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## 1. What is SWM cess and why is it levied on waste generators?

### Why in News?

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahangara Palike (BBMP) has proposed a Solid Waste Management (SWM) Cess of ₹100 per month for each household. While the proposal has sparked debate and criticism among residents and stakeholders, it is important to understand the rationale behind SWM cess, its intended use, and the broader context of solid waste management challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in India.

**CESS TO DOUBLE BBMP'S INCOME FROM SWM**

- The BBMP plans to introduce 15 per cent of the property tax payable as SWM cess and earn an additional income of around ₹450 crore.
- Currently the agency says it is spending over ₹500 crore on solid waste management
- The proposed hike in SWM cess will be placed before the BBMP council meeting this week for approval.



Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) levy user fees or SWM cess as per the provisions of Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016. According to these guidelines, ULBs must collect user fees/cess for SWM services provisions provided. ULBs typically charge about ₹30-50 per month as SWM cess, which is collected along with property tax. ULBs are now considering revising these rates and imposing higher charges on bulk waste generators to meet a portion of the costs incurred in providing SWM services.

### What are the costs?

Offering SWM services is complex and resource-intensive. ULBs typically deploy about 80% of their manpower and up to 50% of their annual budgets to provide SWM services to city residents.

In a city like Bangalore, an urban resident generates about 0.6 kg of waste per day, totalling 0.2 tonnes per person per year. Overall, Bangalore generates about 5,000 tonnes of solid waste per day. Managing this volume of waste requires around 5,000 door-to-door waste collection vehicles, 600 compactors, and about 20,000 Paurakarmikas.

SWM services comprise four components: collection, transportation, processing and disposal. ULBs package collection and transportation together, and processing and disposal together. Collection and transportation are resource and labour-intensive and come up to 85-90% of the SWM budget, whereas only about 10-15% is spent on processing and disposal of waste.

### What are the challenges?

Solid waste generated in Indian cities consists of about 55-60% wet biodegradable material and 40-45% non-biodegradable material. The portion of recyclable material in the dry waste

is minimal, only about 1-2%, with the rest being mostly non-recyclable and non-biodegradable waste.

Although 55% of the wet waste can be converted into organic compost or biogas, the yield is as low as 10-12%, making both composting and biogas generation from solid waste financially unviable. Typically, operational revenue from waste processing facilities covers only about 35-40% of operational expenses, with the rest subsidised by the ULB.

Apart from financial challenges, ULBs face other challenges associated with SWM services, such as extra work of clearing open points and drains, preventing open littering, seasonal changes in waste generation, and sweeping operations.

Additionally, the disposal of non-compostable and non-recyclable dry waste, such as single-use plastic, textile waste and inert materials, is expensive since the material needs to be shipped to cement factories or waste-to-energy projects located about 400-500 km from cities.

Large cities like Bangalore spend about 15% of their budget—about ₹1,643 crore out of ₹11,163 crore — whereas the revenue from SWM services is almost negligible at ₹20 lakh per year. Smaller cities tend to spend up to 50% of their budget but also end up with almost negligible revenue. Hence, ULBs charge SWM cess to cover a portion of the costs.

### **What is the solution?**

Although collection and transportation of waste generate no revenue, several strategies can reduce overall expenditure on SWM and lower user charges.

These are segregation of waste at source, reducing single-use plastic, decentralised composting initiatives, Information, Education and Awareness (IEC) to prevent open littering, and asking bulk waste generators to process their own waste.

A balanced approach, combining marginal user charges with efficient operations, could help make our cities cleaner.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Hindu

## **2. Nik Gupta extradited to US: His alleged involvement in Pannun 'assassination' attempt, chronology of events**

### **Introduction**

Nikhil 'Nik' Gupta, an Indian national who is accused by the United States of being involved in a murder-for-hire plot against Sikh separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, was extradited from the Czech Republic to the US on June 14.

### **Case against Gupta**

Gupta, 52, was arrested in Prague last year at the request of the US government on charges of being involved in a plot to assassinate Pannun in New York. Pannun holds dual American and

Canadian citizenship, and heads the pro-Khalistan organisation Sikhs for Justice, which has been banned in India.



US Federal prosecutors alleged that Gupta hired a hitman to kill Pannun, making a \$15,000 advance payment in May-June 2023. These allegations were made in an indictment filed by the Department of Justice (DoJ) in New York's Southern District, unsealed in November last year.

#### **Response of Indian Government**

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), however, dismissed the report. India has publicly said that a high-level inquiry is looking into the evidence shared by the US in the matter. Gupta, through his attorney, has denied the accusations against him, claiming that he has been "unfairly charged".

#### **Allegations by Canadian Prime Minister**

These allegations came just months after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had, in September 2023, accused "agents of the Indian government" of being involved in the fatal shooting of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar on Canadian soil June 18. Nijjar, a Canadian citizen, like Pannun had been a vocal critic of the Indian government.

The MEA, however, rejected Trudeau's allegations, calling them "absurd". Trudeau's claims adversely impacted India's bilateral relationship with Canada.

#### **Gupta's arrest and extradition**

On June 30 last year, as Gupta travelled from India to the Czech Republic, he was arrested by Czech law enforcement authorities at the request of the US, pursuant to the bilateral extradition treaty between the two countries.

On June 3, the Minister of Justice of the Czech Republic authorised the extradition of Nikhil Gupta to the US. The extradition was carried out on Friday, June 14, 2024, at Prague-Ruzyně Airport.

#### **What next**

As per reports, Gupta is currently lodged at the federal Metropolitan Detention Centre in Brooklyn. He will face trial in the US.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

### **3. Strategic imperative and environment concern in Great Nicobar project**

#### **About Great Nicobar**

Great Nicobar is the southernmost and largest of the Nicobar Islands, a sparsely inhabited 910-sq-km patch of mainly tropical rainforest in southeastern Bay of Bengal. Indira Point on the island, India's southernmost point, is only 90 nautical miles (less than 170 km) from Sabang at the northern tip of Sumatra, the largest island of the Indonesian archipelago.

Great Nicobar has two national parks, a biosphere reserve, small populations of the Shompen and Nicobarese tribal peoples, and a few thousand non-tribal settlers.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a cluster of 836 islands, split into two groups — the Andaman Islands to the north and the Nicobar Islands to the south — by the 150-km wide Ten Degree Channel.

So why does India want to develop Great Nicobar, and why has the proposed three-phase, 30-year project faced sustained criticism from conservationists, wildlife biologists, naturalists, and some local tribal councils?

### **The infra project**

The mega infrastructure project — which is being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) — is proposed to include an International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), a greenfield international airport with a peak hour capacity to handle 4,000 passengers, a township, and a gas and solar based power plant spread across 16,610 hectares.

The project for the “holistic development” of Great Nicobar Island was implemented after a report by NITI Aayog. A pre-feasibility report flagged the opportunity to leverage the strategic location of the island, which is roughly equidistant from Colombo in Sri Lanka to the southwest and Port Klang (Malaysia) and Singapore to the southeast.

It is close to the Malacca Strait, the main waterway that connects the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, and the ICTT is expected to “allow Great Nicobar to participate in the regional and global maritime economy by becoming a major player in cargo transshipment”. A proposed “greenfield city” will tap into both the maritime and tourism potential of the island.

The site for the proposed ICTT and power plant is Galathea Bay on the southeastern corner of Great Nicobar Island, where there is no human habitation. The project was granted in-principle forest clearance and environmental clearance in October 2022. A detailed project report (DPR) has been prepared, and the union government is likely to invite bids for the initial phase of construction of the terminal in the coming months.

### **Strategic importance**

The Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean region are of vital strategic and security interest to India as the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy seeks to expand its footprint across the region. India is wary of a build-up of Chinese maritime forces at the Indo-Pacific choke points of especially Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok. China's attempts to expand its footprint in the region includes building a military facility at Coco Islands (Myanmar) lying just 55 km to the north of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.



A major military infrastructure upgrade is underway at the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The upgrade is aimed at facilitating the deployment of additional military forces, larger and more warships, aircraft, missile batteries, and troops.

Close surveillance of the entire area around the archipelago, and the building up of a strong military deterrence at Great Nicobar is of vital importance to India's national security.

### Environmental concerns

The proposed infra upgrade has been opposed on grounds of the threat it poses to the ecology of the islands. The opposition — by wildlife conservation researchers, anthropologists, scholars, and civil society apart from the Congress — has focused on the potentially devastating impact on the Shompen, a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) of hunter-gatherers with an estimated population of a few hundred individuals who live in a tribal reserve on the island.

It has been alleged that the project violates the rights of the tribal population, and will impact the island's ecology with the felling of nearly a million trees. It is feared that the port project will destroy coral reefs with spinoff effects on the local marine ecosystem, and pose a threat to the terrestrial Nicobar Megapode bird and leatherback turtles who nest in the Galathea Bay area.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express