

Wednesday, July 27, 2022

# Daily Current Affairs



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# SC calls 'irrational freebies' by parties during polls 'serious' issue



What is a Freebie?

NEW DELHI, July 26: Terming as "serious" the promise of "irrational freebies" made by political parties during elections, the Supreme Court today wondered why the Centre was hesitant about taking a stand on the issue.

The court also asked the Centre whether the view of the Finance Commission can be sought to deal with the issue after the Election Commission said it cannot regulate political parties on it.

"Why don't you say that you have nothing to do with it and the Election Commission has to take a call. I am asking whether the Government of India is considering it a serious issue or not?"

"Why are you hesitating to take a stand? You take a stand and then we will decide whether these freebies are to be continued or not. You file a detailed counter (affidavit)," Chief Justice of India NV Ramana told Additional Solicitor General KM Natraj.

The bench, also comprising Justices Krishna Murari and Hima Kohli, was hearing a PIL against the practice of political parties promising freebies during elections. The petitioner wanted the Election Commission to invoke its powers to freeze their election symbols

"Finance Commission is the appropriate authority to deal with it. Maybe we can invite the commission to look into this aspect. We cannot expect the Government of India to issue directions to States. This is not possible and this will create a political issue," Sibal said.

for the Election Commission referred to the reply filed in the matter and said that offering freebies before polls and their execution after the results are the policy decisions of political parties, and the Central government and not the poll panel, will be the best suited for dealing with this issue.

The poll panel cannot regulate State policies and decisions which may be taken by the winning party when they form the government, the counsel for the EC said.

On the other hand, the ASG insisted the issue needed to be dealt with by the EC.

Calling the matter "serious", the bench asked the government not to hesitate from taking a stand.

Lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay, who has filed the PIL, said the poll panel has the power to derecognise and seize the symbol of political parties and they can be used to stop doling out of irrational freebies. - PTI

## Apex court questions govt's hesitation in taking stand

and cancel their registration.

The bench, during the brief hearing, sought the views of senior advocate and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal, who was in the courtroom in connection with another matter, on the issue of freebies made during and after polls.

"This is a serious matter. Truly serious! The solutions are very difficult but the issue is extremely serious. It is the Finance Commission which gives out allocation to the States... They can take into account the debt of a State and the quantum of freebies.

Sibal said the Finance Commission can take an informed view with regard to freebies, their quantum and the financial condition of the State where the promises are sought to be implemented.

"Please find out from the Finance Commission as to whether this takes place. You find out who is the authority where we can initiate a debate or something. I will list it next week. We direct the Government of India to get instructions in this matter..." the CJI told the ASG.

At the outset, the counsel

The term Freebies is not new; rather it is a prevalent culture in Indian politics (in the name of socialism).

- The political parties are always trying to outdo each other in luring the Indian voters with assorted freebies.
- From free water to free smartphones the Indian politicians promise everything to attract prospective voters in favour.
- This trend has gained more momentum in the recent times with the political parties being innovative in their offerings as the 'traditional free water and electricity' is no longer sufficient as election goodies.

## Examples of freebies

- 1 Promise of Rs 15 lakh in our bank accounts
- 2 Free TV, Laptops
- 3 Free electricity
- 4 Loan waivers
- 5 Offering free public transport ride to all women in Delhi

## What cannot be accounted to a freebie?

- MGNREGA scheme (rural employment guarantee scheme)
- Right to Education (RTE)
- Food Security through fair price shops ( under National Food Security Act)
- Prime Minister Kisan Samman Yojana (PM-KISAN)

## Impact of such policies

- Never ending trail: The continuity of freebies is another major disadvantage as parties keep on coming up with lucrative offers to lure more number of votes to minimize the risk of losing in the elections.
- Burden on exchequer: People forget that such benefits are been given at the cost of exchequer and from the tax paid.
- Ultimate loss of poors: The politicians and middlemen wipe away the benefits and the poor have to suffer as they are deprived from their share of benefits which was to be achieved out of the money.
- Inflationary practice: Such distribution freebie commodity largely disrupts demand-supply dynamics.
- Lethargy in population: Freebies actually have the tendency to turn the nation's population into: Lethargy and devoid of entrepreneurship.
- Money becomes only remedy: Everyone at the slightest sign of distress starts demanding some kind of freebies from the Govt.
- Popular politics: This is psychology driving sections of the population expecting and the government promptly responds with immediate monetary relief or compensation.

# Manipur State bird captured on camera for first time in wild



ESPODENT

IMPHAL, July 26: A four-member team of wildlife enthusiasts – comprising three photographers and a reporter – have sighted Manipur's State bird 'Nong-in' in the forest of Razai village, 150 km east of Imphal, and clicked it on camera for the first time in the wild.

The Imphal-based team clicked the photo of a male 'Nong-in' on July 19 evening.

Nong-in (in the local tongue) or Hume's Pheasant (*Syrmaticus humiae*), also known as Mrs Hume's barred back pheasant or barred-tailed pheasant, was named Manipur's State bird on March 21, 1989 and is included in the Scheduled I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

The colourful bird usually resides near rivers with rocky hillsides abundant with scrub forests.

Sharing two photographs of the bird, photographer Oken Sanasam, an employee of DIPR, Manipur, wrote on Facebook, "I'm the first photographer in Manipur of Hume's Pheasant (Nongin) in wild after AO Hume's discovery of it in 1881. First recorded in India from Nagaland in the year 2016 (January) by the photographer Rofikal Islam and second recorded at the same spot by Jainy Maria (Bangalore-based photographer)..."

He said that it was the third time in the country that he recorded the bird at Razai village of Ukhrul, Manipur.

Meanwhile, environmen-



Photo of Manipur's State bird Nong-in or Hume's Pheasant (*Syrmaticus humiae*) clicked by photographer Oken Sanasam, an employee of DIPR, Manipur.

talist Khangembam Shamungou said that there was a need to conserve the State bird by developing a wildlife park in Ukhrul district.

Shamungou, a former lecturer of DM College of Science, has written many wildlife books, including on the State animal Sangai (brow-antlered deer), which is an endangered subspecies of Eld's deer.

"I had gone to Razai village in 2010 but I couldn't see a live Nong-in even though there were reports of its availability in some pockets of Ukhrul namely Razai, Jessami and Shirui. So the recent photo is the first photograph of a Nong-in in the wild in the State," he said.

He said that there are reports of the bird being seen in Chandel, and there were also high chances of its availability in Tipaimukh and Kai-

lam range in southern Manipur, which borders Mizoram.

The Wildlife and Environment Protection Organisation, Manipur and Razai village authority have also called on the Government to develop a wildlife park at Razai village to conserve the Nong-in, in the lines of the Keibul Lamjao National Park in Bishnupur district for conserving the Sangai.

"A fine of Rs 10,000 has been imposed on anyone hunting the bird," said church chairman Ishmael HS of Razai village, who had once handed over a couple of these birds to the State zoological garden authority in 2013-14.

State Forest Minister Th Biswajit Singh on Tuesday congratulated the four wildlife enthusiasts and expressed his desire to felicitate them at a proper function.

## Hume's Pheasant

1. State bird of Mizoram and Manipur
2. Local Name – Nongin
3. Habitat

- inhabits open, dry, subtropical evergreen (mainly oak), coniferous (chiefly pine) or mixed conifer-broadleaf forests on steep, often rocky hillsides interrupted by scrub and grassy clearings.
- It appears to favour broken or successional habitats, with adjacent patches of dense forest,
- endemic to China, Myanmar, Thailand, Burma and India
- India — Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

IUCN: near threatened





Panchayat and Rural Development  
Govt. of Assam



## Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS)



Do you Know about  
**CPGRAMS?**

Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) is an online platform available to the citizens 24x7 to lodge their grievances to the public authorities on any subject related to service delivery. It is a single portal connected to all the Ministries/Departments of Government of India and States.



### Issues which are not taken up for redress :

- Subjudice cases or any matter concerning judgment given by any court.
- Personal and family disputes.
- RTI matters.
- Anything that impacts upon territorial integrity of the country or friendly relations with other countries.
- Suggestions.

## CPGRAMS

- It is an online web-enabled system developed by National Informatics Centre (Ministry of Electronics & IT [MeitY]), in association with Directorate of Public Grievances (DPG) and Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG).
  - The underlying idea was to receive, redress and monitor the grievances of the public.
- It was launched by the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG) under the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions.
- The CPGRAMS provides the facility to lodge a grievance online from any geographical location.

# 5 more Indian sites added to Ramsar list

NEW DELHI, July 26: Five more Indian sites – three from Tamil Nadu and one each from Mizoram and Madhya Pradesh – have been recognised as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, taking the number of such sites in the country to 54, the Union Environment Ministry said today.

The aim of the Ramsar list is “to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands, which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life, through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits”.

India is aiming at getting a

Ramsar tag for 75 of its wetlands on the 75th year of independence, according to officials.

“The emphasis PM Shri Narendra Modi-ji has put on environmental protection and conservation has led to a marked improvement in how India treats its wetlands. Delighted to inform that 5 more Indian wetlands have got Ramsar recognition as wetlands of international importance,” Union Environment Minister Bhopender Yadav tweeted.

Karikili Bird Sanctuary, Pallikaranai Marsh Reserve Forest and Pichavaram Mangrove in Tamil Nadu, Sakhya Sagar in Madhya Pradesh and Pala wetland in Mizoram have made it to the coveted list, he

## Wetlands of international importance



informed.

The Karikili Bird Sanctuary is situated in the Kanchipuram

district of Tamil Nadu and is well-known for cormorants, egrets, grey heron, darter,

spoonbill, grey pelican, white ibis and night heron.

The Pallikaranai Marsh Reserve Forest is one of the last remaining natural wetlands of Chennai located adjacent to the Bay of Bengal.

The Pichavaram Mangrove is the second largest mangrove forest in the world covering about 1,100 hectare of area. It is separated from the Bay of Bengal by a sandbar.

Sakhya Sagar is located in the Madhav National Park in Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh. It has an abundant population of marsh crocodiles.

Pala wetland is the largest natural wetland in Mizoram and is spread across 1,850 hectare. – PTI

### New Ramsar Sites include;

- 1 Pallikaranai Marsh Reserve Forest, Tamil Nadu:** It is a freshwater marsh in Chennai. It is the only surviving wetland ecosystem Chennai. It is counted among last remaining natural wetlands of South India.
- 2 Karikili Bird Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu:** It is a 61.21-hectare protected area located in Kancheepuram District of Tamil Nadu. It is located at a distance of 75 km from Chennai.
- 3 Pichavaram Mangrove, Tamil Nadu:** It is located near Chidambaram in Cuddalore District of Tamil Nadu. It covers an area of 1100 hectares and thus counted among largest mangrove forests in country.
- 4 Pala wetland, Mizoram:** It is the largest natural wetland in Mizoram. The wetland is surrounded by green woodlands. It is known for rich diversity of animal species including several species of animals and birds.
- 5 Sakhya Sagar, Madhya Pradesh:** This lake is an integral part of Madhav National Park in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh.

### About Ramsar Convention:

The Ramsar convention was established by UNESCO on February 2, 1971. It is an intergovernmental environmental treaty, named after Ramsar city in Iran because it was signed there. The convention came into effect on 1975. It encourages the international cooperation and national action to conserve the wetlands and sustainably use their resources. Under it, wetlands of international importance are identified worldwide.



# 19 MPs suspended for unruly behaviour

NEW DELHI, July 26: A record 19 MPs from Opposition parties were suspended from Rajya Sabha on Tuesday for the rest of the week after they continued to disrupt proceedings to press for an immediate discussion on price rise and levy of GST on essential items.

The development, which came a day after Lok Sabha Speaker Om Prakash Birla suspended four Congress MPs for the rest of the current Monsoon session, is likely to further intensify the standoff between the Opposition and the government, which insisted that the discussion will be held once Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recovers from Covid-19.

An unrelenting Opposition created a ruckus in Rajya Sabha, with the penalised MPs refusing to leave the House, and alleging that "democracy has been suspended" in the country.

Of the 19 MPs suspended from Rajya Sabha, seven belong to the Trinamool Con-

gress, six are from the DMK, three from the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), two from the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and one from the Communist Party of India (CPI).

The first seven days of the Monsoon session were virtually washed out as the two Houses were rocked by Opposition protests to press for an immediate discussion on rising prices of fuel and essential commodities as well as levy of GST on wheat, rice, flour, curd and other daily use items.

On Tuesday too, Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned for an hour after it assembled but Deputy Chairman Harivansh managed to conduct Question Hour despite Opposition MPs trooping into the well and shouting slogans.

But in the post-lunch session, when the government legislative business was to be taken up, Harivansh repeatedly asked the protesting members to return to their seats and warned them of action. – PTI

## Rajya Sabha

## Disruption and Suspension

- The **first instance** occurred in 1963.
  - A few Lok Sabha MPs first interrupted President Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan and then walked out while he was delivering the joint address to both Houses. Lok Sabha ended in reprimanding these MPs.
- In 1989, 63 MPs were suspended from Lok Sabha on the discussion of the Thakar Commission report.
- More recently in 2010, 7 MPs were suspended from Rajya Sabha for snatching the women's reservation bill from the minister. Since then, MPs have raised slogans, used pepper spray in the House and displayed placards.



## Reason for Suspension

- It is the role and duty of the Speaker of Lok Sabha (and counterpart in Rajya Sabha) to maintain order so that the House can function smoothly.
- **Rule 373 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business** states that the Speaker, if is of the opinion that the conduct of any Member is grossly disorderly, may direct such Member to withdraw immediately from the House.

**In 2001, the Lok Sabha rule was amended** to give the Speaker one additional power.

- A new rule, **374A**, empowers the Speaker to automatically suspend an MP for a maximum of five days for disrupting the business of the House.
- In 2015, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan used this rule for suspending 25 Congress MPs.

## Powers of Presiding Officers to deal with MPs disrupting proceedings

- MPs are required to adhere to certain rules of parliamentary etiquette.
- For example the **Lok Sabha rulebook** specifies that:
  - MPs are not to interrupt the speech of others,
  - maintain silence and
  - not obstruct proceedings by hissing or making running commentaries during debates.
- Newer forms of protest led to these rules being **updated in 1989**.
  - Now, members should not shout slogans, display placards, tear up documents in protest, and play a cassette or a tape recorder in the House.
  - Rajya Sabha has similar rules.

# Diversion of rice meant for poor by section of ration shops

R DUTTA CHOUDHURY

GUWAHATI, July 26: Though the Government tries to help out the poor people with an extra allotment of rice under the National Food Security Act as well as under other schemes launched during the Covid pandemic, due to the activities of some unscrupulous persons, a portion of rice is being either smuggled out of the country or sold in the open market. There is a need for a strong vigil at the district and sub-divisional level to deal with the problem and strict actions need to be taken against the unscrupulous persons.

In addition to the rice allotted to the poor people under two schemes of the National Food Security Act, after the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, an additional

ten kg of rice is being given to per beneficiary per month under the Prime Minister's Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. Though the pandemic has sub-

sided and the country has opened up, the scheme is continuing and it will continue at least up to September this year. Though the Government aimed

to help out the poor people during the crisis period, some people took advantage of the situation to engage in illegal activities to siphon out the rice allot-

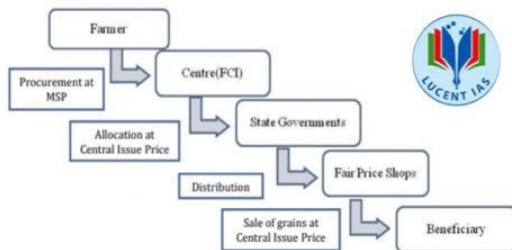
ted to the poor.

It is also a fact that some families have excess rice after the introduction of the Covid-specific scheme and they prefer to sell it off to buy other necessary items. A section of ration shop owners and cooperative societies are also involved in the illegal practice. Moreover, some sections of people in lower Assam districts prefer boiled rice and they take money from the ration shop owners in lieu of rice.

According to information available, rice is smuggled out to Bangladesh by the river routes and a few such cases have also been detected and licenses of the shop owners have been suspended. Digitization of the ration shops will help to tackle the problem to some extent and the process for it is on. But some leakages can still take

place and there is a need for a constant vigil.

Official sources said that all the Deputy Commissioners have formed district-level task forces comprising magistrates, officials of the Food and Civil Supplies Department and police to deal with this issue along with issues like black marketing and hoarding. But the magistrates and police are also bogged down with various other works and it is not possible for them to constantly engage themselves in checking the ration shops. However, they carry out raids when they receive specific complaints. Moreover, the Food and Civil Supplies Department is also facing shortage of staff. Against around 170 posts of sub-inspectors in the Department, only 25 are working now and the remaining posts are vacant.



The Public distribution system (PDS) is an Indian food Security System established under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution. PDS is operated under the joint responsibility of the Central and the State Governments.

- The Central Government, through Food Corporation of India (FCI), has assumed the responsibility for procurement, storage, transportation and bulk allocation of food grains to the State Governments.
- The operational responsibilities including allocation within the State, identification of eligible families, issue of Ration Cards and supervision of the functioning of Fair Price Shops (FPSs) etc., rest with the State Governments.

Under the PDS, presently the commodities namely wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene are being allocated to the States/UTs for distribution. Some States/UTs also distribute additional items of mass consumption through the PDS outlets such as pulses, edible oils, iodized salt, spices, etc.

The National Food Security Act, 2013 aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two-third of the country's population. The enactment of this landmark legislation, brought a paradigm shift in approach to food security, from welfare to rights-based approach. The salient features of the act are as:

- 1 Coverage and entitlement: Up to 75% of rural and 50% of the urban population will be covered under TPDS, with uniform entitlement of 5kg/person/month ration.
- 2 Identification of households: The work of identification of eligible households is to be done by States/UTs.
- 3 Maternity benefit: Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PWLM) are entitled to receive maternity benefits of not less than 6000 rupees.
- 4 Nutritional support: PWLM and children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years will be entitled to meals as per prescribed nutritional norms under ICDS, MDM (PM-Poshan).
- 5 Women empowerment: Eldest women of the household of age 18 years or above to be deemed as head of the household for the purpose of issuing ration cards.
- 6 Grievance Redressal: Act calls for dedicated mechanism for grievance redressal at district and state level.
- 7 Transparency/Accountability: Provisions regarding social audits, setting up of vigilance committees, disclosure of PDS records etc.
- 8 Food security allowance: It is entitled to the beneficiaries in case of non-supply of entitled food grains or meals.

- 1 Corruption in the social sectors like PDS, health and education schemes lead to demographic disadvantage.
- 2 It misdirects developmental strategy from decentralized, directed projects to big-budget projects on account of crony capitalism.



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