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1. Why an Indian start-up lobby has filed an antitrust complaint against Google

Why in News?

An Indian start-up lobby group has filed a complaint with the Competition Commission of India (CCI) against Google's alleged anti-competitive practices in the online advertising market, marking the tense relationship and increasing tussle between the country's new-age firms and tech giants.



The Alliance of Digital India Foundation (ADIF), in a statement, said that Google's dominance over major online platforms and its reliance on advertising for the majority of its revenue hinders competition and negatively impacts Indian businesses.

The development comes as India is currently discussing an exhaustive digital competition law, which could see increased preemptive compliance on the part of large tech companies. It also comes amid increasing antitrust scrutiny into Google by the CCI, after having fined it in 2022 for "abusing its market dominant position" in multiple categories related to the Android mobile device ecosystem in the country.

What is the ADIF's antitrust challenge against Google?

1. 97% revenue through ads: "ADIF contends that Google's control over major online platforms, coupled with the fact that it derives 97 per cent of its revenue from advertising, has led to practices that stifle competition and adversely affect Indian businesses," the organisation's statement said.

2. Maximum bidder for advertisement: Google's ad-ranking system includes advertisers to set a bid for the amount of money they want to spend on a particular advertisement. This is the maximum amount an advertiser has to shell out to Google, when a person clicks on their advertisement.

3. Allows trademark usage in ads: Calling the system a "black-box," ADIF said, "Google's practices regarding trademark usage in keyword bidding create an artificial inflation of advertisement prices. Google allows competitors to bid on trademarked keywords, leading to

a bidding war that ultimately benefits Google at the expense of advertisers and trademark owners”.

4. Preference to own services: The organisation has also accused Google of self-preferencing its own services over other similar offerings, which restricts market access for competitors and negatively impacts start-ups that rely on these services.

5. Removal of third-party cookies: ADIF is particularly concerned over Google’s Privacy Sandbox initiative, which aims to remove third-party cookies from websites accessed via the Google Chrome browser. This move could significantly hamper non-Google Demand Side Platforms’ ability to serve advertisers effectively,” it said.

Earlier this year, Google started phasing out third-party cookies on the Chrome browser, which had till then been a significant tool in the digital advertising industry for at least two decades. Cookies are used by websites and internet applications to remember information about a user.

What is India’s draft digital competition law?

Taking a leaf out of the European regulatory handbook, India has proposed a new digital competition law that could stop tech giants like Google, Facebook, and Amazon from self-preferencing their own services, or using data gathered from one company to benefit another group company.

The draft law, called the Digital Competition Bill, 2024, also has provisions to set presumptive norms to curb anti-competitive practices before they actually take place. It further promises to impose heavy penalties — which could amount to billions of dollars — for violations. If this were to go in force, it could require big tech companies to make fundamental changes to their various platforms.

Understanding the role that data collected by one company of a major technology group can play in benefitting other group companies, the Bill proposes to designate Associate Digital Enterprises (ADEs).

If an entity of a group is determined to be an associate entity, they would have the same obligations as Systemically Significant Digital Enterprises (SSDEs). Essentially, SSDEs have a significant presence in any given core digital service and are identified on the basis of parameters like their turnover, market influence, etc.

The obligations on ADEs will depend on the level of their involvement with the core digital service offered by the main company. Illustratively, if one were to look at Google Search and how it steers direction data to Google Maps, the latter can theoretically be deemed an ADE. Same would apply to YouTube too, depending on the level of data sharing that happens between the core Google Search and how that plays out in the recommendations that YouTube makes to users.

Relevance: GS Prelims & mains Paper III; Economics

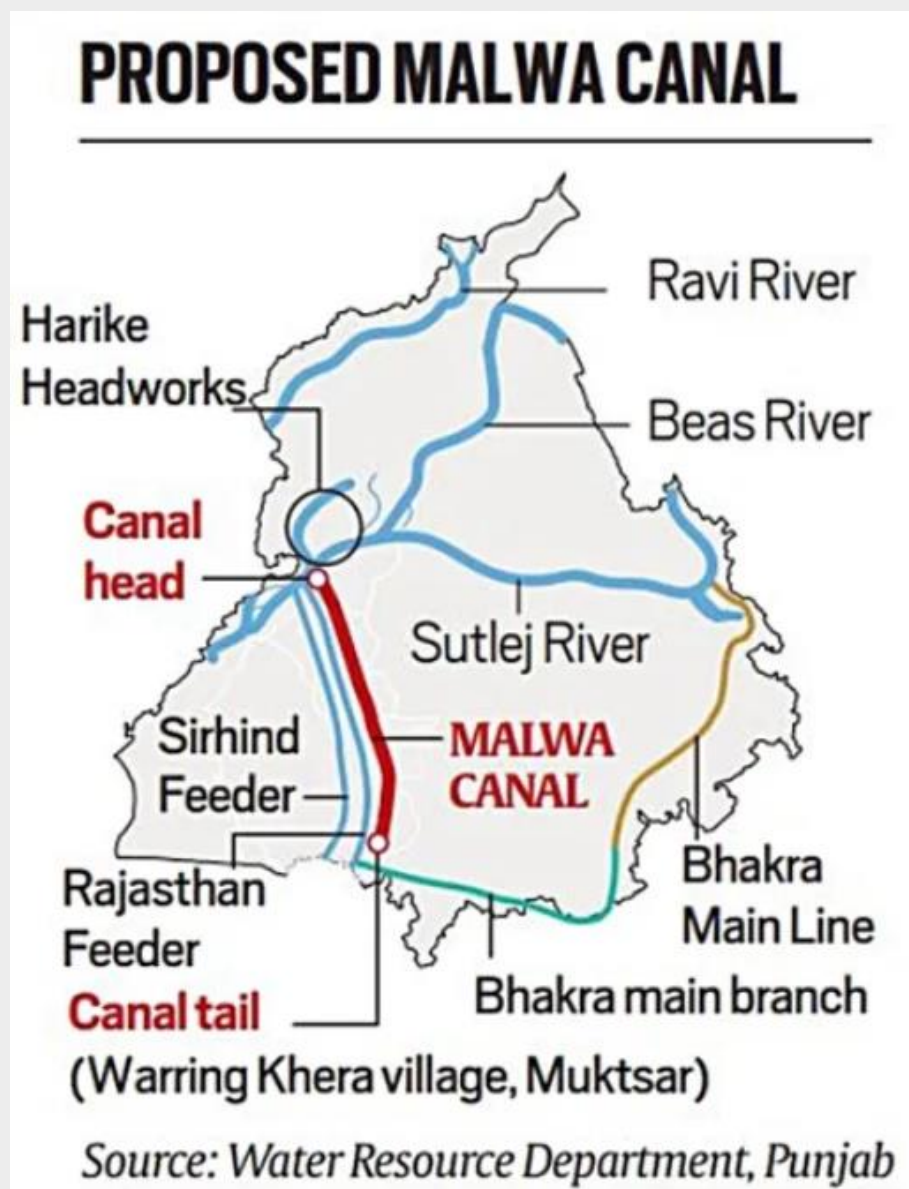
Source: Indian Express

2. In water-starved Punjab, plans for a new irrigation canal

Why in News?

Almost seven decades after the construction of the Bhakra Main Line (BML), Sirhind Feeder, and the Bist Doab canals in the mid-1950s, Punjab wants to spend Rs 2,300 crore on a new irrigation channel, running roughly 150 km in a north-south direction in the state's south-western corner.

The Punjab government faces a serious funds crunch, and some experts have raised questions over the technical viability of the proposed project. What is this canal that Punjab wants to build, and why?



Proposed Malwa canal

The proposed 149.53-km canal is named after Malwa, the biggest and politically most important of the three geographical and cultural regions of Punjab, which sprawls across the entire southern part of the state. The proposed 50-foot wide and 12-foot deep canal will

originate at the Harike Headworks on the Sutlej river in Ferozepur district, and will carry 2,000 cusecs of water. (A cusec is flow equivalent to 1 cubic foot per second.)

The proposed canal, which will tail off at Warring Khera village in Muktsar district close to the border with Haryana, will flow parallel to the Sirhind Feeder and Rajasthan Feeder canals, to the latter's east. The canal, which is expected to take five years to build, is projected to irrigate 2 lakh acres of land in seven districts.

Challenges before govt

Funds for the Rs-2,300 crore project is the primary hurdle before the state already reeling under a debt burden of Rs 3.5 lakh crore. Given the hostility between the BJP-led central government and the AAP government in Punjab, the Centre is not expected to be helpful. The state is looking at securing funding from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

The regular process of carrying out a socio-economic survey to figure out the need for land acquisition, and to assess the extent of human displacement and rehabilitation and compensation, will have to be gone through. Environmental clearance, permission to fell trees, and clearance from the Central Water Commission will be needed. The Detailed Project Report (DPR) is in the process of being submitted, a government official said.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: The Indian Express

3. Vinesh Olympics disqualification: What is weight cutting, and why is it controversial?

Why in News?

Wrestler Vinesh Phogat was disqualified after the official weigh-in the morning, ahead of her scheduled gold medal bout in the evening.



While she had cleared the weigh-in on previous day, Vinesh was found to be "a few grams over 50 kg". It was reportedly 2 kilos overweight on previous night — weight she tried her best to shed overnight but couldn't.

Vinesh's tragic situation highlights a larger issue afflicting combat sports — the practice of weight cutting. In recent years, many have even called for a ban on athletes drastically cutting (and then gaining) weight ahead of their fights. Here is why.

First, why does one's weight matter in wrestling (and other combat sports)?

Combat sports — wrestling, boxing, judo, mixed martial arts (MMA), etc. — are organised according to weight classes. This is to facilitate fair and competitive matches. Fighters of similar

weight (and thus, size) are more likely to have similar physical attributes, making for a more even playing field. Without weight classes, larger and bulkier athletes would have a natural advantage over smaller ones, even if they are not as technically gifted.

What are weigh-ins?

Athletes in a particular weight class (say 50 kg) have to weigh equal to, or less than, the stipulated weight. However, one's weight is never static. It constantly fluctuates within a certain range depending on a number of factors, from how much you eat and drink, to how much you sweat, and other bodily functions. Moreover, it is impractical to constantly monitor an athlete's weight throughout a competition.

Thus, combat sports use a system of weigh-ins. There are designated times before (and in some competitions, after) when an athlete has to be weighed, and meet the requirements of their weight class.

According to United World Wrestling's (UWW) Olympics weigh-in rules, wrestlers are weighed on the morning of their competition, while wearing their singlet. Since the Olympics competition goes on for two days, there are two weigh-ins — there is a 30 minute period on Day 1, and a 15 minute period on Day 2.

Other sports or competitions may have different rules regarding weigh-ins. In fact, weigh-ins are a key part of the spectacle ahead of a fight in professional combat sports such as pro boxing or MMA.

What is weight cutting? Why do combat athletes cut weight?

In simple words, weight cutting involves athletes drastically reducing their weight in a short period of time. This is done by athletes to make the stipulated weight in time for weigh-ins.

Many, if not most, combat sports athletes believe that cutting weight before a bout can provide them with an edge over their opponent in the ring, mainly by quickly rebounding in weight and thus weighing more than what their weight class stipulates. This is because weight cuts primarily involve ridding the body of any accumulated water — this is the "easiest" weight to shed. Athletes do not drink water, carry out intense exercise, use saunas, wear heavy clothing, etc. to lose this water weight through sweat. They also do not eat anything ahead of weigh-ins.

But this weight can then be quickly gained after the weigh-in through the intake of lots of fluids and carb heavy meals. This, athletes feel, can give them a weight advantage in the actual bout which generally takes place hours (sometimes even a day) after a weigh-in. Notably, the scientific evidence supporting this theory thus far has been inconclusive.

What are some potential harms of weight cutting?

There are limits to how much weight can be cut in a certain period of time without endangering the athlete's physical (and mental) well being. In the highest levels of sport, where a lot (including handsome monetary rewards) rides on an athlete's performance, there is an incentive to push the limits of what is safe — sometimes with dangerous, even deadly, consequences.

In 2018, UFC fighter Uriah Hall suffered “mini-seizure” and a “slight heart attack” during weight cutting, according to an official press release by UFC. And this was a lucky escape. In 2015, Chinese MMA fighter Yang Jian Bing, who competed in the ONE Championship, died due to dehydration while cutting weight.

To put it simply, weight cutting can be extremely risky, but as combat sports currently stands, athletes feel they have to do it to gain a competitive edge by allowing them to then rapidly gain weight between the weigh-in and their fight/match.

So, should weight cutting be banned?

This is why some experts have called for a ban on weight cutting. However, not everyone agrees, especially athletes. Many believe that it is possible to cut weight safely by following a strict, longer-term regime to do so.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express