

1. Vladimir Putin's 'Nuclear Briefcase' in China: Its History and Contents

Introduction

During a recent visit to China, Russian President Vladimir Putin was seen accompanied by officers carrying a mysterious "nuclear briefcase." This article explores the history and purpose of this enigmatic device.

What is the 'Nuclear Briefcase'?

The 'Nuclear Briefcase,' also known as 'Cheget,' is an integral part of Russia's system for authorizing nuclear strikes. It is designed to relay orders for a nuclear strike to the country's rocket forces. This system is interconnected with the 'Kazbek' electronic command-and-control network.



Usage and Key Figures

The 'Nuclear Briefcase' is carried by the Russian President, and it is also allocated to the Defence Minister and the Chief of General Staff. These three individuals are responsible for coordinating and executing potential nuclear strike orders. Notably, the President carries the briefcase during foreign visits.

Historical Use

The only known instance of a 'Nuclear Briefcase' being opened during a crisis occurred in 1995 when Russian officers mistook a scientific rocket launch for a hostile missile. The incident led to the briefcases being activated for planning a response. However, the crisis was averted, and the forces stood down within minutes.

System Operation

Upon receiving alerts of possible enemy action, the Russian electronic command-and-control networks are activated. The duty general conveys information to the other key figures holding the 'Nuclear Briefcases,' allowing them to monitor and make decisions related to the perceived threat.

Similar Devices in Other Countries

The United States also possesses a similar device officially known as the "Presidential Emergency Satchel," commonly referred to as the 'football.' This device allows the American President to authorize a nuclear attack and includes information on retaliatory options, classified site locations, and authentication codes. The Vice President also has a similar briefcase for continuity of authority.

Security Concerns

In recent times, there have been security concerns regarding the 'football.' Reports emerged in 2021 that during the January 2021 riots at the US Capitol, the Vice President's 'football' was close to the commotion. Additionally, past instances of misplaced codes under previous U.S. presidents, such as Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and Ronald Reagan, highlight security challenges associated with these devices.

Conclusion

The 'Nuclear Briefcase,' a critical component of Russia's nuclear strike authorization system, is shrouded in mystery. Its historical use and its American counterpart, the 'football,' raise questions about the security and protocol surrounding these devices in an increasingly complex world.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Indian Express

2. Row over Puri Jagannath Temple's Locked Treasure Room: The Long-standing Issue

Introduction

As Assembly and General elections approach in Odisha, there is a renewed demand to open the Ratna Bhandar (treasure room) of the Puri Jagannath Temple. This treasure

room has remained locked for nearly four decades. Both the BJP and Congress have been actively pushing for its reopening.

The Significance of Puri Temple's Ratna Bhandar

The Ratna Bhandar is where the precious ornaments donated by devotees and erstwhile kings for the sibling deities—Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Goddess Subhadra—are stored. It consists of two chambers: the Bhitar Bhandar (inner chamber) and the Bahara Bhandar (outer chamber). While the outer chamber is regularly opened for rituals and festivals, the inner chamber has not been accessed for 38 years.

Why the Demand to Open It Now?

The demand to unlock the Ratna Bhandar has gained momentum due to concerns raised by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which oversees the temple. ASI has called for repairs and conservation of the chamber, fearing structural damage that could endanger the precious ornaments. Devotees, temple managing committee members, and the Puri royal scion are in favor of reopening it to ensure its safety and conduct an inventory.

Historical Perspective

The last inventory of the Ratna Bhandar was conducted between May and July 1978, and though it was briefly opened in 1985, the inventory was not updated. The 1978 inventory listed gold ornaments, silver utensils, and other valuables. Some items could not be weighed during the process.

Procedure to Open the Treasure House

Opening the Ratna Bhandar requires permission from the Odisha government. An attempt was made in 2018, but the keys were missing. An envelope containing "duplicate keys of inner Ratna Bhandar" was later discovered. A judicial inquiry was initiated to investigate the key loss. The findings of this inquiry have not been publicly disclosed.

Current Developments

In August 2022, ASI once again sought permission to inspect the inner chamber, but it has not received approval. Opposition parties have accused the Odisha government of delaying tactics. In response to the growing demand, the temple managing committee recommended the Ratna Bhandar's opening during the 2024 annual Rath Yatra.

Why in news?

The Gyan Sahayak Scheme, introduced by the Gujarat state government, has generated opposition from various quarters, including student groups, political parties, and educators. This scheme is designed to address teacher vacancies in government schools by appointing teachers on a contractual basis until regular appointments can

be made. The controversy surrounding the scheme has even led to protests and calls for its cancellation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Social Issues

Source: The Indian Express and The Hindu

3. How Multilateral Development Banks have lent to India

What are Multilateral Development Banks?

Multilateral Development Banks are institutions whose members include multiple developed and developing countries, which have to fulfil certain lending obligations to facilitate developmental objectives.

They provide financing and technical assistance to countries and organisations undertaking projects across sectors including transport, energy, urban infrastructure, and waste management. Usually, developed countries in MDBs contribute to the lending pool while developing countries primarily borrow from these institutions to fund development projects.

MDBs lending to India

MDBs have played a crucial role in India's development journey by financing key infrastructure projects with longer gestation periods.

World Bank: The World Bank, established in 1944, has committed to lending worth \$97.6 billion in India, including all active and closed projects. Of the total commitments, \$18.7 billion (19 per cent) have been committed to projects in the public administration sector, \$14.8 billion (15 per cent) to the agriculture, fishing and forestry sector, and \$10.6 billion (11 per cent) to the transport sector.

Asian Development Bank: The Manila-based Asian Development Bank, formed in 1969, has cumulatively committed to assistance worth \$59.7 billion in India for project and technical assistance. Of the total assistance, \$20.2 billion (34 per cent) has been committed to the transport sector, \$15 billion (25 per cent) to the energy sector, and \$6.7 billion (10 per cent) to the urban infrastructure sector.

Of the \$2 billion it committed in 2022, \$1.8 billion was committed to sovereign projects, for which the loan amount is guaranteed by either the central, state, or local government(s), and just \$0.2 billion to non-sovereign projects.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: The Beijing-headquartered Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which was formed in 2016, has approved financing worth \$9.9 billion in India. Of this, \$4.2 billion (42 per cent) has been

approved for the transport sector, \$1.4 billion (14 per cent) for the energy sector, and \$1.25 billion (12.6 per cent) for economic resilience.

Of the total 42 projects for which AIIB has approved financing, 29 are sovereign projects and 13 are non-sovereign projects.

European Investment Bank: The European Investment Bank, established in 1958, has signed off on 22 projects in India with a cumulative value of Euro 4.5 billion. Of the total amount, Euro 2.45 billion were signed off for the transport sector and Euro 1.5 billion for the energy sector.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: The Indian Express

4. Why Reforms in Special and Local Laws (SLLs) are Essential

Introduction

The recent introduction of Bills related to criminal laws in India has sparked significant discussion. While these bills aim to bring much-needed reforms to the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and Indian Evidence Act (IEA), they often overlook the Special and Local Laws (SLLs) which constitute a vital part of the broader criminal justice system in India. This article emphasizes the importance of reforming SLLs and their substantial role in the criminal justice framework.

Significance of SLLs

SLLs play a crucial role in the Indian criminal justice system. In 2021, approximately 39.9% of all cognizable offenses were registered under SLLs, as per the Crime in India Statistics. These laws have triggered essential debates concerning the boundaries of state power in criminalization, particularly in terms of individual rights and liberties.

Need for Reform in SLLs

SLLs present a range of substantive and procedural issues. Some SLLs, like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA) and the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999 (MCOCA), have vague definitions for offenses such as 'terrorist act' and 'unlawful activity.' Additionally, certain SLLs, like the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, have faced criticism for their applicability to consensual sexual activities among minors, raising concerns about criminalizing conduct that might be better suited for civil or regulatory treatment.

Procedural Challenges in SLLs

SLLs have also diluted universally accepted due process values. For instance, the UAPA grants increased search and seizure powers, while the MCOCA allows confessions recorded by police officers. Stringent provisions in SLLs, such as those in the UAPA,

Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, and Prevention of Money Laundering Act, make obtaining bail extremely difficult.

The Evolution of Criminal Laws

Over time, there has been a significant shift in the landscape of criminal laws. This shift represents a departure from the original intent of codifying all criminal laws, as envisioned by the Indian Penal Code (IPC) inspired by Jeremy Bentham's concept of a "Pannomion," — an all-comprehensive collection of rules codified in a single place. While the IPC was meant to serve as a comprehensive collection of criminal laws, the growing reliance on SLLs has led to an understanding of criminal laws that deviates from the IPC's original scope.

The Need for Comprehensive Reform

It is essential to ensure that SLLs do not overshadow the idea of codifying penal laws as envisaged in the IPC and CrPC. All SLLs that criminalize conduct should be integrated as separate chapters within the broader penal code. Similarly, SLLs that introduce distinct procedures for reporting offenses, arrest, investigation, prosecution, trial, evidence, and bail should be included as either separate procedures within the CrPC or as exceptions to its general provisions.

Conclusion

Neglecting the substantive and procedural aspects of SLLs in ongoing reform efforts is a significant limitation. Therefore, a second generation of reforms is necessary to address these shortcomings and harmonize SLLs within the overall framework of India's criminal laws.

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu