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ISLAM MAY BECOME THE WORLD'S LARGEST RELIGION BY 2035

- A study has revealed that Islam may surpass Christianity and become the world's largest religion by 2035. According to a new research report released by the Pew Research Center, headquartered in Washington, D.C., USA, the world's total population is projected to increase by 29% between 2020 and 2070.
- During this period, the Christian population is expected to increase by 30%, while the Muslim population may increase by 80%. By 2035, Islam may overtake Christianity and become the world's largest religion.
- If current trends continue, the global Muslim population could exceed 3.6 billion (360 crore) by 2070. At the same time, the Christian population is projected to remain below 3 billion (300 crore).
- Although the Christian population will continue to grow, the Muslim population is expected to increase at a much faster rate. The primary reason for this growth is that Muslims, on average, have more children than people belonging to other religious groups.
- Religious conversion and other changes in religious identity contribute only a small proportion to this population growth. Between 2020 and 2025, the average fertility rate among Muslims was 3.1 children per woman, compared with 2.5 children per woman among Christians, according to the passage.
- The global Hindu population, including India, was approximately 1.2 billion (120 crore) in 2020. It is projected to increase to 1.4 billion (140 crore) by 2070. However, the population of people belonging to other religious groups is expected to grow faster than the Hindu population.
- Consequently, the report states that the proportion of Hindus in the world's population, which was 15% in 2020, may decline to 4% by 2070.

SUPREME COURT JUDGMENT

- Anyone who observes that Tamil Nadu's river sand and rocks from its hills are being used more extensively for the benefit of people in other states than for the people of Tamil Nadu would naturally feel a sense of moral outrage.
- For several years, the business of transporting river sand and crushed stones from Tamil Nadu to Kerala and selling them at higher prices for substantial profits has continued without interruption.
- River sand is extracted from Tamil Nadu, while rocks from its hills are broken down and converted into crushed stones (jelly stones). These materials are then transported to Kerala.
- An even more disturbing issue is that these materials are reportedly exported from Kerala to countries such as the Maldives, generating profits worth several more crores of rupees.
- Some companies that have obtained permission to extract minerals and quarry hills in Tamil Nadu have established companies in Kerala under different names. Through these companies, they export river sand and crushed stones originating from Tamil Nadu.

- After winning the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly elections and forming a new government, the DMK government intervened in this matter and attempted to stop these activities. All the present contractors are those who obtained permission during the previous government. In an attempt to regulate them, the Joseph Vijay government issued a ban order on July 27, prohibiting the transportation of minerals to other states.
- The government announced that restrictions would be imposed under Rule 3A of the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Illegal Mining, Transportation and Storage of Minerals and Mineral Dealers Rules, 2011, against mineral dealers involved in illegal extraction, transportation and storage of minerals in Tamil Nadu.
- However, the court stated that the ban violated the conditions of the contracts approved by the government.
- The court further observed that the government's prohibition order applied only to illegal sand mining and stone quarrying, and not to those who had legally obtained contracts.
- It also held that preventing legally authorised contractors from selling minerals to other states would violate the right to trade guaranteed by the Constitution. We cannot criticise the court's judgment, which was delivered on the basis of the evidence presented before it.
- When taking action against such companies, the Tamil Nadu government has the right to cancel contracts if it finds that contractors have extracted minerals beyond the quantities permitted under their agreements.
- No company holding a licence to extract minerals in Tamil Nadu can escape allegations of extracting minerals beyond the permitted quantity. Only a very small number of contractors may have operated honestly.
- After cancelling the existing contracts, the government can include a condition in new agreements stating that minerals must not be transported to states outside Tamil Nadu. Only those willing to accept this condition may be allowed to participate in the tender process.
- An investigation by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) revealed that several times more sand had been extracted than the quantity officially permitted when the Tamil Nadu government sold river sand. A complaint was made before the court alleging that district collectors had not cooperated with the investigation.
- As the proceedings were repeatedly adjourned, the issue gradually faded from public attention. So far, no one has been punished in connection with the matter.
- The investigation report pointed out that important evidence had been obtained showing discrepancies between the quantities recorded by the government and the actual quantities of sand excavated.
- It also stated that officials had failed to properly record this evidence.
- Information regarding the operating period of the powerful, heavy-duty JCB excavators purchased for extracting sand in quantities several times higher than the permitted limits could be obtained from the foreign company concerned.
- Enforcement Directorate officials discovered that the estimated quantity of sand that could have been excavated during the operating hours of these machines did not match the officially recorded quantity of sand sold. However, these facts were not properly documented and were effectively buried and concealed.
- Now, the issue is gradually being forgotten. Measures to Prevent the Looting of Mineral Resources
- Whenever the Tamil Nadu government sells river sand, it should record the specific construction project in Tamil Nadu for which the sand is purchased.
- The government should also verify whether the sand is actually being used for the declared purpose.
- Through such monitoring, the large-scale exploitation and looting of Tamil Nadu's mineral wealth can be prevented.
- The DMK government should not hesitate to act because of the court's judgment.
- Instead, it should investigate violations of contract conditions and identify cases in which contractors have exceeded the permitted extraction limits.
- The government must not miss the opportunity to cancel contracts where violations are established.
- This would help protect Tamil Nadu's natural resources and prevent their unauthorised exploitation.

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