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1. Why is Trump Establishing a Department of Government Efficiency?

Introduction



President-elect Donald Trump recently announced the creation of a new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). On November 12, he appointed tech billionaire Elon Musk and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy to spearhead this initiative, aimed at reducing bureaucratic red tape, slashing excessive regulations, cutting wasteful spending, and restructuring federal

agencies.

The Mission Ahead for Musk and Ramaswamy

Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy will serve as external advisors, collaborating with the White House and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to drive substantial structural reforms. The focus will be on fostering an entrepreneurial approach within the federal government. Both share Trump's vision of reducing government bureaucracy. In an October rally, Musk suggested that federal spending could be cut by as much as \$2 trillion from the current \$6.5 trillion budget. Ramaswamy, during his bid for the Republican nomination, advocated for dismantling certain federal agencies and restructuring intelligence units.

Is Reform Truly Necessary?

The federal government's fiscal situation has raised alarms. According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) Performance and Accountability Report for 2024, the long-term financial outlook appears unsustainable. In early 2024, GAO reported that public debt had reached 97% of the GDP by the end of the fiscal year 2023, with projections indicating it could exceed 106% by 2028. Without drastic policy interventions, public debt could potentially double the growth rate of the economy over the next three decades, reaching nearly 200% of GDP by 2050. The GAO has repeatedly urged Congress to develop a comprehensive fiscal plan to achieve sustainability, ensuring that debt growth remains in line with or below the GDP rate.

Trump's Approach to Regulatory Budgeting: What's Next?

During his campaign, Trump vowed to eliminate 10 regulations for every new one introduced—far more ambitious than his previous policy of cutting two rules for each new regulation during his first term. To achieve this, Trump will likely pursue multiple strategies,

such as reinstating rescinded executive orders, utilizing the Congressional Review Act to reverse late-stage regulations from the current administration, reforming oversight at the OMB, and possibly shifting some regulatory powers to Congress. Additionally, he aims to scale back entire agencies to streamline federal functions and reduce the government's regulatory footprint.

Historical Precedents: Past Efficiency Initiatives

Efforts to reduce federal inefficiencies are not new. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan established the Grace Commission, a group of business leaders tasked with identifying and eliminating waste in government spending. After two years, they released a report with over 2,500 recommendations. However, most of these proposals required Congressional approval and were ultimately not implemented.

In 2010, President Barack Obama formed the Simpson-Bowles Commission to address the federal deficit. The commission's report recommended deep cuts in domestic and military spending, an increased federal gasoline tax, and adjustments to Social Security, among other measures. However, these recommendations failed to gain enough support in Congress due to political disagreements, underscoring the need for both strong political will and bipartisan collaboration to enact such sweeping reforms.

The Potential Impact of the DOGE Initiative

While the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is ambitious, its direct influence may be limited to providing recommendations on reducing federal regulatory authority. The implementation of these recommendations will depend on the approval of Congress and cooperation from agencies like the OMB.

The commission's work is set to conclude by July 4, 2026, and while it won't directly lead to the immediate shutdown of federal agencies or widespread layoffs, it could serve as a precursor to broader structural changes, especially if aligned with Trump's Schedule F initiative. This initiative seeks to reclassify certain federal employees, making it easier for the President to dismiss them, which could significantly reshape the civil service landscape. Proponents argue that this would reduce bureaucratic resistance, while critics warn that it could erode the nonpartisan nature of the civil service.

For DOGE to avoid the fate of previous commissions that failed to produce lasting change, it might benefit from adopting strategies similar to New Jersey's Red Tape Review Commission. This state-level commission successfully identified regulatory burdens that negatively impacted citizens and small businesses, leading to meaningful reforms before it was eventually disbanded due to political pressures. Its success demonstrates that regulatory commissions can achieve tangible results when there is broad support and collaboration.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

2. New Zealand Lawmakers Perform Haka in Protest Against Controversial Bill: What You Need to Know

Introduction

MAORI PROTEST IN PARLIAMENT

HAKA DISRUPTS VOTE ON CONTROVERSIAL BILL



Recently, New Zealand's Parliament witnessed a powerful protest when legislators from the Indigenous Māori community staged a haka—a traditional ceremonial dance—in response to a divisive bill. This demonstration led to a temporary suspension of the parliamentary session.

The protest was led by Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke, a young 22-year-old MP from Te Pāti Māori (the Māori Party). The protest was triggered when she was questioned about her party's stance on the proposed Treaty Principles Bill, which aims to reinterpret an agreement signed nearly two centuries ago between the British and the Māori. In a bold gesture, Maipi-Clarke tore up a copy of the bill in front of its author, further intensifying the protest, which was supported by members of the Green and Labour parties as well as spectators in the public gallery.

The Cultural Significance of the Haka

The haka holds a deep cultural and historical significance for the Māori people. Traditionally, it was performed by warriors on the battlefield or during significant occasions to demonstrate strength, unity, and cultural pride. According to New Zealand Tourism, the haka embodies a sense of physical prowess while showcasing the spirit and resilience of the Māori culture. It involves synchronized chanting, powerful hand gestures, dramatic facial expressions, and rhythmic foot stomping.

One of the most well-known haka performances in recent years occurred in 2019 when students from diverse schools—including non-Māori institutions—performed it to honor victims of the Christchurch shootings.

Varieties of Haka in Māori Culture:

- **Ka Mate:** Composed in the 19th century by tribal leader Te Rauparaha, this haka is a celebration of life and survival with the famous refrain: "Ka mate, ka mate! Ka ora, ka ora!" ("I die, I die! I live, I live!").
- **Peruperu:** A war haka performed before battles to intimidate opponents.
- **Ngeri:** A shorter haka without set choreography, used to uplift spirits and fortify courage.
- **Pōwhiri:** Performed during formal welcoming ceremonies.
- **Manawa Wera:** A haka expressing grief, often performed at funerals or memorial services.

The All Blacks, New Zealand's national rugby team, have famously performed the haka before matches for nearly 120 years, gaining a psychological edge over their opponents and showcasing cultural unity.

Why Was the Haka Performed in Parliament?

Despite the protest, Parliament moved forward and passed the first reading of the Treaty Principles Bill, introduced by the libertarian Act Party, a junior partner in New Zealand's current center-right coalition government. The bill seeks to amend the Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed in 1840 between representatives of the British Crown and over 500 Māori chiefs. This foundational document guaranteed Māori rights over their lands and resources in exchange for ceding governance to the British.

Over the years, successive governments, courts, and tribunals have developed principles based on the treaty to improve relations between the Māori and the government. These principles—commonly recognized as participation, partnership, protection, and redress—have been used to interpret the treaty's original English and Māori texts, which had discrepancies.

What is the Treaty Principles Bill?

The bill, introduced by Act Party leader David Seymour, aims to define the treaty's principles in a more precise legal framework, arguing that the current lack of specificity has led to overly broad interpretations. For instance, the 1975 Treaty of Waitangi Act established a tribunal to document the injustices faced by Indigenous communities during colonization. However, Seymour contends that the current interpretations have contributed to division based on ethnicity and believes that redefining the treaty through Parliament rather than the courts will create fairer applications.

The bill does not seek to rewrite the original treaty but instead proposes a referendum to ensure that its principles are applied equally to all New Zealanders. However, critics argue that this would undermine the treaty's original intent, jeopardize Māori rights, and promote anti-Māori sentiment. Even some members of the ruling coalition, including Prime Minister Christopher Luxon of the New Zealand National Party, have expressed reservations about the bill, describing it as "simplistic."

Growing Opposition and Potential Challenges Ahead

The bill's path forward is likely to be contentious, with significant opposition not only from Māori rights groups but also within the government itself. Activists are organizing a 1,000-kilometer protest march (hīkoi) to the capital, Wellington, in opposition to the bill. The upcoming parliamentary readings will determine whether the bill can gain sufficient support or if it will face a backlash that could derail its progress.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

3. Why BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers have been banned in Delhi-NCR

Introduction

With rising pollution levels and persistent smog in Delhi, the government has introduced strict measures to address air quality concerns. Under the implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) Stage III, a ban has been enforced on BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers within the National Capital Region (NCR).

Recently, the Delhi Traffic Police issued fines of ₹20,000 each to 514 light motor vehicles falling under these categories. Let's explore the rationale behind this ban and the significance of emission standards in India.



Understanding Bharat Stage Emission Standards

The Bharat Stage (BS) emission standards are regulatory measures introduced by the Indian government to control air pollution from vehicles with internal combustion engines. These norms dictate the permissible levels of air pollutants emitted by vehicles and other engine-powered equipment.

India began implementing emission standards in 1991, with significant updates in 1996 when vehicle manufacturers were required to introduce technologies like catalytic converters to reduce emissions. Environmental considerations led to the introduction of fuel specifications, first notified in April 1996, and were gradually implemented by the year 2000.

India initially followed the European (Euro) emission standards, albeit with a lag of five years. Following a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court in April 1999, the government introduced Bharat Stage-I (BIS 2000) and Bharat Stage-II norms, which were equivalent to Euro I and Euro II, respectively. BS-II was implemented in NCR and other major cities, while BS-I covered the rest of the country.

Evolution from BS-IV to BS-VI Standards

Over the years, India progressed from BS-II to BS-IV standards. In 2016, the government made a bold decision to skip BS-V and leap directly to BS-VI norms by 2020 to address the growing air pollution problem. Originally, BS-V standards were scheduled for 2019, but due to deteriorating air quality, the government accelerated the shift to BS-VI. As a result, all new vehicles were required to comply with BS-VI standards starting in 2020.

Key Differences Between BS-IV and BS-VI Norms

The most significant difference between BS-IV and BS-VI standards lies in the reduction of sulphur content in fuel. BS-VI fuels have around 80% less sulphur, decreasing from 50 parts per million (ppm) in BS-IV to just 10 ppm in BS-VI. This change substantially lowers the emission of pollutants:

- Nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions from diesel vehicles are reduced by nearly 70%.
- NO_x emissions from petrol vehicles are reduced by approximately 25%.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), exposure to high levels of nitrogen oxides can exacerbate respiratory conditions like asthma, cause coughing, and make breathing difficult. Long-term exposure is linked to an increased risk of developing asthma and greater susceptibility to respiratory infections. Additionally, gaseous sulphur oxides can damage vegetation, reducing plant growth and harming foliage.

Challenges Faced During the Transition to BS-VI

When the BS-VI standards were announced in 2016, automotive manufacturers expressed concerns about their existing stock of BS-IV vehicles. They requested an extension to sell off these vehicles by March 31, 2020. However, experts noted that the benefits of higher-grade BS-VI fuel would only be realized if used with BS-VI-compliant engines. Running BS-VI fuel in older BS-IV engines or vice versa could not only fail to reduce emissions effectively but also risk damaging the engine over time.

The ban on older vehicles, like BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel models, is thus a critical step in curbing pollution and improving air quality in Delhi-NCR, aligning with India's broader efforts to achieve cleaner air through stringent emission norms.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment