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1. Why is Switzerland a popular destination for 'death tourism'? What is the case of the US woman's 'assisted dying', and how is that different from euthanasia?**Introduction**

Switzerland police arrested at least four persons recently for their involvement in the death of a 64-year-old American woman by a 'suicide pod' on September 23. The woman, whose identity has not been disclosed, reportedly suffered from an autoimmune condition for years.



This incident has turned the spotlight on the contentious Sarco pod, engineered by Dr Philip Nitschke, an Australian physician who founded the pro-euthanasia group Exit International.

More crucially, it also raises questions about the ethics of assisted dying and euthanasia.

What are euthanasia and assisted dying?

Both euthanasia and assisted dying are ways in which a person may intentionally choose to end their life.

Euthanasia relies on the presence of a physician to address a lethal drug to the person. Euthanasia may be of two kinds — voluntary, where the patient gives their explicit consent, and involuntary, when they are unable to do so, possibly because they are in a coma.

Assisted dying, on the other hand, is understood to rely on self-administration of the lethal substance, with medical involvement restricted simply to the procurement of the drug.

Assisted suicide according means to intentionally help another person end their life, and does not stipulate that the person is terminally ill.

What is the Sarco pod?

Named after sarcophagus, the stone coffin used to bury ancient royalty, the Sarco is a coffin-sized, air-tight machine designed by Exit International.

First made in 2019, the Sarco pod consists of a 3D-printed detachable capsule placed on a stand with a canister of liquid nitrogen. A person lying inside it could press a button to initiate the dying process, flooding the air inside it with nitrogen gas.

The device was designed and built in the Netherlands by Nitschke and Dutch engineer Alex Bannink over 12 years and cost around €650,000 (\$725,000) to research and develop. Future pods are estimated to cost around €15,000 and to be reusable.

Writing in HuffPost in 2018, Nitschke emphasised that the pod is not available to just anyone, and interested candidates must clear an online mental fitness test first. "If they pass, they receive an access code to a Sarco device that works for 24 hours. After the code is entered and an additional confirmation given, liquid nitrogen in the generator is released, rapidly bringing down the oxygen level in the capsule. Within a minute, the user loses consciousness; death comes a short time later," he wrote.

The device is portable and can be transferred where one chooses.

Has the Sarco Pod violated Swiss laws on assisted dying?

Active euthanasia is banned in Switzerland. However, assisted dying and assisted suicide are legal as long as the person ends their life without any "external assistance" and those who help them do not have "any self-serving motive".

The country's laws on assisted dying and assisted suicide have made it a preferred destination for "death tourism," wherein people come there to end their lives.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

2. What changes the Armed Forces are considering to shed colonial influences, and why

Overview



To do away with colonial vestiges in the Indian military and its traditions, the Armed Forces are considering several changes.

These include officers studying Indian strategists in their career courses instead of Western experts, reducing the number of Scottish-origin pipe bands in the Army, and giving a more pan-India character to

certain arms of the Army.

Drafting a tri-service Act instead of three individual service Acts is also being considered.

What changes are being considered?

As part of efforts to inculcate an indigenous strategic thought in young military minds, texts written by ancient Indian strategists are being increasingly included in career courses instead of literature written by western military thinkers and writers.

For instance, the Secunderabad-based College of Defence Management (CDM) is drafting a syllabus in consultation with the Indic Studies department of Gujarat university, which will be made a mandatory part of mid-career courses to be attended by officers of the three services. It could include land campaign studies of Indian forces like the INA, Marathas and Sikhs; maritime strategies of rulers like Raja Raja Chola I and his son Rajendra Chola, King Marthand Varma, Kunjali Marakkar IV, among others; and the governance model of ancient Indian emperor Chandragupta Maurya.

The Armed Forces are in the process of identifying obsolete laws and rules that can be weeded out.

Also, at present, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force have a different service Act governing each. Work is on to bring in a consolidated tri-services Act, which will reduce redundancies and promote smoother operations.

The Army is discussing whether Scottish-origin pipe bands can be reduced to one at each regional command headquarters—from one in almost every unit—and be kept for purely ceremonial purposes.

There may also be a study to assess if the Army's infantry regiments can be given a more pan-India character, like the artillery and armoured divisions, instead of the current system of a Jat regiment, Bihar regiment, etc.

What changes have already been made by the Armed Forces?

Several colonial-era military customs and practices have been done away with in the last few years, by changing several Army unit crests, the naval ensign, and giving out Indian names to military platforms and weapon systems.

Most joint exercises with other nations as well as operations and seminar halls in military complexes are being given Indian names.

More Indian tunes and instruments have been used in the Republic Day and the Beating Retreat ceremonies in the last few years. The Christian hymn Abide With Me was replaced by the patriotic Hindi song Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon after the Beating Retreat ceremony of 2022. Earlier this year, the Indian Navy permitted wearing the traditional kurta-pyjama attire into its naval messes.

Professional military education institutes are conducting regular seminars by Indology authorities to propagate indigenous ethics, law and warcraft concepts.

Why the changes?

The idea is to "Indianise" the Indian military further, doing away with colonial influences.

This process has been on since India gained freedom from British rule in 1947, but there was an upswing in the efforts after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while speaking at the Combined Commanders Conference in Gujarat's Kevadia in 2021, talked about increasing indigenisation in the national security system, including in the doctrines, procedures and customs of the Armed Forces.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

3. Export ban on Non-Basmati White Rice lifted: why, what is the likely impact

Introduction

The Centre recently lifted the ban on export of Non-Basmati White Rice. It has, however, imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of \$490 per tonne.

A day before, the government had removed the 20% export duty on Non-Basmati White rice, and halved export duty on three other categories of rice. The duty on 'rice in the husk (paddy or rough)', 'husked (brown) rice', and 'parboiled rice' was reduced from 20 per cent to 10 per cent.

Why the decision now?

The export ban had come amid a marginal dip in rice production and the looming threat of an erratic monsoon last year.

This year, sowing of paddy during the ongoing kharif season has been higher, the crop is normal, and a bumper output is expected. Wholesale prices are down, while the Central pool is well-stocked. Factors behind this are:

Higher sowing: Though paddy is grown in all three seasons in India, most of it is planted in kharif. With a good monsoon, farmers have planted more paddy than last year. As per the agriculture ministry, the area under paddy was reported at 413.50 lakh hectare as on September 20 this year, 2.2 per cent higher than last year (404.50 lakh hectares) and 3 per cent higher than the normal area (401.55 lakh hectares during five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23). The increase has been reported from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Haryana, Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh.

Record production: The agriculture ministry said on September 25 that India's total rice production (kharif, rabi and summer) is estimated to reach 137.82 million tonnes during 2023-24, 1.5 per cent higher than last year. This is due to a higher output during the kharif season, which increased to 113.26 million tonnes from 110.51 million tonnes during 2022-23.

Declining wholesale prices, stable retail inflation: Data on the Centre's UPAg portal show that the wholesale price of rice was recorded at Rs 3,324.99 per quintal on September 27, lower than Rs 3,597.09 per quintal a week ago, and Rs 3,502.91 per quintal a month ago.

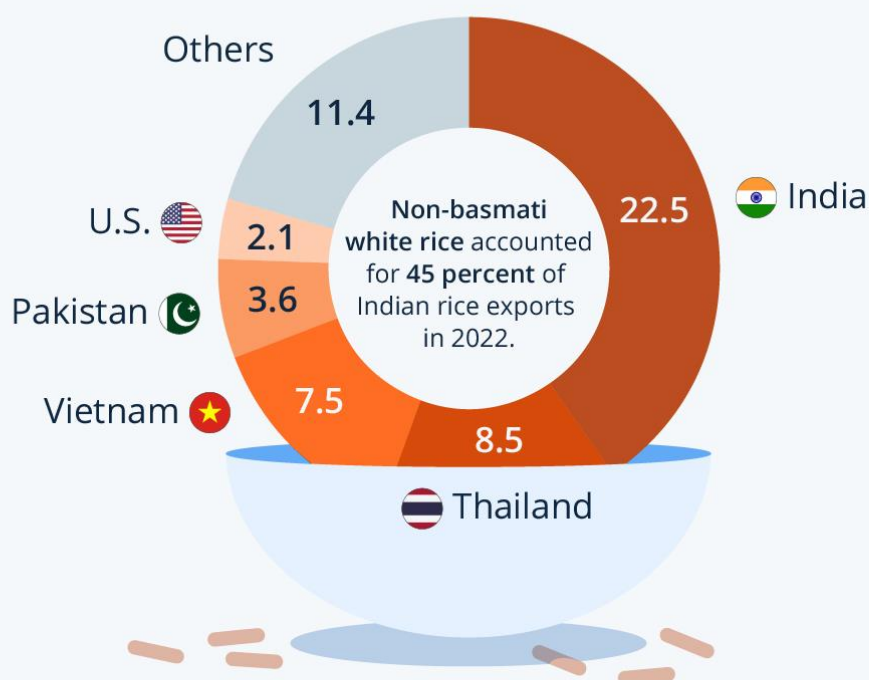
However, the Consumer Price Index-based retail inflation of rice has been hovering in double digits for the past two years. It started rising from June 2022 and reached its peak in July 2023

(13.09 per cent), when the government banned exports. It remained in double digits for 18 months, before coming down to 9.52 per cent in August.

Surplus stocks: Food Corporation of India data show that rice stock in the Central pool was 323.11 lakh tonnes on September 1. Along with unmilled paddy, the rice stock would be 423 lakh tonnes, much higher than the buffer stock norms. The Centre is required to maintain a stock of 135.40 LMT of rice as on the first day of July and 102.50 lakh tonnes on the first day of October.

The World's Biggest Exporters of Rice

Biggest exporters of rice worldwide in 2022 (in million tons)



Sources: USDA, Reuters



statista

Who will be impacted by the move?

Along with easing export restrictions, the Centre has also allowed state governments to buy rice for their welfare schemes, and distilleries for ethanol making.

Before its export was banned, Non-Basmati White rice constituted about 25 per cent of the total rice exported from the country. The lifting of the ban will help traders, who, if they were

at all exporting, were paying a 20% duty. It will boost export sentiment and may benefit farmers who grow non-Basmati premium varieties like Sona Masoori (mainly grown in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), which was hit by the ban.

For domestic consumers, retail prices, which are already elevated, may further go up.

Was any export taking place during the ban?

The Centre had allowed exports “on the basis of permission granted” to meet the food security needs of other countries, based on the request of their governments.

Thus, the rice was being exported, through the newly formed National Cooperative Export Limited (NCEL), to United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bhutan, Mauritius, Singapore, Nepal, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Republic of Guinea, Malaysia, Philippines, and Seychelles, among others.

What is India’s status as a rice exporter?

India is the second largest producer and the biggest exporter of rice. India, along with China, accounts for over half of the world’s rice production. China, however, is also the biggest consumer of rice, leaving little for exports.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), India accounted for 33 per cent (17 million tonnes) of the world’s total rice exports (53 million tonnes) during the calendar year 2023. In 2022, before the ban on Non-Basmati White Rice shipments, India accounted for about 40 per cent of the total rice exports (56 million tonnes) in the world.

Who are India’s competitors?

Two east Asian countries—Thailand and Vietnam—are the two main competitors of India in the global rice market. In 2023, the combined rice export of these two countries was almost equal to Indian exports. Besides, Pakistan, Cambodia and the United States are also in the list of rice exporters.

Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, China, European Union, Nigeria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia are the top rice importers.

What does India’s export breakup look like?

India’s rice exports are broadly categorised into basmati and non-basmati rice. The non-basmati rice category includes six subcategories— rice in husk of seed quality; other rice in husk; husked (brown) rice; rice parboiled; non-basmati white rice; and broken rice.

Basmati accounts for almost one third of India’s total rice export. In the financial year 2023-24, Basmati export was recorded at 52.42 lakh tonnes.

In the non-Basmati category, rice in husk of seed quality saw exports of only 19,788 tonnes in 2023-24. This was shipped mainly to the Philippines, Bangladesh and Nepal. Other rice in husk goes mainly to Nepal and Bhutan. India exported 3.19 lakh tonnes of this rice during 2023-24. Husked (brown) rice saw a jump in exports last year. The main buyers were Vietnam, Malaysia and the Netherlands. India exported a quantity of 3.01 lakh tonnes of husked (brown) rice

during 2023-24. Parboiled rice exports stood at 75.70 lakh tonnes during 2023-24. Main importers were Benin, Guinea, Togo, Somalia, Cote D' Ivoire, Djibouti and Liberia.

Non-basmati white rice went to Kenya, Mozambique, Cameroon, Vietnam, Malaysia, Togo, Madagascar, Cote D' Ivoire, and Benin in the biggest quantities. India exported 23.59 lakh tonnes of this rice during 2023-24.

Broken rice, meanwhile, was imported mainly by Senegal, Gambia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cote D' Ivoire, Djibouti, Netherlands and Mali. India exported 5.45 lakh tonnes of broken rice last year.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

4. AVGC: The Future of Media & Entertainment Industry

Introduction

The AVGC (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics) sector is set to be the future of the media and entertainment industry. Movies like Baahubali and RRR have introduced a new vision for portraying historic and fantasy themes in India, inspiring films like PS1 and kalki. According to the FICCI-EY 2024 report, India now boasts the second-largest anime fan base globally and is projected to contribute 60% to the worldwide growth in anime interest in the coming years. In a significant step toward making India a global hub for AVGC, the Union Cabinet recently approved the establishment of a National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) for Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics, and Extended Reality (AVGC-XR) in Mumbai.




NCoE Background


NCoE will be set up as a Section 8 Company under the Companies Act, 2013 in India with Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry and Confederation of Indian Industry

representing the industry bodies as partners with the Government of India. The establishment of the NCoE follows the Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs 2022-23 budget announcement, which proposed the creation of an AVGC task force in the country. NCoE AVGC aims at creating a world class talent pool in India to cater to the Indian as well as global entertainment industry. Provisionally named the Indian Institute for Immersive Creators (IIIC), this center aims to revolutionize the AVGC sector and foster innovation in immersive technologies. It will be modeled after renowned institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

SALIENT FEATURES OF NCOE



- 1 NCoE will also extensively focus on creation of India's IP for both domestic consumption and global outreach.**
- 2 Will function as an incubation centre by providing resources for nurturing start ups and early stage companies in AVGC-XR field.**
- 3 Will also position India as a content hub for providing state-of-the-art content.**
- 4 Enhance India's soft power globally and attracting foreign investment into M&E sector.**
- 5 To be set up in Mumbai, Maharashtra and FICCI and CII to represent industry bodies as partners with the Government of India**
- 6 To act as pinnacle institution to anchor the AVGC-XR ecosystem in the country.**
- 7 Will foster R&D and will bring together experts from various science & art fields that can lead to major breakthroughs in AVGC - XR**



Objective of NCoE (IIIC)

India's animation sector is witnessing remarkable growth, driven by increasing demand for films, visual effects (VFX), gaming animation and engaging mobile content. This surge presents exciting opportunities for skilled and enthusiastic animators. Boasting a growth rate of 25%

and an estimated value of ₹46 billion by 2023 (FICCI-EY Report 2023), the animation industry in India is thriving and offers a promising future for passionate young talent.

With rapidly evolving technology and increasing internet penetration all across the country, coupled with one of the cheapest data rates, the usage of AVGC-XR globally is poised to grow at an exponential pace. This creates abundant opportunities, particularly through the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE). Below are some of the key objectives of the NCoE (IIIC):

- Focusing of creating Indian IP
- Leveraging our cultural heritage in new age
- Create a multiplier effect in the industry
- An industry led initiative, in partnership with state and academia
- Integrated focus on education, skilling industry, development, innovation
- Hub and spoke model of development to be followed
- IIIC as the hub and several center's as its spokes dedicated innovation and research fund to promote start-up ecosystem



6 key things to know about NCoE

1. Films like RRR, Baahubali, The Lion King and Avatar have demonstrated the immense potential of animation and immersive technology! India's Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC) sector is poised for explosive growth, with vast opportunities for employment and innovation.

2. Immersive technologies create lifelike, interactive experiences. This includes Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), Mixed Reality (MR) and 3D modeling & animation. Whether you're a 3D animator, VR/AR creator, game developer or comic artist - this is your playground.

3. The NCoE is your gateway to mastering immersive tech. The National Centre of Excellence will offer cutting-edge training and integrate India's rich cultural heritage with modern technology, fostering the creation of indigenous intellectual property (IP) and building the future of India's digital creative economy.

4. With an estimate to generate 5,00,000 jobs, the NCoE is modeled after premier institutions like IITs and IIMs. The center will provide world-class infrastructure, state-of-the-art technology and specialized skills to build a strong talent pool.

5. Hands-on learning and career pathways. Students will gain practical experience through industry-driven courses, ensuring they are job-ready upon graduation. You'll also have access to internships, mentorships for aspiring startups, and a curriculum focused on content creation - for India, for the world!

6. Collaboration and innovation. By fostering partnerships between the central and state governments, academia, and industry, the NCoE will create a dynamic ecosystem for research, development, and innovation in immersive technologies. This is where India's next-gen creators will thrive.

Conclusion

The Union Cabinet's approval of the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) for AVGC marks a pivotal step in strengthening India's media and entertainment industry. This initiative is set to boost the economy while creating new job opportunities in the rapidly growing AVGC sector. As a global hub for filmmaking, India's advancements in technology and infrastructure will enable the production of high-quality content, positioning the country as a leader in technological innovation and creativity.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: PIB