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### 1. Telecom Bill 2023: What powers it gives the government for 'national security'

#### Introduction

The Telecommunications Bill, 2023 was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Union minister for Communications, Electronics & Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw.

Among its many significant provisions is one on national security, which allows the government to temporarily take control of telecom services in case of an emergency. Here's exactly what the Bill says about this.

#### What is the Telecommunications Bill, 2023?

The Telecommunications Bill, 2023 amends and consolidates the laws relating to "development, expansion and operation of telecommunication services and telecommunication networks; assignment of spectrum; and for matters connected therewith".

The new Bill seeks to replace the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933, and the Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act, 1950.

According to its statement of objectives and reasons, "Telecommunication sector is a key driver of economic and social development. It is the gateway to digital services. Security of our country is vitally dependent on safety of telecommunication networks. Therefore, there is a need to create a legal and regulatory framework that focuses on safe and secure telecommunication network that provides for digitally inclusive growth."

It adds: "The nature of telecommunication, its usage and underlying technologies have undergone massive changes, especially in the past decade. Therefore, there is a need for enacting a legislation for telecom sector that serves the needs of our society."

#### What does the Telecom Bill say on national security?

The Bill allows the government to take over telecom services and intercept messages in the interests of national security and in case of emergencies.

The Bill says: "On the occurrence of any public emergency, including disaster management, or in the interest of public safety, the Central Government or a State

Government or any officer specially authorised in this behalf by the Central Government or a State Government, if satisfied that it is necessary or expedient so to do, by notification— (a) take temporary possession of any telecommunication service or telecommunication network from an authorised entity; or (b) provide for appropriate mechanism to ensure that messages of a user or group of users authorised for response and recovery during public emergency are routed on priority."

It further says that "on the occurrence of any public emergency or in the interest of public safety", the central or state government, "in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, defence and security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, or for preventing incitement to the commission of any offence", direct that messages "transmitted or received by any telecommunication service or telecommunication network, shall not be transmitted, or shall be intercepted or detained, or shall be disclosed in intelligible format to the officer mentioned in such order".

About press messages, it specifically says, "The press messages, intended to be published in India, of correspondents accredited to the Central Government or a State Government shall not be intercepted or detained, unless their transmission has been prohibited" under relevant rules.

Under the new Bill, the government can also ask telecommunication services to transmit specific messages. "If it appears necessary or expedient so to do in the public interest, the Central Government may direct any authorised entity to transmit in its telecommunication services or telecommunication network, specific messages, in such manner as may be specified," the Bill says.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express

## 2. Unprecedented Suspension of 78 MPs

### Why in news?

On 18th December, a historic suspension of 78 Members of Parliament (MPs) occurred, marking a total of 92 suspensions in the ongoing Winter Session. This move has intensified tensions between the Opposition and the government, prompting accusations of a "murder of democracy." The Rajya Sabha particularly witnessed a significant depletion, with almost 50% reduction in Opposition strength.

### Chaotic Proceedings and Repeated Adjournments

The Lok Sabha witnessed chaotic proceedings leading to the suspension of 33 MPs, with repeated adjournments throughout the day. The suspension resolution was

passed by a voice vote (not by Division vote), escalating the confrontations between the government and the Opposition.

### **Bills Passed Amidst Turmoil**

Amidst the chaos, several Bills, including the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Second Amendment) Bill, 2023, and the Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill, 2023, were hurriedly passed in the Rajya Sabha within 15 minutes. The Opposition's demand for a debate on a recent security breach in the Lok Sabha remained unaddressed.

### **Opposition's Accusations of Autocracy**

Opposition leaders, led by Mallikarjun Kharge, accused the government of being "autocratic" and criticized the suspension of MPs as an attack on democratic norms. The suspension of 78 MPs in a single day surpasses the previous record set in 1989, further fueling concerns about the state of democracy.

### **Implications for Parliamentary Proceedings**

With a significant portion of the Opposition now suspended for the rest of the session, concerns are raised about the government's ability to push through legislation without meaningful debate. The suspension coincided with the introduction of important bills, including the Telecommunications Bill, 2023, and the passage of the Post Office Bill, 2023.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

## **3. India set to man its Arctic base around the year with new expedition**

### **Why in news?**

Maintaining a constant human presence in one of the coldest regions of the world has been a difficult task for long. However, starting this week, India will have around-the-year manning of the Arctic with the launch of the first-ever winter expedition in this region. With this, India's Himadri will be only the fourth research station in the Arctic to be manned around the year.

### **Why is the Arctic region being studied?**

The region above the Arctic Circle, north of latitude 66° 34' N, includes the Arctic Ocean. Scientific evidence has shown that the Arctic ice and the sea ice have the potential to affect humans outside the Arctic region, as sea levels rise, and to influence atmospheric circulations.

Climate experts have found that on average, temperatures in the Arctic region have risen by 4 degrees Celsius over the last 100 years. The Arctic sea-ice extent (the ice

formed by the freezing of seawater) is declining at a rate of 13 per cent per decade. At this rate, the Arctic Ocean could go ice-free sometime during the summer of 2040.

Studies have demonstrated that the increased Arctic sea-ice loss could lead to a greater tropical sea surface temperature, increased precipitation in the tropics, and a shift in the position of the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (the region of the Earth where northeast and southeast trade winds converge). There are also high chances for an increase in extreme rainfall events.

With such unprecedented changes owing to global warming, the Arctic could become a more habitable and less hostile place. In no time, there could be a rush to explore and exploit the region's resources and minerals, and to gain supremacy over the trade, navigation and other geo-economic and strategic sectors.



Figure 1 Himadri, India's research station in the Arctic.

### **Why are expeditions to the Arctic challenging?**

First, there are challenges related to the environment. At the research base Ny-Ålesund in Svalbard, Norway, the mean temperature in February – the year's coldest month – is minus 14 degrees Celsius. On the other hand, the mean temperature during the warmest month, July, is 5 degrees Celsius.

Due to such a hostile environment, performing both outdoor and indoor scientific observations or sampling has remained largely limited to the summer months. So far, only three research stations have had permanent staff deployment in the Arctic round-the-year.

Further, Eight Arctic countries – Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the USA – form the Arctic Council. It is an intergovernmental forum of Arctic countries for promoting cooperation. India has 'Observer' status here.

However, with multiple state jurisdictions in the Arctic, there is limited space available for establishing independent research stations. Geopolitical tensions, such as amid the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war, could cut off the Arctic regions from explorations.

### **How have India's interests in the Arctic evolved?**

India signed the Svalbard Treaty in Paris in 1920. This allowed it to operate in the Svalbard archipelago, which is under the sovereign control of Norway. But there was no concrete research taken up in the Arctic region till the turn of the century.

In 2007, the first Indian expedition comprising five scientists visited the International Arctic Research Facilities at Ny-Ålesund. The visit aimed at initiating studies in the fields of Arctic microbiology, atmospheric sciences and geology.

Following a successful visit, Himadri was established and would be manned only for 180 days a year. This station has, so far, hosted over 400 Indian researchers across 200 visits since its operations began in July 2008.

In 2014, a multisensory moored observatory named IndArc was established in Kongsfjorden, part of the Svalbard archipelago. India's northernmost atmospheric laboratory, the Gruvebadet Atmospheric Laboratory, was established in 2016 in Svalbard to study atmospheric sciences.

In May 2022, India released its Arctic Policy, which details six pillars – science and research, climate and environment protection, economic and human development, transportation and connectivity, governance and international cooperation and national capacity building.

Further, India is a member of the Ny-Ålesund Science Managers Committee, the International Arctic Science Committee, the University of Arctic and the Asian Forum for Polar Sciences.

### **Which countries are studying the Arctic?**

In 1990, the National Institute of Polar Research, Japan, was the first to establish a research station in Ny-Ålesund.

Located 2,100 km north of Norway's capital Oslo, Ny-Ålesund has ten countries: China, Germany, France, India, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, South Korea and the United Kingdom. They have set up eleven permanent research stations. Of these, only three stations have human presence around the year, until now.

Relevance: GS Prelims; S&T

Source: The Indian Express & The PIB