies. Of these, 13,710 are managed by the Water Resources Department.
- Chengalpattu district, often called the "District of Lakes," has the highest number at 528 lakes.
- A 1906 census recorded 474 lakes in Chennai; today, only 43 remain. Most have been converted into residential areas, commercial complexes, or industrial zones.
- The Mogappair Lake was completely desilted and filled to create the "Mogappair Lake Project" for housing and commerce.

iii. Veeranam Lake

- Dug in the 10th century by the Chola King Rajaditya, Veeranam Lake has a circumference of approximately 15 kilometers.
- It has a total capacity of 1,465 million cubic feet, making it one of the largest man-made reservoirs in the world.
- It fulfills the irrigation needs of 45,000 acres of land and serves as a major drinking water source for Chennai.

iv. Threats to Lakes and Wetlands

- Lakes are frequently used as dumping grounds for garbage and waste.

- Many water bodies are choked by invasive weeds like *Prosopis juliflora* (Seemai Karuvelam) and water hyacinth.
- The Pallikaranai marsh, which spanned 15,000 acres a century ago, has shrunk to just 2,500 acres. This drastic reduction is cited as a primary cause of flooding in nearby residential areas during rains.
- This year, the Southwest monsoon has been 46% below average, leading to a sharp decline in lake water levels, exacerbated by high temperatures causing rapid evaporation.

v. Proposed Solutions and Economic Comparisons

- It is the Government's duty to desilt lakes to prevent rainwater from flowing wastefully into the sea, but public participation is also vital.
- In Kurichi village, villagers and NGOs collaborated to desilt a 383-acre lake, increasing its storage capacity from 93 crore liters to 542 crore liters.
- The Central Government has introduced the "Amrit Sarovar" project, aiming to create or restore 75 lakes in every district.
- Desalinating seawater is extremely expensive (with ₹4,276 crore allocated for current phases). It suggests that prioritizing lake maintenance is a far more logical and cost-effective way to achieve water self-sufficiency than allowing rainwater to reach the sea and then spending billions to desalinate it.

12. Analysis of the social impact of alcohol and the economic path toward total prohibition in Tamil Nadu.

i. Impact on Society and Individuals

- Alcohol and drug addiction are leading to new diseases, severe social problems, and a direct threat to human lives.
- Addiction shatters family structures and renders the future of children meaningless.
- Multiple generations have already become enslaved to alcohol, creating a long-term crisis for the state's welfare.

ii. Constitutional and National Context

- Under Article 47 of the Indian Constitution, State Governments have the full power to ban alcohol and enact prohibition laws.

- Prohibition is already successfully implemented in Gujarat, Nagaland, Mizoram, Bihar, and the Union Territory of Lakshadweep.

iii. Political and Historical Context in Tamil Nadu

- The closure of 717 liquor shops located near schools, colleges, and places of worship is cited as a positive recent measure.
- Like the 2003 ban on lottery tickets, which saved countless poor families; Government should show similar courage to ban alcohol for public health and peace.
- Prohibition is often a major talking point before elections but is typically sidelined by political representatives once they are in power.

iv. Economic Reality and the Revenue Trap

- A major hurdle for the state is that approximately one-sixth (1/6th) of Tamil Nadu's revenue is derived from liquor sales.
- Current State Finances:
 - Total Tax Revenue: Approximately ₹3.5 lakh crore.
 - Total Expenditure: Approximately ₹4 lakh crore.
 - Revenue Deficit: Approximately ₹50,000 crore.
- About 50% of the state's total spending is allocated to essential sectors like Education, Health, Energy, Rural Development, and Highways.
- The state's income relies on three main pillars: Commercial Taxes (which contribute over two-thirds), Stamps and Registration, and Alcohol sales.

v. Fiscal Challenges of "Freebie" Schemes

Welfare promises impact the ability to implement prohibition:

- Women's Rights Grant: The current annual allocation is ₹15,000 crore. Increasing the monthly grant to ₹2,500 would cost an additional ₹20,000 crore per year.
- LPG Subsidies: Providing 6 free gas cylinders annually would cost between ₹8,000 and ₹10,000 crore.
- These mounting costs, combined with agricultural loan waivers and electricity concessions, create a situation where the state finds it difficult to forgo liquor revenue.

vi. Proposed Path to Revenue-Neutral Prohibition

The state can survive without liquor revenue by optimizing other sectors:

- By identifying new professional sectors for taxation and eliminating tax evasion in

Commercial Taxes, the state could generate an additional ₹25,000 to ₹35,000 crore annually.

- In 2025–26, reforms in the Stamps and Registration department alone increased revenue by ₹7,000 crore.
- The Government should appoint honest, experienced, and innovative officers to high-revenue departments and grant them the independence to make firm decisions.
- Tax policies must be made clear and simple to encourage public compliance and understanding.

viii. Conclusion

Viewing alcohol revenue as essential for state survival is a fallacy. It urges the Government to reject the "liquor for welfare" model and instead focus on sustainable economic development through administrative efficiency and social justice.