

1. Katy Perry, all-female crew go to space: Is space tourism worth it?**Why in News?**

OUTLOOK BUSINESS

Katy Perry Joins Historic All-Female Crew on Blue Origin's Space Mission

Gayle King – Emmy awarded Journalist & CBS Mornings co-anchor, known for her powerful storytelling, authenticity and journalistic integrity


Lauren Sánchez – Licensed Pilot, Journalist, and fiancé of Jeff Bezos, she is leading the mission

Katy Perry – Pop star & Philanthropist, she sees the mission as a symbol of "progress for women in space & beyond"

Aisha Bowe – NASA-recognized aerospace engineer & tech founder, championing STEM & breaking barriers as a Black woman in engineering

Amanda Nguyen – Nobel Peace Prize nominee & civil rights leader, symbolizing advocacy & equality in space exploration

Kerianne Flynn – Socially responsible film producer, bringing a visionary perspective to the mission's story



Pop star Katy Perry and five other women went to space recently aboard a rocket operated by

billionaire Jeff Bezos' private company, Blue Origin. It was the first time since 1963 that an all-women crew has been to space.

The mission, which lasted for around 11 minutes, involved the New Shepard rocket taking the women more than 100 kilometres above Earth, crossing the internationally recognised boundary of space (known as the Kármán line), and offering a few minutes of weightlessness before they descended.

Space Tourism rising popularity

The journey that Perry and other women embarked upon, and the attention it garnered showcased the rising popularity of space tourism. While the industry was valued at \$848.28 million in 2023, it reached \$1.3 billion last year, according to a report by Research and Markets. By 2030, the industry is estimated to touch \$6.7 billion, growing at the rate of 31.6% between 2024 and 2030.

However, as the space tourism industry has grown by leaps and bounds, the concerns — from how expensive the ticket to space is to environmental impacts — around it have also increased.

What exactly is space tourism?

Space tourism is a section of the aviation sector which seeks to provide tourists with the opportunity to become astronauts and experience space travel for recreational, leisure, or business purposes.

There are two main types of space tourism, sub-orbital and orbital. The sub-orbital spacecraft takes passengers just beyond the Kármán line. The passengers get to spend a few minutes in space and then come back to Earth.

The orbital spacecraft, on the other hand, takes passengers much further than the Kármán line. Usually, passengers can spend from a couple of days to more than a week at an altitude of nearly 1.3 million feet.

There are three major private players in the industry, Virgin Galactic, Blue Origin, and SpaceX. All of them executed their first missions in 2021.

What are the concerns around space tourism?

1. **LACK OF ACCESSIBILITY:** Currently, space tourism is accessible to only the super-rich. A passenger generally has to pay at least a million dollars to reach outer space. For instance, Blue Origin has not released full ticket prices, a \$150,000 deposit is required to reserve a seat. A journey to space on a Virgin Galactic spacecraft costs about \$450,000, according to space.com.

2. **NOT A DRIVER OF INNOVATION:** Over the years, supporters of space tourism have argued that the industry can provide several benefits. For example, space tourists can carry out experiments such as the effects of microgravity on human health, plant growth, and material properties. This can help scientists prepare for future space missions.

However, so far, experiments conducted during space tourism missions have not been able to provide any breakthrough innovation.

Also, technologies being developed by private companies for space tourism are unlikely to be useful for other space-related activities such as industrial and scientific applications.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT: Several studies have pointed out that space tourism may lead to environmental damage as rockets emit gaseous and solid chemicals directly into the upper atmosphere.

For instance, nitrogen oxides emitted during rocket launches can deplete the ozone layer by converting ozone into oxygen. This could threaten the recovery of the ozone layer which took place after the phasing out of chlorofluorocarbons.

The soot emissions from rocket launches are far more effective at warming the atmosphere compared to other sources.

It is for these reasons why most experts remain skeptical about space tourism and its so-called benefits. They have repeatedly highlighted that the money and resources spent on such recreational trips could be better used to push climate and environmental action on Earth.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

2. Telangana becomes first State to notify sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes

First State to implement sub-categorisation

SC SUB-CATEGORISATION MOVEMENT: FROM 1994 TO 2024

- **1994:** SC sub-categorisation movement starts in undivided AP, led by MRPS president Manda Krishna Madiga
- **1996:** The TDP government appoints Justice P Ramiachandra Raju Commission to study the sub-categorisation issue
- **1997:** The Commission recommends sub-categorisation of SCs into four groups, with separate reservations for each
- **1999:** The state government promulgates the AP Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Ordinance, which is later replaced by an Act in 2002
- **2004:** The high court strikes down the Act, and the Supreme Court upholds the high court's judgment
- **2004:** The UPA government at the Centre constitutes the Justice Usha Mehra panel to examine SC sub-categorisation
- **2008:** The Usha Mehra Commission submits report, recommends amending Article 341 to allow sub-categorisation and de-sub-categorisation of SCs. The Centre does not implement the report, citing ongoing litigation in the Supreme Court
- **2014:** After formation of Telangana, the BRS govt adopts a resolution in the Assembly favouring SC sub-categorisation and sends it to the Centre
- **2023:** During the Assembly elections, Congress and BJP promise SC sub-categorisation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also promises this on behalf of the BJP
- **Aug 1, 2024:** The Supreme Court upholds the power of states to sub-classify reserved category groups

The Telangana government has notified the implementation of the Telangana Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Act 2025. The State has issued a gazette notification with April 14, 2025 as the appointed day for categorisation of Scheduled Castes (SC) into three groups.

Telangana has become the first State into the country to operationalise the classification of the Scheduled Castes after the Supreme Court's landmark judgment on August 1 last year upholding the constitutionality of sub-classifying the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) to grant separate quotas for the most

marginalised groups within these communities.

Basis of Sub-Categorisation

The government took into consideration the contents of the top court's verdict, empirical data, social, economic, educational, employment, and political status of the communities in the categorisation of SCs into three groups for implementation of the rule of reservation.

Accordingly, 15 sub-castes categorised as most backward had been classified as Group-I with 1% reservation. Though these groups constituted 0.5% of the population, the government had decided to provide them with 1% reservation with a view to provide educational and employment opportunities to the most backward among the Scheduled Castes.

In all, 18 sub-castes of the total 59 which received marginal benefits have been placed under Group-II with 9% reservation while 26 sub-castes that were relatively better placed in terms of opportunities had been placed in Group III with 5% reservation.

The State government clarified 33 of the 59 sub-castes were continuing in the same group in which they were placed in the past and there was shuffling of only 26 sub-castes constituting 3.43% of SC population.

Recruitment to government jobs would forthwith be based on the categorisation of the SC communities, adding the categorisation would not be applicable to the vacancies already notified.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

3. Amending the RTI Act through the Data Protection Bill is unwarranted

Why Now?



That the Right to Information Act and the use of RTIs have enhanced the accountability of those in governance in India. In the last few years there have been attempts to dilute the provisions of the Act, a landmark one that was passed 20 years ago. Clearly, some in governance and administration have treated the Act and its provisions on transparency and disclosure to be encumbrances.

Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act overcoming RTI

A significant threat has now emerged in the amendment to Section 8(1)(j) of the Act, which has been introduced in Section 44(3) of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023. Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act allows government bodies to withhold "information which relates to public information" provided its disclosure is not related to public interest or results in an unnecessary invasion of privacy. While doing so, it provides the safeguard that if the Public Information Officer or an appellate authority finds public interest in disclosing such information, it could still be available.

This safeguard is important. Some information related to public servants, such as college degrees or caste certificates, might be private, but as a recent and controversial case of a bureaucrat using a fake caste certificate showed, such information could be released in public interest.

Section 44(3) of the DPDP act amends Section 8(1)(j) by allowing government bodies to simply withhold "personal information" without the safeguard provisions on public interest or other such exceptions.

View of government

In a letter to Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Ashwini Vaishnaw defended the amendment, saying that Section 44(3) was aimed at preventing the RTI Act's "misuse" and was to harmonise the requirement of right to privacy and the right to information. He also said that information such as salaries of public officials would still remain accessible through Section 3 of the DPDP Act.

Conclusion

But by amending the RTI Act itself and by defining "personal information" vaguely in Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, authorities could deny RTI requests of previously public data by classifying them as "personal" — and lessen public scrutiny. The RTI Act already harmonises concerns related to the right to information and privacy by subjecting them to the question of public interest. Therefore, the amendment using the DPDP Act is unnecessary and unwarranted. The government must take the concerns of civil society and transparency activists and remove the provision amending the RTI Act, in the DPDP Act.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

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