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1. The allegations against PVR for abuse of dominant position

Why in news?

Having found “no discernible competition concern,” the Competition Commission of India (CCI) rejected a complaint alleging that multiplex chain PVR had abused its dominant market position. Yogesh Pratap Singh, a film director, had accused the multiplex chain of according preferential treatment to films from large production houses over those by independent film makers.

What were the allegations about?

The primary allegation was that the multiplex chain, utilising its dominant position in the film exhibition market, had accorded preferential treatment to films of the “powerful and monetarily affluent production houses.” Mr. Singh also said that PVR engaged in cartelisation and vertical integration. He cited PVR’s foray into the business of film production; and actions relating to film distribution and film exhibition with big production houses. In the context of film distribution, vertical arrangements entail agreements between entities at different levels of the production chain; that is, producer-distributor, producer-exhibitor and distributor-exhibitor.

What was PVR’s response?

PVR denied the allegations. It said that the allegations were not backed by evidence. Further, the chain argued that the purpose of the complaint was to “pressurise” it to exhibit his film, in the absence of any legal obligation to do so. PVR clarified that it has no special tie-ups or recurring/long-term arrangements. More importantly, the multiplex chain said that it was not in their interest to accord preferential treatment to a specific producer or distributor, and that it does not offer any preferential treatment to its own films.

What does the CCI’s order say?

After examining the submissions of the multiplex chain, CCI concluded that there existed no perceptible concern about competition. Its order held that the commercial wisdom of the exhibitors is largely driven by consumer demand. Unless harm to competition was apparent, any intervention on its part would only lead to “undesirable consequences,” it noted. This would amount to taking away the autonomy of the entities and substituting that with the decisions of the regulator. About vertical integration, the order held that it was not per se prohibited under the provisions of

the Competition Act. Further, the complainant had not submitted any evidence to substantiate these allegations. It held that most of the agreed terms for both independent filmmakers and larger production houses were largely the same — including revenue sharing terms. Finally, upholding autonomy in screen allocation, the regulator concluded that the guiding factor for selection and allocation was maximisation of revenue. The specific criteria include the revenue generating potential of the movie, the buzz around the film, marketing, advertising and promotions done etc.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

2. Why Kashmir and Ladakh are without snow this winter, its implications



Figure 1 The Kashmir Valley has experienced a dry spell this winter

One of Kashmir's main winter tourism attractions, Gulmarg, has been bereft of snow this season, leading to a plunge in the flow of tourists and severely hitting the business of ski resorts.

Snowfall in Kashmir, however, is much more than just a tourist attraction. It is crucial for the local climate, winter crops and horticulture, availability of waters in streams and rivers, and for the local economy.

Dry winter

Though the lack of snow is the most visible in Gulmarg, a major tourist destination during this time of the year, the whole of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh have remained largely without rains or snow this winter.

Winter precipitation in Jammu and Kashmir, as also Ladakh, is mainly in the form of snowfall. Normally, the region gets its first snowfall in the first half of December, and

then through most of January. But it has been mostly dry this season. Jammu and Kashmir saw 80 per cent rainfall deficit in December, and 100 per cent (absolutely no rain) deficit in January so far, India Meteorological Department (IMD) data show. Ladakh has had no precipitation at all in December or January.

While snowfall in the region has been showing a declining trend in recent years, this season is remarkable.

The overall decreasing trend of snowfall has been attributed to a decline in western disturbance events and gradual rise in temperatures, which involves the role of climate change. The prevailing El Nino event in the eastern Pacific Ocean might be the additional factor to account for this year, scientists say.

Western Disturbances

Winter precipitation in the Himalayan region is caused mainly by Western Disturbances. These are large eastward-moving rain-bearing wind systems that originate beyond Afghanistan and Iran, picking up moisture from as far as the Mediterranean Sea and even the Atlantic Ocean.

Western Disturbances are the primary source of rainfall over north and northwest India during the post-monsoon and winter months. Along with the south-west monsoon season that runs from June to September, and the north-east monsoon that brings rains to Tamil Nadu and some other regions, Western Disturbances are the third major contributors to India's annual rainfall.

During winters, about four to six western disturbance events happen every month on an average. This season there was one feeble western disturbance event in December that did not bring any rains, and another similar one in January.

El Nino impact

Indeed, there have been several years in the last one decade — 2022, 2018, 2015 — when winters have been relatively dry in Jammu and Kashmir, and snowfall has been very low.

For the past few months, El Niño has persisted and will continue to do so in the coming months. This has affected the global atmospheric circulation, and might be contributing to the deficit precipitation in the region as well.

Repercussions

Less snowfall in the region is expected to have both short-term and long-term implications. Long-term implications include the generation of less hydroelectricity, an increase in the rate of glacier melting, and an adverse impact on the drinking water supply, since scanty snowfall means very little recharge of groundwater.

In the short term, a dry spell can result in an increase in forest fires, agricultural drought, and a drop in crop production.

The winter snow is a source of steady moisture to the soil that is vital for winter crops, particularly horticulture. Yields of apples or saffron, important ingredients of local economy, are badly affected in the absence of snowfall.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Geography

Source: The Indian Express

3. Who are the shankaracharyas — and who was Adi Shankara?

Why in news?

The four shankaracharyas have said that they will not attend the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22.

The shankaracharyas head the four Hindu mathas (monasteries) — in Dwarka (Gujarat), Joshimath (Uttarakhand), Puri (Odisha), and Sringeri (Karnataka) — that are believed to have been founded by the eighth-century religious scholar and philosopher Adi Shankara.

But first, why are the shankaracharyas skipping the Ram Mandir inauguration?

While the seers from Dwarka and Sringeri have not given reasons, the shankaracharyas of the Joshimath and Puri mathas have been more vocal.

“[Prime Minister] Modi will inaugurate the temple, he will touch the idol, then what am I supposed to do? Stand and clap?” Puri’s shankaracharya Nischalananda Saraswati told reporters.

The shankaracharya of the Jyotir Matha peeth, Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati, cited non-adherence to religious scriptures as his reason for skipping the inauguration. “The scriptures are being undermined by carrying out consecration before the construction of the temple is complete. There is no reason for this rush,” he said on Twitter (now X).

Who are the shankaracharyas?

Shankaracharya, literally ‘teacher of the way of Shankara’, is a religious title used by the heads of the four cardinal mathas or peeths believed to have been established by

Adi Shankara (c 788 CE-820 CE). According to tradition, they are religious teachers who belong to a line of teachers going back all the way to Adi Shankara himself.

And who was Adi Shankara?

According to the most popular versions of Adi Shankara's life-story, he was born in Kalady village on the bank of the River Periyar in what is today Kerala's Ernakulam district.

From Kanchi in Tamil Nadu to Kamrup in Assam, from Kashmir and the Kedar and Badri dhams in the Himalayas to Kashi (Varanasi) on the bank of the Ganga and Puri on the Bay of Bengal, Adi Shankara is said to have traversed the length and breadth of the Indian landmass preaching Advaita Vedanta. (More on that later.)

He is also popularly identified as the author of 116 works, including celebrated commentaries (or bhashyas) on 10 Upanishads, the Brahmasutra, and the Bhagavad Gita. However, the authorship of many works attributed to Shankara remains disputed.

What is Advaita Vedanta?

Shankara is most associated with Advaita Vedanta, a school of Hindu philosophy and spiritual discipline.

Advaita Vedanta articulates an ontological position of radical nondualism — it posits that all that we perceive is ultimately illusory (maya), and that the principle of brahman (not to be confused with the caste Brahmin) is the only true reality of all things, transcending empirical plurality. The fundamental thrust of Advaita Vedanta lies in the unity of atman or individual consciousness, and brahman or the ultimate reality.

This philosophical tradition found its most sustained early articulation in the works of Shankara, who "endeavoured to communicate nonduality through systematised theories of metaphysics, language, and epistemology".

What is the legacy of Shankara?

Shankara's legacy today transcends his contributions to metaphysics and theology. His travels across the subcontinent have often been interpreted as a near nationalistic project where faith, philosophy and geography are yoked together to imagine a Hindu India which transcended the political boundaries of his time.

And his four cardinal mathas, located in the North and South, East and West of India, are seen as the ultimate examples of this project. His mathas are thus also seen as

keepers of Hindu faith and traditions. This is what makes the shankaracharyas' refusal to attend the inauguration of the Ayodhya temple so significant.



Relevance: GS Prelims
Source: Indian Express