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1. Rules to get disability certificates tweaked: the changes, why they are being opposed

Introduction

The government last week notified the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Amendment) Rules, 2024 (RPwD Rules), introducing changes to the process of applying for and issuing disability certificates and unique disability identity cards (UDID).

The amendments have been made by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DePWD) to tighten the application and vetting processes. Recently, IAS probationer Puja Khedkar was dismissed from service for allegedly forging her disability and caste certificate.

While government officials have said the changes in norms are to streamline the process, disability rights groups have called for their rollback, claiming they make the application process cumbersome.

Divyang News!

Government of India made Changes in Getting Disability Certificate.

Previously, individuals could apply for disability certificates through various medical authorities or government hospitals. Now, applications must be submitted exclusively through the Unique Disability ID (UDID) portal, which has raised concerns about accessibility for many applicants who may lack digital literacy or internet access



Rules to get disability certificates Which processes have been amended?

The RPwD Amendment Rules have made changes in Rule 17 and Rule 18. Rule 17 relates to the mode of application, the authority to apply to, and the documents to be submitted. Rule 18 relates to the issuance of disability certificates and UDID cards once the applications are received, and the timeframe to issue them.

While the UDID portal already issues colour-coded cards on the basis of the extent of disability, the amended rules now specify that white, yellow and blue cards would be issued. White would for those with disability below

40 per cent, yellow for those with 40–80 per cent disability, and blue for those with disability of 80 per cent and above.

The severity of disability is examined using the government's 'assessment guidelines', which were last updated in March. Twenty-one different kinds of disabilities and their extent or severity are assessed using these guidelines.

What are the changes in these processes?

Under Rule 17 on the process of applications, one of the most important tweaks is that persons with disabilities have to submit their application through the UDID portal, and it has also given a statutory backing to UDID cards. In the earlier Rules, notified in 2017, there was no specific mention of submitting the applications only through the digital medium and also no specific mention of applications for UDID cards.

The application has to be made only to a "medical authority or any other notified competent medical authority" of the district where the applicant resides. The tweak is important, as the earlier version of the Rules did not stress the need to submit the application only to a "competent medical authority".

Further, under Rule 17(2), the applicants have to now submit a proof of identity, and a photo not older than six months along with their Aadhaar number. Earlier, the applicant's Aadhaar number along with proof of residence and two recent photographs was enough to make the application.

Under the rules on issuance, the certificate and UDID card can now be issued within three months as opposed to a month previously. Government officials have claimed that this change has been made following feedback from hospitals which examine persons with disabilities before issuing certificates.

Further, under the new rules, an application can be considered void if no decision is taken by the relevant medical authority for two years.

Why have disability rights organisations sought its rollback?

Various disability rights organisations and activists have criticised the amendments on the grounds that the tweaks put the onus of preventing forgeries on the applicants rather than the government.

For instance, the National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled (NPRD) pointed out that the insistence on submitting the applications only through the UDID portal is based on the assumption that the community is comfortable with digital media.

Regarding the requirement for a "notified competent medical authority", activists said this takes away the assistance provided by independent medical experts associated with trusts and non-profits, who help medical boards during the process of certifying disability.

On the issue of giving a three-month period to authorities for issuing the certificates and UDID cards, activists said this would delay the process. Activists said there are instances when the certification is required on an urgent basis for educational applications or to seek reservation benefits. Providing a longer minimum window, they said, would stretch the process.

The NPRD said seeking additional supporting documents, such as photographs not older than six months, adds more burden on those with sensory and mobility issues and those who are in remote areas.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

2. North Korean troops in Russia: what can Pyongyang move mean, implications for Ukraine war

Introduction

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said recently that North Korean troops have been sent to Russia and that North Korean military units have been deployed in the Kursk region. According to a Reuters report, after a briefing from a South Korean delegation, Rutte told reporters, "The deepening military cooperation between Russia and North Korea is a threat to both Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic security."



The Associated Press reported that the US Department of Defense had confirmed that approximately 10,000 troops were in Russia for training and would likely be fighting against Ukraine soon.

Rutte said the North Korean deployment represented "a significant escalation" of Pyongyang's involvement in "Russia's illegal war" in Ukraine, a breach of UN Security Council

resolutions and a "dangerous expansion" of the war. Rutte said the deployment of North Korean troops was a sign of "growing desperation" on the part of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

North Korean soldiers in Kursk

The Kursk region is a Russian border area where Ukrainian forces staged a major incursion in August this year and presently hold hundreds of square kilometres of territory, marking the first time Ukraine had gained control of Russian territory.

Military experts say that Kursk creates a buffer zone between Ukraine and Russia, making its military control important for both Kyiv and Moscow.

Support extended to Russia by North Korea, in the form of soldiers or in any other form, should not come as a surprise. North Korea's strong ties with Russia can be traced back to the days of the erstwhile Soviet Union, during the Cold War and the Korean War.

Russia-North Korea ties

In 1945, Soviet troops invaded the Japanese colony of Korea, which was followed by liberation of the Korean Peninsula from Japanese occupation. By agreement with the US, the 38th parallel was used to divide the peninsula, with the Soviet Union in charge of the north and the United States in charge of the south. During the Korean War between 1950-1953, the Soviet Union and China backed North Korea, including militarily.

During the Cold War, the 1961 DPRK-Soviet Union Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance became an important marker of cooperation and friendship between the two countries.

What the West and Ukraine's allies say

Following an absence of an official "end" to the Korean War, technically, North Korea and South Korea have remained hostile and at war since 1953, although the fighting has stopped. Over the Ukraine involvement issue, South Korea's President Yoon has expressed concern about the security of his own country. According to a Reuters report, Yoon told Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that a major security concern for South Korea would be the possibility of North Korea gleaning military experience and knowledge from its involvement in Russia's war.

There is a consensus among experts that it is unclear and perhaps too early to understand what role North Korean troops may play in the war between Russia and Ukraine. In the big picture, 10,000 troops may not be a significantly large number of soldiers on the ground. However, according to a Reuters report, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) think tank said the number of North Korean forces involved "make this more than a symbolic effort".

It may also be a way to show support for Russia and to emphasise to the larger diplomatic community that North Korea and Russia are not just fair-weather friends but have deeper, lasting ties.

What is clear is that the involvement of North Korean troops has riled the United States and its allies, and perhaps at some level, that was the intent.

The Kremlin had earlier dismissed reports about a North Korean troop deployment as "fake news". According to a Reuters report, Putin has not denied the presence of North Korean troops in Russia, but said it was Russia's business how it implements a partnership treaty that Moscow had signed with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un in June. A North Korean representative to the United Nations in New York called the reports "groundless rumours".

South Korea's stance

Reuters quoted the South Korean Presidential office of Yoon Suk Yeol saying the pace of North Korean troop deployment to Russia had been faster than expected, creating a dangerous situation.

On Tuesday, South Korea's spy agency, the National Intelligence Service, briefed the country's lawmakers saying that the armed forces in Russia were trying to teach military terminology to North Korean soldiers. On Wednesday, South Korea's presidential office said it is considering sending a team of military monitors to Ukraine to observe and analyse the expected deployment of North Korean troops.

However, from North Korea's perspective, there are several angles to why it may have stepped in to support Russia. There has been some discussion about how adequately trained North Korean soldiers may be to take on fighting in any capacity in a war like the one that has been ongoing for some three years between Ukraine and Russia.

While significant casualties in war may be received negatively or reflect poorly on the country, some North Korea analysts believe that the wages soldiers in Russia get could be one way of injecting much-needed foreign currency for Pyongyang. North Korea may also get more security support from Russia in exchange.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

3. Supreme Court ruling on child marriage: why it's important to go beyond just punishment

Introduction



The judgment in *Society for Enlightenment and Voluntary Action v. Union of India*, delivered by the Supreme Court earlier this month, has moved the focus in cases of child marriage from penalising criminal actions to addressing the "harm meted out to the victim".

The judgment underlines that comprehensive efforts to address child marriage should go beyond prevention and prosecution, and must include substantial measures to help those already in child

marriages reclaim their agency.

According to National Family Health Survey data, the percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married before 18 declined from 47.4% in 2005 to 26.8% in 2016, and further to 23.3% in 2021. Nonetheless, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of eliminating child marriage entirely by 2030 appears ambitious.

The institutional response has focused mostly on prevention and, of late, prosecution — such as the mass arrests of men in Assam whose wives were minors when they married.

What is the law on child marriage?

Under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA), a “child marriage” is one in which either the husband is under 21 years of age, or the wife is under 18. Such a marriage is “voidable”, that is, the party that was a child at the time of the marriage has the option to annul it — until such annulment occurs, the marriage is valid and subsists.

In Karnataka and Haryana, as state-specific amendments have made all child marriages void from the beginning.

Is annulment the same as divorce?

Annulment is different from divorce — when a marriage is annulled, it is as though it had never occurred, and the individuals involved are considered unmarried.

In contrast, divorce acknowledges that a marriage existed for a period before being dissolved, leaving the parties with the legal status of divorcees.

Divorce requires proving specific grounds — such as cruelty or adultery — depending on the personal law applicable. For annulment under the PCMA, the individual needs to only establish that a child marriage took place, and that they were within the legal age limit to apply for nullification.

PCMA also provides for other civil remedies such as maintenance, residence orders, and return of gifts exchanged at the wedding.

Why are there concerns about using criminal action to tackle child marriage?

Although the child marriage itself subsists unless it is annulled, various activities related to child marriage are criminalised.

Under the PCMA, performing or promotion of child marriage, and a male adult marrying a minor are criminal offences. Sexual activity with a minor, including within a child marriage, is an offence under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO), and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS).

Applied together, the criminal provisions of PCMA, BNS, and POCSO create the possibility of criminal action against the girl’s entire family — her parents, husband, and in-laws — which could leave her in a vulnerable position without preparation or support to survive independently. It may also create barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare, as seeking such services could inadvertently trigger criminal action against her family.

A study of 73 judgments from 2008 to 2017 by the Delhi-based legal resource group Partners for Law in Development found that the criminal provisions of PCMA were used twice as often in cases of self-initiated marriages than arranged marriages.

A 2024 study by Bengaluru-based Enfold Proactive Health Trust and Civic Data Lab based on 174 PCMA judgments from Assam, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu, showed 49.4% of these marriages were self-initiated.

These trends suggest that criminal action can overlook complexities involved in the issue, and cause unintended harm to adolescents seeking autonomy.

In many cases, underage individuals choose to marry to escape difficult situations such as neglect, abuse, or the prospect of a forced marriage. These child marriages involve young people asserting their agency in a patriarchal society, using elopement as a way to legitimise their relationships.

Why is the SC judgment significant?

Exiting a child marriage can attract social and economic sanctions. The SC judgment directs the introduction of a special scheme for skill development, vocational training, and economic stability for women who leave child marriages, rehabilitation services, monitoring and follow-up support to ensure reintegration, and a call to consider compensation for these women under victim compensation schemes.

Some women may not want to exit the marriage, but may need help to claim agency within the marriage. They require tools to strengthen their ability to advocate for themselves in decisions involving reproductive rights, employment, and education. The SC judgment's emphasis on sex education for adolescents can empower those in such marriages with the skills and information to effectively navigate their relationships.

When implemented with an understanding of the evolving nature of child marriage — especially trends involving young people eloping — these measures offer a more holistic and agency-affirming approach to eliminating child marriage than an over-reliance on criminal prosecution.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express