

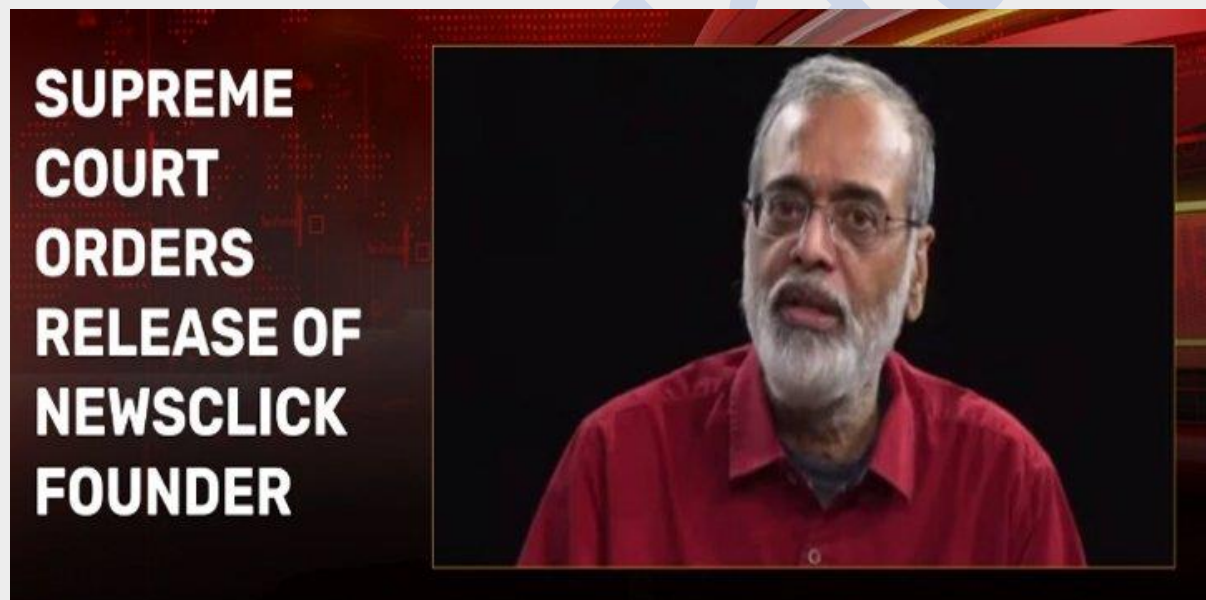
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1. Failure to follow procedure: Why SC said Newsclick founder's arrest was illegal

Why in News?

Invalidating his arrest in a terror case, the Supreme Court ordered the release of Newsclick founder-editor Prabir Purkayastha. The reason the court gave: the Delhi Police failed to inform Purkayastha the grounds of his arrest before taking him into custody.

The ruling by a Bench led by Justice B R Gavai is significant because it emphasises that proper procedure and due process are the guardrails against arbitrary action, even in stringent terror cases.



Arrest Charges

Purkayastha was arrested at about 6.30 am on October 3, 2023 by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police. Invoking the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the Delhi Police alleged that Newsclick received money for pro-China propaganda.

The FIR mentioned serious offences: Sections 13 (unlawful activities), 16 (terrorist act), 17 (raising funds for terrorist acts), 18 (conspiracy), and 22(C) (offences by companies, trusts) of the UAPA, and Sections 153 A (promoting enmity between different groups) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Issues in arrest

Purkayastha's case is that on October 4, 2023, without any prior notice, he was taken to the residence of a special judge at 6.30 am for his remand hearing. Purkayastha's lawyers claimed

that on their client's insistence, around 7 am, they were informed about the proceedings over a phone call.

In pleadings before the Delhi High Court, Purkayastha said that an unsigned copy of the remand application was sent by WhatsApp to his lawyers without mentioning the time of the arrest or the grounds of arrest.

However, even as objections to the remand were filed before 8 am, Purkayastha's lawyers were told that the remand order had already been passed, and seven days of police custody had been granted.

Crucially, official records show that the remand order was signed at 6 am, which is even before Purkayastha was produced before the judge or his lawyers were informed.

Even the FIR in the case was made public only after a few days had passed after his arrest.

The issue of the legality of arrest

Purkayastha's case was essentially this: that his arrest was illegal as it did not follow due process.

Article 22(1) of the Constitution, which is about protection against arrest and detention, reads: "No person who is arrested shall be detained in custody without being informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds for such arrest nor shall he be denied the right to consult, and to be defended by, a legal practitioner of his choice."

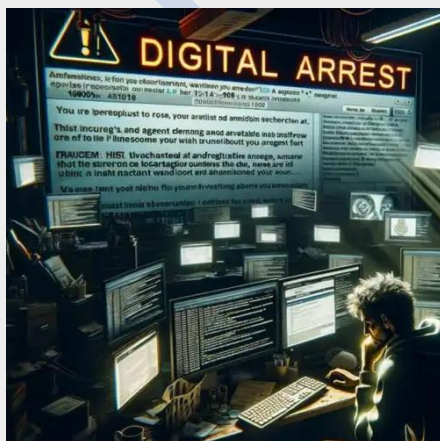
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

2. What is 'digital arrest'?

Why in News?

Following increasing reports of "digital arrests" by cybercriminals posing as law enforcement officers, the central government has collaborated with Microsoft to block more than 1,000 Skype IDs used for online intimidation, blackmail, and extortion. The government has advised people to file a complaint immediately after an incident.



What is Digital arrest?

Online frauds and criminals typically call potential victims and tell them that they have sent or are the intended recipients of a parcel containing illegal goods, drugs, fake passports or any other contraband item. In some cases, the criminals contact relatives or friends of the target and tell them that the target has been found to be involved in a crime or an accident, and is in their custody.

The criminals, who often use pictures or identities of police personnel to convey authenticity, usually demand money from the target for a

'compromise' and closure of the case. In certain cases, the victims are "digitally arrested", and forced to stay visible over Skype or other video conferencing platforms to the criminals until their demands are met.

The cybercriminals are also known to use studios that look like police stations or government offices, and to wear uniforms similar to those of law enforcement agencies.

Victims around the country have reported having lost large sums of money to these criminals.

Actions by the Centre

Intelligence agencies have concluded that the incidents are part of an organised online economic crime racket being run by cross-border crime syndicates. The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, which coordinates the response to cybercrime in the country, has blocked more than 1,000 Skype IDs linked to such activities, after collaborating with Microsoft.

It is also working to block SIM cards, mobile devices and "mule" accounts used by the cybercriminals. Money mules are "innocent victims who are duped by fraudsters into laundering stolen/ illegal money via their bank account(s).

When such incidents are reported, the money mule becomes the target of police investigations, due to their involvement.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

3. How Punjab and Haryana remain key to national food security

The importance of Punjab and Haryana to India's food security

The two breadbasket states, whose farmers led the protests against the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government's now-repealed three agricultural reform laws during 2020-21, have together accounted for 75.5% of the total wheat procured for the Central foodgrain pool in the current marketing season.

Government agencies have so far bought about 25.5 million tonnes (mt) of the 2023-24 winter-sown crop harvested from late-March. Out of that, 12.2 mt has come from Punjab and over 7 mt from Haryana.

Wheat lynchpins

Till the mid-2000s, Punjab and Haryana contributed 90% or more of the wheat for feeding the public distribution system (PDS) and other government programmes.

With the Green Revolution (the cultivation of high-yielding varieties) spreading to other states, and their governments also establishing infrastructure for buying grain at minimum support prices (MSP) from farmers, the ratio dipped to roughly 65% by the early 2010s. In recent years, the contribution of Punjab and Haryana has increased again.

TABLE 1: Wheat Procurement for Central Pool (lakh tonnes)

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Punjab	127.14	132.22	96.45	121.17	122.31
Haryana	74.00	84.93	41.86	63.17	70.32
MP	129.42	128.16	46.04	70.97	45.66
UP	35.77	56.41	3.36	2.20	8.47
Rajasthan	22.25	23.40	0.10	4.38	8.35
TOTAL*	389.93	433.44	187.92	262.02	255.24

**Includes other states; Figures are for Crop Year (July-June) 2023-24, till May 15.*

Source: Department of Food and Public Distribution.

The rice situation

In rice, government procurement was traditionally concentrated in Punjab and Haryana, plus the Godavari-Krishna and Kaveri delta regions of Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Tamil Nadu (TN).

Like with wheat, there has been a diversification here as well, with new states — especially Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and even UP — becoming major contributors to the Central pool. In the process, the combined share of Punjab and Haryana in total rice procurement has fallen from 43-44% in the early 2000s to an average of 28.8% in the four years ended 2022-23.

TABLE 2: Rice Procurement for Central Pool (lakh tonnes)

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Punjab	108.76	135.89	125.48	122.01	124.14
Haryana	43.07	37.89	37.06	39.77	39.42
Telangana	74.54	94.53	73.94	88.35	43.87

AP	55.33	56.66	44.61	27.55	18.82
Chhattisgarh	50.53	47.62	61.65	58.65	97.10
Odisha	47.98	52.58	48.31	53.83	39.45
UP	37.90	44.78	43.91	43.89	36.05
MP	17.40	24.97	30.70	31.02	28.23
Bihar	13.41	23.84	30.09	28.17	20.78
Tamil Nadu	22.04	30.53	18.76	23.01	18.30
W Bengal	18.38	18.90	24.01	21.82	12.64
TOTAL*	518.26	601.71	575.88	568.66	497.24

**Includes other states; Figures are for Crop Year (July-June) 2023-24, till May 15.*

Source: Department of Food and Public Distribution.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express