

# PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

**MARCH WEEK 4**



## March (Week 4)

### INDEX

#### Contents

<b>Prelims</b> .....	3
<b>NATIONAL</b> .....	3
Electoral Bonds.....	3
The Ken-Betwa Link Project.....	4
Right to counsel in custody.....	4
Tomar king Anangpal II.....	5
NITI Aayog vision for Great Nicobar.....	5
Helium.....	7
SPACs.....	8
Gandhi Peace Prize.....	8
Shigmo.....	9
Project Mausam.....	9
Suez Canal.....	10
The New Regulation on Cryptocurrency.....	10
Perpetual bond controversy.....	11
<b>INTERNATIONAL</b> .....	13
World Water Day.....	13
Parosmia- an odor distortion associated with COVID-19.....	13
Gravitational Waves.....	14
International Day of Forests.....	15
France's bill that seeks to set age of sexual consent at 15.....	16
NISAR-the joint Earth-Observing mission of NASA and ISRO.....	16
<b>Mains</b> .....	18
<b>GS I</b> .....	18
How to treat unpaid work.....	18
<b>GS II</b> .....	19
The debate around the Places of Worship Act.....	19
The row over Myanmar refugees in Mizoram.....	20
Governing Delhi.....	22
An unconscionable act.....	23
South Asia's power trade.....	24
Structural pitfalls of MGNREGA.....	26



Why the electoral bonds scheme must go.....	28
Remove the wedges in India-Bangladesh ties .....	30
<b>GS III</b> .....	33
Draft amendment to Forest Conservation Act .....	33
Only 11% low-income countries make their data open: World Bank report.....	36
Current Affairs Quiz .....	38





# Prelims

## NATIONAL

### Electoral Bonds

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The Supreme Court reserved its order on a plea seeking a stay on the sale of fresh electoral bonds ahead of state assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and the Union Territory of Puducherry.*

#### What are electoral bonds?

- Announced in the 2017 Union Budget, electoral bonds are interest-free bearer instruments used to donate money anonymously to political parties. A bearer instrument does not carry any information about the buyer or payee and the holder of the instrument (which is the political party) is presumed to be its owner.
- The bonds are sold in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore, and the State Bank of India (SBI) is the only bank authorised to sell them. Donors can purchase and subsequently donate the bonds to their party of choice, which the party can then cash through its verified account within 15 days.
- There is no limit on the number of bonds an individual or company can purchase. SBI deposits bonds that a political party hasn't encashed within 15 days into the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. A total of 12,924 electoral bonds worth Rs 6534.78 crore have been sold in fifteen phases between March 2018 to January 2021.
- At the time of its announcement, in Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's Budget speech in 2017, electoral bonds were understood to be a way for companies to make anonymous donations. However, the fine print of the notification has revealed that even individuals, groups of individuals, NGOs, religious and other trusts are permitted to donate via electoral bonds without disclosing their details.

#### Concerns expressed:

- The move could be misused, given the lack of disclosure requirements for individuals purchasing electoral bonds.
- Electoral bonds make electoral funding even more opaque. It will bring more and more black money into the political system.
- With electoral bonds there can be a legal channel for companies to round-trip their tax haven cash to a political party. If this could be arranged, then a businessman could lobby for a change in policy, and legally funnel a part of the profits accruing from this policy change to the politician or party that brought it about.
- Electoral bonds eliminate the 7.5% cap on company donations which means even loss-making companies can make unlimited donations.
- Companies no longer need to declare the names of the parties to which they have donated so shareholders won't know where their money has gone.
- They have potential to load the dice heavily in favour of the ruling party as the donor bank and the receiver bank know the identity of the person. But both the banks report to the RBI which, in turn, is subject to the Central government's will to know.



## **The Ken-Betwa Link Project**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *On the occasion of World Water Day on April 22, a memorandum of agreement was signed between Union Minister of Jal Shakti and the chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to implement the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP) recently.*

### **What is the Ken Betwa Link Project?**

- The Ken-Betwa Link Project is the first project under the National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers.
- Under this project, water from the Ken river will be transferred to the Betwa river. Both these rivers are tributaries of river Yamuna.
- The Ken-Betwa Link Project has two phases. Under Phase-I, one of the components — Daudhan dam complex and its appurtenances like Low Level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa link canal and Power houses — will be completed. While in the Phase-II, three components — Lower Orr dam, Bina complex project and Kotha barrage — will be constructed.
- According to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, the project is expected to provide annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares, drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people and also generate 103 MW of hydropower.
- According to the Comprehensive Detailed Project Report, the cost of Ken-Betwa Link Project is estimated at Rs 35,111.24 crore at 2017-18 prices.

### **Which region will get the benefits of the KBLP?**

- The Ken-Betwa Link Project lies in Bundelkhand, a drought-prone region, which spreads across 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the project will be of immense benefit to the water-starved region of Bundelkhand, especially in the districts of Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen of Madhya Pradesh and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur of Uttar Pradesh.

### **Will the project affect the Panna tiger reserve?**

- According to a written reply given by Minister of State for Jal Shakti Rattan Lal Kataria, out of the 6,017 ha of forest area coming under submergence of Daudhan dam of Ken Betwa Link Project, 4,206 ha of area lies within the core tiger habitat of Panna Tiger Reserve.

## **Right to counsel in custody**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *Recently, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) told a special court in Mumbai that the arrested assistant police inspector Sachin Waze, now suspended from Mumbai Police, was not cooperating in the probe against him and was insisting on his lawyer being present during interrogation. Separately, Waze filed an application seeking to be allowed to meet his lawyer in privacy while he is in police custody. A look at what the law says about legal counsel for those in police custody.*

### **Is access to a lawyer the right of an accused?**

- Across the world, various rights are available to a person while in custody of an investigating agency to prevent him or her from being forced into giving self-incriminating statements through means including torture.



- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirms the right of an accused to be informed of the reasons for an arrest, the charges against him and the right to be provided legal assistance.
- The “Miranda rights” or “Miranda warning”, as they are referred to in the US, require a police officer to inform a suspect being arrested that he has the right to talk to a lawyer for advice before being questioned,, and the right to have a lawyer with him during questioning.
- In India, the safeguards available to a person in such circumstances are enshrined in the Constitution. Article 20 (3) states: “No person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself”.
- And Article 22 states that a person cannot be denied the right to consult and to be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice. This includes provisions that grant an accused the “right to consult” a lawyer.
- Section 41D of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) states that an accused is entitled to “meet an advocate of his choice during interrogation, though not throughout interrogation”.

### **Tomar king Anangpal II**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The government has recently formed a committee to popularise the legacy of 11th-century Tomar king, Anangpal II. Crediting him with giving Delhi its present name and also repopulating it, the National Monument Authority — which functions under the Ministry of Culture — has embarked on a mission to present “correct history” to the people through the works of historians, academics and archaeologists.*

#### **Who was Anangpal II?**

- Anangpal II, popularly known as Anangpal Tomar, belonged to the Tomar dynasty that ruled parts of present-day Delhi and Haryana between the 8th and 12th centuries.
- The capital of Tomars changed many times from being initially at Anangpur (near Faridabad) during the reign of Anangpal I (who founded the Tomar dynasty in the 8th century), to Dhillikapuri (Delhi) during the reign of Anangpal II.
- The Tomar rule over the region is attested by multiple inscriptions and coins, and their ancestry can be traced to the Pandavas (of the Mahabharata).
- Anangpal Tomar II was succeeded by his grandson Prithviraj Chauhan, who was defeated by the Ghurid forces in the Battle of Tarain (present-day Haryana) after which the Delhi Sultanate was established in 1192.

#### **His connection with Delhi**

- Anangpal II is credited to have established and populated Delhi during his reign in the 11th century.
- Anangpal II was instrumental in populating Indraprastha and giving it its present name, Delhi. The region was in ruins when he ascended the throne in the 11th century, it was he who built Lal Kot fort and Anangtal Baoli.
- Tomars and their Delhi link find mention in some modern-day literature as well.

### **NITI Aayog vision for Great Nicobar**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *In what appears to a re-run of recent developments in Little Andaman Island, more than 150 sq. km. of land is being made available for Phase I of a NITI Aayog-piloted ‘holistic’ and ‘sustainable’ vision*

*for Great Nicobar Island, the southernmost in the Andaman and Nicobar group. This amounts to nearly 18% of the 910 sq. km. island, and will cover nearly a quarter of its coastline. The overall plan envisages the use of about 244 sq. km. — a major portion being pristine forest and coastal systems.*

#### **Details:**

- Projects to be executed in Phase I include a 22 sq. km. airport complex, a transshipment port (TSP) at South Bay at an estimated cost of ₹12,000 crore, a parallel-to-the-coast mass rapid transport system and a free trade zone and warehousing complex on the south western coast.
- What stands out prominently in the whole process, starting with the designation in mid-2020 of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) as the nodal agency, is the speed and co-ordination with which it has all unfolded.
- Significant changes have also been effected to the legal regimes for wildlife and forest conservation.

#### **Ecological uniqueness**

- In its meeting on January 5, 2021, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) denotified the entire Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to allow for the port there.
- The NBWL committee seemed unaware that India's National Marine Turtle Action Plan that was under preparation then (it was released on February 1, 2021) had listed Galathea Bay as one of the 'Important Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Areas' and 'Important Marine Turtle Habitats' in the country. It is included in Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)-I, the zone with maximum protection.
- Then, on January 18, another Environment Ministry expert committee approved a "zero extent" Ecologically Sensitive Zone (ESZ) for the Galathea NP to allow use of land in the south-eastern and south-western part of the island for the NITI Aayog plan.
- The October 2020 draft notification for this zero extent ESZ had ironically listed out in great detail the park's ecological uniqueness — that it is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, houses a range of forest types, has one of the best preserved tropical rainforests in the world, is home to 648 species of flora and hosts 330 species of fauna including rare and endemic ones such as the Nicobar wild pig, Nicobar tree shrew, the Great Nicobar crested serpent eagle, Nicobar paradise flycatcher and the Nicobar megapode. It also notes that the park is home to the indigenous Shompen community.
- The notification says that an ESZ is needed to protect the park from an ecological, environmental and biodiversity point of view, but goes on in the very next para to propose a zero extent ESZ for nearly 70% of the periphery of the park.
- It is almost as if the unique diversity of life just listed suddenly disappeared because of an arbitrary line drawn to allow a slew of high value projects.
- This is illustrated in the case of the Giant leatherback turtle and the Nicobar megapode, two charismatic species for whom Great Nicobar is very important.
- The beaches here, like at the mouth of the river Galathea in South Bay are among the most prominent nesting sites globally of the Giant leatherback. It for this reason that the bay was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1997, but has now been denotified to allow for the transshipment port

#### **Threat to Shompen**

- Similar concerns exist about the impact on the Shompen community. The proposed project areas are important foraging grounds for this hunter-gatherer nomadic community and the official Shompen Policy of 2015 specifically noted that the welfare and integrity of these people should be given priority "with regard to large-scale development proposals in the future for Great Nicobar Island (such as transshipment port/container terminal etc.)".
- Now, large forest areas here could become inaccessible and useless for the Shompen.
- Available evidence suggests that issues of the geological volatility of these islands are also not being factored in.
- The December 26, 2019, tender document by WAPCOS Limited for a 'Traffic Study for Creating Transshipment port at South Bay, Great Nicobar Island' justifies the port here by noting that "the





topography of the island is best suited, which has not been damaged much even by the tsunami on 26.11.2004 (sic)".

- Yet, a 2005 Earthquake Engineering Research Institute (EERI) Special Earthquake Report by a multi-disciplinary team from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur, recorded witness accounts of 8-metre-high tsunami waves hitting the Great Nicobar coast on December 26, 2004.
- "The lighthouse at Indira Point, the southernmost tip of the Great Nicobar Island, which was on high ground before the earthquake," the report notes, "is now under water, indicating a land subsidence of about 3-4 m."
- Loss of life and property then was limited because the Great Nicobar coast is largely uninhabited. This raises questions over safety of life, property and the investments in this zone and that too without accounting for the complex ecological, social and geological vulnerabilities here.
- Little, if anything, is also known of the NITI Aayog vision document itself – What is its rationale? What was the process of its creation? Which agencies/individuals were involved? What impact assessments, if any, have been done at all?
- Neither the NITI Aayog nor the agencies that are facilitating it with zeal have made this available.

## Helium

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** Helium is colourless, odourless, tasteless, inert and a noble gas. Yet, it finds many applications, mainly in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, in rockets and in nuclear reactors. India imports helium for its needs, and with the U.S. appearing set to cut off exports of helium since 2021, Indian industry stands to lose out heavily. What is the solution? Can India become self-reliant towards its needs of helium gas?

### **Helium on Earth**

- Dutch physicist Kamerlingh Onnes liquefied Helium by cooling the gas to -270 degrees Celsius. It is known that Kamerlingh Onnes collected helium gas from the springs of Bath in Baden Baden, Germany for his liquefaction experiment.
- Some scientists and geologists started looking for helium underground – they guessed it may be present there by analysing debris from volcanic eruptions. From the oil drilling operation in Dexter, Kansas, in the U.S., chemists Hamilton Cady and David McFarland discovered the presence of helium in natural gas.
- They further went on to discover that despite its overall rarity, helium was concentrated in large quantities under the American Great Plains.
- The U.S. became the most important exporter of helium across the world. It was soon realised that U.S. was also the biggest store house of helium.
- The U.S., now, is planning to switch off export of helium from 2021. Qatar is a possible exporter but acute political and diplomatic wrangles have made Qatar unreliable.
- Every year, India imports helium worth Rs 55,000 crores from the U.S. to meet its needs.

### **Emerging project**

- Homi Sethna, then the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission arranged for the project to be part of the newly started Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC) project of Kolkata.
- It should be mentioned that Bhabha Atomic Research Centre under the leadership of R. K. Garg, head of the Chemical and Engineering Division, in the 1970s made an effort to extract helium from monazite sand. Unfortunately, this project was doomed, and BARC did not push it any further.





- So, this vast reservoir of helium in the Rajmahal volcanic belt remained untapped.
- India's Rajmahal volcanic basin is the store house of helium trapped for billions years, since the very birth of our Earth from the Sun. At present, we are mapping the Rajmahal basin extensively for future exploration and harnessing of helium.
- In conclusion, helium is not just for balloons but it is the key ingredient for India's high technology and the most sophisticated medical diagnosis.

## **SPACs**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *Earlier this month, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued an investor alert, which was the first warning of sorts, when it came to SPACs, or special purpose acquisition companies.*

### **The vehicle and its attraction**

- An SPAC, or a blank-cheque company, is an entity specifically set up with the objective of acquiring a firm in a particular sector.
- The aim of this SPAC is to raise money in an initial public offering (IPO), and at this point in time, it does not have any operations or revenues. Once the money is raised from the public, it is kept in an escrow account, which can be accessed while making the acquisition. If the acquisition is not made within two years of the IPO, the SPAC is delisted and the money is returned to the investors.
- According to the SEC, certain market participants believe that, through an SPAC transaction, a private company can become a publicly-traded company “with more certainty as to pricing and control over deal terms as compared to traditional IPOs”.
- On the other hand, a key factor that makes SPACs attractive to investors despite them essentially being shell companies, are the people sponsoring the blank-cheque company. Globally, prominent names such as former NBA star Shaquille O’Neal, tennis star Serena Williams, former TikTok CEO Kevin Mayer, Dell Technologies founder and CEO Michael Dell, billionaire and venture capitalist Vinod Khosla etc. have participated in SPACs.

### **The risk factors**

- For SPACs, the biggest opportunity is also the biggest threat — depending on from which side it is looked at. As per the 2021 statistics, out of the 281 SPAC listings that have happened, only two have announced their targets.
- Also, out of the 248 SPAC listings in 2020, 138 are still searching for targets. The boom in investor firms going for SPACs and then looking for target companies have tilted the scales in favour of investee firms.
- This has the potential, theoretically, to limit returns for retail investors post-merger. Also, even as the SPACs are mandated to return money to their investors in the event no merger is made within two years, fineprint of several SPAC prospectuses shows that certain clauses could potentially prevent investors from getting their monies back. Historically, though, this has not happened yet.

## **Gandhi Peace Prize**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *Gandhi Peace Prize for 2019 and 2020 announced.*

### **Details:**



- The Gandhi Peace Prize is an annual award instituted by the Government of India since 1995, the 125th Birth Anniversary commemoration year of Mahatma Gandhi.
- This annual award will be given to individuals, associations, institutions or organizations who have worked selflessly for peace, non-violence and amelioration of human sufferings particularly for the less-privileged sections of society contributing towards social justice and harmony.
- The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex.
- The 2019 award has been given to (Late) His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said of Oman.
- The 2020 award has been conferred upon Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh.
  - Bangladesh is celebrating Mujib Borsho (Mujib Year) in 2020-21.
- The award carries an amount of Rs. 1 crore, a citation, a plaque and an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item.
- The Award may be divided between two persons/institutions who are considered by the Jury to be equally deserving of recognition in a given year.
- The Award is given for Social, Economic and Political transformation through Non-violence.
- Some of the previous recipients of the award include Nelson Mandela, Gerhard Fischer (German diplomat), Baba Amte, Ramakrishna Mission, ISRO, Akshaya Patra Foundation, Sulabh International, etc.
- The jury for Gandhi Peace Prize is chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and comprises two ex-officio members, namely the chief justice of India and leader of the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha.

### **Shigmo**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *With a rise in Covid-19 cases across a number of states in the country, Holi celebrations may be tepid this year. In Goa, however, questions are being raised over the scale of celebrations for the annual Shigmotsav.*

#### **What is Shigmo or Shigmotsav?**

- Shigmo is the celebration of a 'rich, golden harvest of paddy' by the tribal communities of Goa, says Professor of History at Panaji's Dhempe College of Arts and Science Prajal Sakhardande.
- Agricultural communities including the Kunbis, Gawdas and Velips celebrate the festival that also marks the onset of spring.
- Shigmo celebrations last over a fortnight in the months of Phalgun-Chaitra months of the Hindu calendar that correspond with March-April every year.

### **Project Mausam**

(Source: [PIB](#) )

**Context:** *Project Mausam has been extended up to 31st March, 2023.*

#### **About the Project:**

- Project 'Mausam' is a Ministry of Culture project with Archaeological Society of India (ASI), New Delhi as the nodal agency and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi as its Research Unit.

- This project aims to explore the multi-faceted Indian Ocean ‘world’ – collating archaeological and historical research in order to document the diversity of cultural, commercial and religious interactions in the Indian Ocean.
- The main objective of the project is to inscribe places and sites identified under Project Mausam as transnational nomination for inscription on UNESCO’s World Heritage List.
- The central themes that hold Project ‘Mausam’ together are those of cultural routes and maritime landscapes that not only linked different parts of the Indian Ocean littoral, but also connected the coastal centres to their hinterlands.
- More importantly, shared knowledge systems and ideas spread along these routes and impacted both coastal centres, and also large parts of the environs.

## Suez Canal

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The owners of a giant container vessel blocking the Suez Canal said on Thursday that they were facing “extreme difficulty” refloating it, prompting Egypt to suspend navigation through one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes.*

### **About Suez Canal**

- The Suez Canal is an artificial sea-level waterway running north to south across the Isthmus of Suez in Egypt, to connect the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.
- The canal separates the African continent from Asia.
- It provides the shortest maritime route between Europe and the lands lying around the Indian and western Pacific oceans.
- It is one of the world’s most heavily used shipping lanes, carrying over 12% of world trade by volume.
  - It provides a crucial link for oil, natural gas and cargo being shipped from East to West.
  - As per Suez Canal Authority (SCA) data, in 2020, nearly 19,000 ships, or an average of 51.5 ships per day, with a net tonnage of 1.17 billion tonnes passed through the canal.
- The canal is a major source of income for Egypt’s economy, with the African country earning USD 5.61 billion in revenues from it last year.
  - In 2015, Egypt announced plans to further expand the Suez Canal, aiming to reduce waiting times and double the number of ships that can use the canal daily by 2023.
- The Suez Canal is actually the first canal that directly links the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. It was opened for navigation in November 1869.
- The 150-year-old canal was controlled by British and French interests in its initial years, but was nationalised in 1956 by Egypt.
  - Suez Crisis, international crisis in the Middle East, precipitated in July 1956, when the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal. The canal had been owned by the Suez Canal Company, which was controlled by French and British interests.
- The Canal was closed five times; the last time was the most serious one since it lasted for 8 years. The Canal was then reopened for navigation in June 1975.

## The New Regulation on Cryptocurrency

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )



**Context:** *The corporate affairs ministry has announced companies will have to disclose any holding or dealings in cryptocurrencies or virtual currencies in their financial statements filed with the Registrar of Companies.*

### **What are Cryptocurrencies?**

- A cryptocurrency is a digital asset designed to work as a medium of exchange wherein individual coin ownership records are stored in a ledger existing in a form of a computerized database.
- It uses strong cryptography to secure transaction records, to control the creation of additional coins, and to verify the transfer of coin ownership.
- It typically does not exist in physical form (like paper money) and is typically not issued by a central authority.
- Cryptocurrencies typically use decentralized control as opposed to centralized digital currency and central banking systems.

### **What is the new regulation?**

- All companies will now have to disclose in their statutory financial filings to the RoC any profit or loss on transactions involving cryptocurrency, the amount of cryptocurrency held on the reporting date, and any deposits or advances received from anyone for the purpose of investing in cryptocurrencies or virtual currencies.
- Some experts have said these disclosure requirements indicated the government is open to regulating cryptocurrencies instead of banning them.
- Others, however, noted that the additional disclosure does not necessarily indicate that the government has decided to regulate cryptocurrencies instead of banning them.
- The government's new bill – Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021 — aims to prohibit all private cryptocurrencies while setting the stage to roll out the legal framework for an “official digital currency”.
- However, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said the Centre will take a calibrated approach to cryptocurrencies and will not close the window on experimentation with cryptocurrencies.

### **Perpetual bond controversy**

(Source: [The Hindu Businessline](https://www.thehindubusinessline.com) )

**Context:** *A circular from SEBI on perpetual bonds in the second week of March set off tensions between the Finance Ministry and the market regulator and sent debt mutual fund investors into a tizzy once again. While the circular intended the changes to take effect from April 1, 2021, SEBI has now decided to give funds time until April 2023 to fall in line with the valuation rules.*

### **What is it?**

- Perpetual bonds are fund-raising instruments that do not carry any maturity date as bonds usually do. Instead, they offer to pay their buyers a coupon or interest at a fixed date for perpetuity.
- While a variety of entities may issue perpetual bonds, the most common ones in India are issued by banks to meet their Basel III capital norms and are called Additional Tier 1 or AT-1 bonds.
- In the case of bank AT-1 bonds, banks can write off the principal in addition to not paying interest if they run short of capital or face bankruptcy. For an investor, this feature and the eternal nature of these bonds add to the risk; but they usually fetch higher yields than other debt instruments.
- While the principal amount in such bonds is never really due for repayment, issuers do attach a call option. So, at the end of a specific term, say five or 10 years from the issue date, the issuers can buy back



the bonds from the investors. Investors can also use the secondary market as a means of exit in the case of traded perpetual bonds.

- Given the higher risk appetite required for such instruments, SEBI has restricted the purchase of such bonds to institutions. Debt mutual funds with retail investors in them however own such bonds.
- After the recent write-off of AT-1 bonds of YES Bank and its consequent effect on debt mutual funds, SEBI, in March, decided to further protect retail investors in debt funds by setting a 10 per cent limit for a debt fund's investment in such bonds.
- It also laid down that funds need to value these bonds as if they were 100-year bonds and, if illiquid, to reflect their true risk.

### **Why is it important?**

- Bonds are valued by discounting the future interest receipts and principal repayments to present value.
- Today, fund houses value perpetual bonds assuming that their issuers will exercise their call options five or 10 years from the issue date. But SEBI wants fund houses to value them as if the principal will be returned only a 100 years later. Following this tweak in norms, perpetual bonds not traded frequently may see a sharp fall in value.
- Not only will this change in valuation norm lead to significant volatility in the NAVs of several debt schemes, but the calculation can itself be cumbersome. Take the case of non-traded or thinly traded perpetual bonds.
- SEBI classifies debt securities with a trading volume of less than ₹5 crore in a calendar month as thinly traded. Perpetual bonds that fall into this category may need to build a risk-free benchmark and identifying a 100-year benchmark can be tough.
- The Finance Ministry appears worried about the circular because with stiffer valuation norms and the 10 per cent limit on debt scheme exposures, public sector banks may find it tougher to raise capital through this route.

## INTERNATIONAL

### World Water Day

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** To focus on the importance of freshwater, the United Nations marks March 22 every year as World Water Day. The theme of World Water Day 2021 is “Valuing Water”.

#### **Why is World Water Day celebrated?**

- As per the UN website, the idea for this international day goes back to 1992, the year in which the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro took place.
- That same year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution by which March 22 of each year was declared World Day for Water, to be observed starting in 1993.
- Later on, other celebrations and events were added. For instance, the International Year of Cooperation in the Water Sphere 2013, and the current International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028.
- These observances aim to highlight that water and sanitation measures are key to poverty reduction, economic growth, and environmental sustainability.
- Explaining this year’s theme ‘Valuing Water’, UN-Water said on its website, “The value of water is about much more than its price – water has enormous and complex value for our households, food, culture, health, education, economics and the integrity of our natural environment. If we overlook any of these values, we risk mismanaging this finite, irreplaceable resource.”

#### **Water in the Indian Constitution**

- The Ministry of Jal Shakti says on its website, “As most of the rivers in the country are inter-State, the regulation and development of waters of these rivers, is a source of inter-State differences and disputes. In the Constitution, water is a matter included in Entry 17 of List-II i.e. State List. This entry is subject to the provision of Entry 56 of List-I i.e. Union List.”
- Under Article 246, the Indian Constitution allocates responsibilities of the States and the Centre into three lists– Union List, State List, and Concurrent List.
- Water is under Entry 17 of the State List, which reads: “Water, that is to say, water supplies, irrigation and canals, drainage and embankments, water storage and water power subject to the provisions of entry 56 of List I.”

### Parosmia- an odor distortion associated with COVID-19

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** While loss of smell (anosmia) and taste is a well known symptom of COVID-19, some people may experience parosmia, which is characterised by a change in perception of odours.

#### **What is parosmia?**

- According to Fifth Sense, a charity for people affected with smell and taste disorders, parosmia is a medical term used to describe a condition in which affected individuals experience “distortions of the sense of smell”.



- A person with parosmia is able to detect certain odours, but they might experience the smell of certain things as different and often unpleasant. For instance, to someone with parosmia, coffee may smell like burnt toast.
- Fifth Sense says that these unpleasant smells are often described by people as being similar to that of chemicals, burning, faeces, rotting flesh and mould.

### COVID-19 and parosmia

- Research published in the journal Nature recently says that parosmia has been associated with a high proportion of patients with post-infectious loss.
- Significantly, this study reported that nearly half of its COVID-19 cohort reported parosmia, which was persistent at least till six months in the majority of the cases.
- The study says that parosmia might be a positive sign and may reflect the recovery of the olfactory sensory neurons.
- While there is no cure or medication for this abnormality, individuals may find some relief with “smell training”.
- According to the Smell and Taste Clinic at the James Paget Hospital, UK if parosmia or phantosmia (sensation of an odour being present when it is not) becomes more disabling than the loss of smell or is the only symptom, then the person should be given specific treatment such as using nasal drops or tablets.

### Gravitational Waves

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** Since the first detection of the merger of black holes dated September 14, 2014, by the two gravitational wave detectors at LIGO in the U.S., the field has witnessed important developments. The LIGO detectors have been joined in their search for gravitational waves from various sources by the VIRGO detector in Italy and the KAGRA detector in Japan.

### What are Gravitational Waves?

- Gravitational waves are 'ripples' in space-time caused by some of the most violent and energetic processes in the Universe. Albert Einstein predicted the existence of gravitational waves in 1916 in his general theory of relativity.
- Einstein's mathematics showed that massive accelerating objects (such as neutron stars or black holes orbiting each other) would disrupt space-time in such a way that 'waves' of undulating space-time would propagate in all directions away from the source.
- These cosmic ripples would travel at the speed of light, carrying with them information about their origins, as well as clues to the nature of gravity itself.
- The strongest gravitational waves are produced by cataclysmic events such as colliding black holes, supernovae (massive stars exploding at the end of their lifetimes), and colliding neutron stars.
- Other waves are predicted to be caused by the rotation of neutron stars that are not perfect spheres, and possibly even the remnants of gravitational radiation created by the Big Bang.

### Background hum

- Until now, the number of mergers detected by LIGO, VIRGO and KAGRA detectors is minuscule compared with the number of mergers actually taking place in the sky.
- The idea that the gravitational waves arising from the collection of all these mergers should be present like a background signal has been around for some time.
- Just as studying the cosmic microwave background tells us about the early universe, its formation, the stochastic gravitational wave background would reveal the structure of the universe around us.

- Detections till now have been of events that were relatively close to us. Distant binary coalescences, milli-second pulsars, etc are expected to produce a background, and detecting any of this would be a great breakthrough.

### **Radiometer algorithm**

- The radiometer algorithm which Indian researchers played a key role in developing, comes in useful as a tool for detecting hitherto unknown sources: with recent algorithms developed in India, the radiometer analysis has been made hundreds of times faster and they are now being used by the international collaboration for the official analysis.
- The gravitational wave background consists of an isotropic component and an anisotropic component.
- The isotropic component is constant when you look in different directions and the anisotropic component depends on the direction.
- The present results are not that the isotropic component has been detected, we are still far from that, but that the group has successfully shown that it must be below a certain level as otherwise it would have been detected. Future improved versions of the detectors will have to work below this level to detect the background.

### **International Day of Forests**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The United Nations observes March 21 as the International Day of Forests, commemorating the green cover around the world and reiterating its importance. The theme of the International Day of Forests for 2021 is “Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being”.*

### **Why is the International Day of Forests celebrated?**

- The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed March 21 as the International Day of Forests (IDF) in 2012.
- According to the official UN website, the Day celebrates and raises awareness of the importance of all types of forests. On this day, countries are encouraged to undertake local, national and international efforts to organize activities involving forests and trees, such as tree-planting campaigns.
- The Day is celebrated by the United Nations Forum on Forests and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with governments, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and other relevant organisations in the field.

### **Annual themes for the International Day of Forests**

- The theme for each year is chosen by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. The theme for 2021 is “Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being”.
- This year’s theme aims to emphasise how restoration and sustainable management of forests can help address climate change and biodiversity crisis. It can also help produce goods and services for sustainable development, fostering an economic activity that creates jobs and improves lives.
- Themes of the International Day of Forests are aimed to fit into the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), which calls for the protection and revival of ecosystems around the world.

### **Forest cover in India**

- Since Independence, a fifth of India’s land has consistently been under forests, despite the population increasing more than three times.



- As per the biennial State of Forest Report, 2019, India's forest cover has increased by 3,976 sq km or 0.56% since 2017.
- For the second consecutive time since 2007, the report recorded a gain — an impressive 1,275 sq km — in dense forest (including very dense forest with a canopy density of over 70%, and moderately dense forest with a canopy density of 40-70%).

### **France's bill that seeks to set age of sexual consent at 15**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The lower house of France's parliament approved a bill that would define a clear age of consent for the first time in the country's history, setting it at 15 years.*

#### **What is the current French law on consent?**

- Under current French laws, there is no formal age of consent. This means that children can legally be considered capable of consenting to sex. Although it is illegal for adults to have sexual intercourse with children below the age of 15, such offences are not automatically considered rape, and are given lighter punishments.
- A rape charge —which carries a punishment of 20 years— is only considered when there is proof of “force, threat, violence or surprise”. Without such proof, suspects are charged with the lesser offence of sexual assault, which is punishable by up to 7 years.
- As consent by children is legally meaningful, child rape cases become exceedingly difficult to prove, since courts are faced with the tricky task of relying on a child's testimony.
- Critics have long blamed the current law, as well as statutes of limitation, for hindering the prosecution of sexual abuse cases.

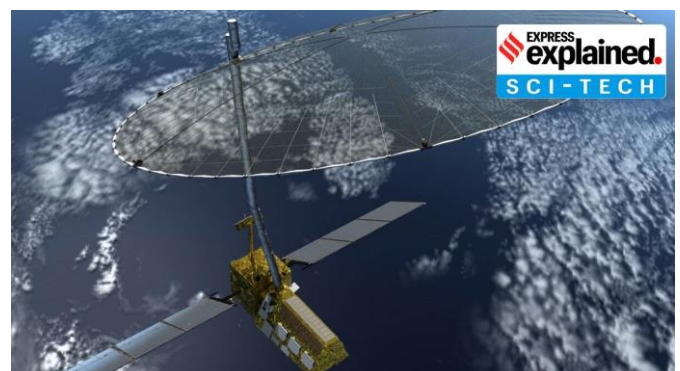
### **NISAR-the joint Earth-Observing mission of NASA and ISRO**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *NASA and ISRO are collaborating on developing a satellite called NISAR, which will detect movements of the planet's surface as small as 0.4 inches over areas about half the size of a tennis court. The satellite will be launched in 2022 from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota, India, into a near-polar orbit and will scan the globe every 12 days over the course of its three-year mission of imaging the Earth's land, ice sheets and sea ice to give an “unprecedented” view of the planet.*

#### **What is NISAR?**

- It's an SUV-sized satellite that is being jointly developed by the space agencies of the US and India.
- The partnership agreement was signed between NASA and ISRO in September 2014, according to which NASA will provide one of the radars for the satellite, a high-rate communication subsystem for science data, GPS receivers and a payload data subsystem.





- ISRO, on the other hand, will provide the spacecraft bus, the second type of radar (called the S-band radar), the launch vehicle and associated launch services.
- Significantly, NISAR will be equipped with the largest reflector antenna ever launched by NASA and its primary goals include tracking subtle changes in the Earth's surface, spotting warning signs of imminent volcanic eruptions, helping to monitor groundwater supplies and tracking the rate at which ice sheets are melting.
- The name NISAR is short for NASA-ISRO-SAR. SAR here refers to the synthetic aperture radar that NASA will use to measure changes in the surface of the Earth. Essentially, SAR refers to a technique for producing high-resolution images. Because of the precision, the radar can penetrate clouds and darkness, which means that it can collect data day and night in any weather.
- During the course of three years, the images will allow scientists to track changes in croplands, hazard sites and will help them to monitor crises such as volcanic eruptions.
- The images will be able to capture changes in the Earth caused by certain activities. For instance, drawing drinking water from an underground aquifer can leave signs on the surface. If too much of it is drawn out, the ground begins to sink, which is what scientists believe the images will be able to show them.



# Mains

## GS I

### How to treat unpaid work

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *Women everywhere carry a disproportionately higher burden of unpaid work, namely, unpaid domestic services as well as unpaid care of children, the old and the disabled for their respective households. Though this work contributes to overall well-being at the household level and collectively at the national level, it is invisible in the national database and particularly in national policies.*

#### Details:

- This work is repetitive, boring and frequently drudgery — a 24-hour job without remuneration, promotions or retirement benefits. It restricts opportunities for women in the economy and in life.
- Women do this job not necessarily because they like it or are efficient in it, but because it is imposed on them by patriarchal norms, which are the roots of all pervasive gender inequalities. This unequal division of unpaid work between women and men is unfair and unjust and it deprives women of equal opportunities as men.
- For political parties to recognise this work is a positive development, and the demand for wages for housewives has emerged from this concern. However, its implementation may create problems such as affordability of the government and calculation of the amounts.
- Women may not be eager to enter the labour market. More important, these wages may confirm unpaid work as women's work only, which would deny opportunities to women in the wider world. Payment of pension to old women (60+ years) may be a better idea to compensate them for their unpaid work.

#### What the government could do

- What governments could do is recognise this unpaid work in the national database by a sound time-use survey and use the data in national policies.
- Also, they could relieve women's burden of unpaid work by improving technology (e.g. better fuel for cooking), better infrastructure (e.g. water at the doorstep), shifting some unpaid work to the mainstream economy (e.g. childcare, care of the disabled, and care of the chronically sick), and by making basic services (e.g. health and transportation) accessible to women.
- Also, they could redistribute the work between men and women by providing different incentives and disincentives to men (e.g. mandatory training of men in housework, childcare, etc.) and financial incentives for sharing housework. These measures will give free time to women and open up new opportunities to them.

#### Unpaid work and the economy

- What is critical is to understand the linkages between unpaid work and the economy. The household produces goods and services for its members, and if GDP is a measure of the total production and consumption of the economy, it has to incorporate this work by accepting the household as a sector of the economy.
- At the macro level, unpaid work subsidises the private sector by providing it a generation of workers (human capital) and takes care of wear and tear of labour who are family members. The private sector would have paid much higher wages and earned lower profits in the absence of unpaid work.



- Unpaid work also subsidises the government by taking care of the old, sick and the disabled. The state would have spent huge amounts in the absence of unpaid work. Unpaid work is a privately produced public good which is critical for the sustenance of the mainstream economy.
- This work, therefore, needs to be integrated with the mainstream economy and policies. It will be up to public policies then to improve the productivity of unpaid workers, reduce their burden, and tap their potential in development, as the household could also be an important economic sector.
- By excluding this work from the economy, macroeconomics shows a clear male bias. It is not surprising that many economists call economics “a wrongly conceived discipline” that is narrow, partial and truncated.
- There is an urgent need to expand the purview of economics not only for gender justice but mainly for moving towards a realistic economics.

## GS II

### The debate around the Places of Worship Act

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** Earlier this month, the Supreme Court asked the Centre to respond to a petition that challenges the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. The law was enacted to freeze the status of all places of worship in the country as on August 15, 1947. An exception was made to keep the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi dispute out of its ambit as the structure was then the subject of litigation. The dispute ended after the court ruled that the land on which the Masjid stood should be handed over to the Hindu community for the construction of a Ram temple. The challenge to the Act questions the legality of the prohibition it imposes on any community laying claim to the places of worship of another.

#### **What does the 1991 Act say?**

- The Act says that no person shall convert any place of worship of any religious denomination into one of a different denomination or section.
- It contains a declaration that a place of worship shall continue to be as it was on August 15, 1947.
- Significantly, it prohibits any legal proceedings from being instituted regarding the character of a place of worship, and declares that all suits and appeals pending before any court or authority on the cut-off date regarding the conversion of the character of a place of worship shall abate.
- In other words, all pending cases will come to an end, and no further proceedings can be filed. However, any suit or proceedings relating to any conversion of status that happened after the cut-off date can continue.
- The 1991 Act will not apply in some cases. It will not apply to ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains that are covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
- It will also not apply to any suit that has been finally settled or disposed of, any dispute that has been settled by the parties before the 1991 Act came into force, or to the conversion of any place that took place by acquiescence.





- The Act specifically exempted from its purview the place of worship commonly referred to as Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. It was done to allow the pending litigation to continue as well as to preserve the scope for a negotiated settlement.
- Anyone contravening the prohibition on converting the status of a place of worship is liable to be imprisoned for up to three years, and a fine.
- Those abetting or participating in a criminal conspiracy to commit this offence will also get the same punishment.

#### **What are the grounds of challenge?**

- The petitioner, Ashwini Upadhyay of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), argues that the Act takes away the rights of communities such as Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains to reclaim the sites of their places of worship through legal proceedings.
- It amounts to taking away the right of the people to seek justice through the courts and obtain a judicial remedy. He also contends that the cut-off date of August 15, 1947, is arbitrary and irrational.
- The petition contends that the legislation legalises the actions of invaders in the past who demolished places of worship. It wonders how the law could exempt the birthplace of Ram, but not that of Krishna.
- It is also said the law violates the right to practise and propagate religion, as well as the right to manage and administer places of worship. Further, it goes against the principle of secularism and the state's duty to preserve and protect religious and cultural heritage.

#### **What has the SC said on the status freeze?**

- In its final verdict on the Ayodhya dispute, the Supreme Court had observed that the Act “imposes a non-derogable obligation towards enforcing our commitment to secularism”.
- The court went on to say: “Non-retrogression is a foundational feature of the fundamental constitutional principles, of which secularism is a core component.”
- The court described the law as one that preserved secularism by not permitting the status of a place of worship to be altered after Independence.
- In words of caution against further attempts to change the character of a place of worship, the five-judge Bench said, “Historical wrongs cannot be remedied by the people taking the law in their own hands. In preserving the character of places of public worship, Parliament has mandated in no uncertain terms that history and its wrongs shall not be used as instruments to oppress the present and the future.”

#### **What are the implications of the case?**

- Some Hindu organisations have been laying claim to the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi and the Shahi Idgah in Mathura.
- Civil suits have been filed in a Mathura court seeking the shifting of the 17th-century mosque from the spot that some claim is the birthplace of Lord Krishna.
- Any order that strikes down or dilutes the 1991 law on the status of places of worship is likely to influence the outcome of such proceedings.

### **The row over Myanmar refugees in Mizoram**

(Source: [The Hindu](http://www.thehindu.com) )

**Context:** *With the February 1 military coup in Myanmar, Mizoram is caught between a humanitarian urge and India's policy on refugees. At least 1,000 people from the adjoining Chin State of Myanmar are said to have crossed over to Mizoram, fearing a military crackdown. The Mizoram government favours providing refuge to the Chins, who are ethnically related to the majority Mizos in the State, but the Ministry of Home*

*Affairs has made it clear that “India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereon”.*

### **When did the refugees start arriving?**

- Mizoram began feeling the heat a month after the military coup when three police personnel crossed over to Lungkawlh village in Serchhip district.
- Within weeks, the number increased to almost 400. According to the State Home Department, a majority of those who sought asylum were deserters from Myanmar’s police and fire services department. They had to flee after joining the civil resistance movement.
- The influx of Myanmar nationals was reported from Hnahthial, Champhai, Saitual and Serchhip districts. Most of the refugees waded across the Tiau River that runs along much of Mizoram’s 510-km border with Myanmar.

### **Is this the first time this has happened?**

- Extremism, counter-insurgency and sectarian violence have driven people out of Myanmar into India in the past as well. More than 1,200 Buddhists and Christians from Myanmar’s Arakan State had taken refuge in Mizoram’s Lawngtlai district in 2017.
- They fled their homes after the Myanmar Army clashed with the extremist Arakan Army. The refugees stayed back for more than a year. Thousands of Chins are said to be living in Mizoram for more than 40 years now.
- There have been other such instances, though not on this scale. Manipur, too, has been dealing with the influx issue, although on a smaller scale, for a long time. The villages of the Kuki-Zomi have often had people crossing over from Myanmar.

### **How porous is the border?**

- Unlike India’s border with Pakistan and Bangladesh, much of the border with Myanmar is without any fence. The Assam Rifles personnel guard the border but a tough terrain comes in the way of maintaining airtight vigil.
- There have been calls to fence the border. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP from Arunachal Pradesh, Tapir Gao, said fencing the border would also help in checking the movement of extremist groups to and from Myanmar.
- Some are against the idea, insisting that a fence would make “free movement” of border residents into each other’s country difficult.
- The two countries had in 2018 agreed to streamline the movement of people within 16 km of the border on either side. There are more than 250 villages with about 3,00,000 people living within 10 km of the India-Myanmar border.

### **Where do the Centre and Mizoram stand now?**

- As a humanitarian gesture, the Mizoram government on February 26 issued a standard operating procedure (SOP) to Deputy Commissioners of border districts to facilitate the entry of refugees and migrants.
- The SOP stated that all Myanmar nationals entering Mizoram in connection with the political developments in the country shall be properly identified.
- The government said those facing a threat to their lives should be treated as refugees, given medical care, relief and rehabilitation and security. But the SOP was revoked on March 6 after the Centre conveyed its displeasure to the State over the development.
- On March 10, the North East Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a letter to chief secretaries of Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Director General of Assam Rifles, directing them not to allow refugees from Myanmar and take appropriate action as per law. The Ministry pointed out that State governments have no powers to grant “refugee status to any foreigner”.

- Mizoram is not happy about this. “They are like family ... we share ethnic ties with them,” said Rajya Sabha member from Mizoram K. Vanlalvena. “We do not want the Indian government to offer them full-time citizenship or employment. The only thing we ask is to let these refugees stay until their country returns to normalcy.”

## **Governing Delhi**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs in the Lok Sabha. The Bill states clarification of the expression “Government” and addressing “ambiguities” in legislative provisions as its core objectives. Underlining Delhi’s status as a Union Territory, modifications have been proposed to four sections of its three-decade-old predecessor, the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991. The legislation was enacted to supplement constitutional provisions for the Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers for the NCT of Delhi in 1992.*

### **What are the changes sought?**

- The amendments seek to promote “harmonious relations between the legislature and the executive” and provide for rules made by the Legislative Assembly of Delhi to be “consistent with the rules of the House of the People” or the Lok Sabha.
- The Bill also seeks to define the responsibilities of the elected government and the Lieutenant Governor along the constitutional scheme of governance of the NCT interpreted by the Supreme Court in recent judgments regarding the division of powers between the two entities.
- The amendments also propose to ensure that the Lieutenant Governor is “necessarily granted an opportunity” to exercise powers entrusted to him under proviso to Clause (4) of Article 239AA of the Constitution.
- The clause provides for a Council of Ministers headed by a Chief Minister for the NCT to “aid and advise the Lieutenant Governor” in the exercise of his functions for matters in which the Legislative Assembly has the power to make laws.

### **How did it come about?**

- The genesis of the Bill lies in the administrative tug of war between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-led Delhi government and then Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G) Najeeb Jung, immediately after the former came to power for the second time in 2015.
- The L-G refused to send files regarding three reserved subjects — land, police and public order — to the Chief Minister’s office.
- Between early 2015 and mid-August 2016, several orders issued by the Delhi government related to matters such as transfer of bureaucrats, setting up of Commissions of Inquiry and the administration of the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB), were either declared void or reversed by the L-G citing procedural lacunae ranging from lack of approval from his office to not being constitutionally empowered to take such decisions.
- The issue of which entity was “the competent authority” was taken by the Delhi government to the Delhi High Court which, in August 2016, held that the L-G had “complete control” of matters related to the NCT and “nothing will happen without the concurrence of the L-G”.
- However, the judgment held that the L-G was bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers in some matters. The Delhi government then moved the Supreme Court.



- On July 4, 2018, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court held that the “real authority to take decisions lies in the elected government”. The NCT’s government, it also ruled, needed only to inform the L-G of its “well-deliberated” decisions instead of obtaining his “concurrence” in every issue of day-to-day governance.
- On February 14, 2019, a two-judge bench hearing the issue of Services — the transfer and posting of bureaucrats — and power over the ACB delivered a split verdict. This verdict stated that while the L-G was free to form an opinion on any matter, “any” did not mean in every “trifling matter” and the L-G should not intervene routinely but only in matters fundamental to Delhi.
- Two years later, on February 3, 2021, the Union Cabinet approved the Bill for introduction in Parliament during the Budget Session.

### Why does it matter?

- Some experts believe that the amendments will turn the administrative clock of the Capital back by several decades and take it to the era of the Delhi Metropolitan Council, which was considered a mere municipal body, and “snatch” the right of the city’s citizens to vote for those they deem fit to administer them.
- Other experts argue that the elected government of Delhi had always been a local administrative body to be headed by the L-G as an administrator.
- Experts on both sides of the argument agree that the proposed amendment has put paid to the question of statehood for Delhi, which had been demanded by major political players in the capital, including the AAP, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress.
- The immediate impact of the Bill will be to render void several committees created in the Delhi Legislative Assembly on administrative issues over the last six years allowing direct communication between MLAs and bureaucrats.

### What lies ahead?

- Terming the Bill as an instrument of the BJP-led Centre to curtail the Delhi government’s powers, the AAP has hit the streets to demand its withdrawal. It may challenge the Bill in court, according to party insiders.
- However, the opposition BJP has welcomed the Bill saying the AAP government had been functioning in “unconstitutional ways”.

### An unconscionable act

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3644221.ece) )

**Context:** *The world has been watching Myanmar descend into a brutal military dictatorship again. The scenes from the past few weeks have been terrible — peaceful protestors being killed, detained, and communities terrorised. In all this, the people of Myanmar have been pleading with the international community to support them in their hour of need. It is incumbent upon Myanmar’s neighbours to stand up for rule of law, democracy and human rights.*

### Engaging in doublespeak

- While many in India are supportive of those in Myanmar calling for democracy, the Indian government has been engaging in doublespeak.
- On the one hand, India has made relatively strong, laudable statements as part of the UN Security Council and at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in support of the people of Myanmar. On the other, the government is simultaneously detaining and preparing to deport Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.



- The Ministry of Home Affairs has also recently issued a diktat to border States to check “illegal influx” from Myanmar to India. The Ministry wrongly labels those fleeing into India as “infiltrators”, arguing that they are not to be considered refugees as India has not signed the UN Refugee Convention.
- This is an erroneous position in international law. These individuals would fall within the legal definition of refugees i.e., those who have a well-founded fear of persecution, and the customary international law norm of non-refoulement is legally binding.
- This means that no State can send individuals back to a situation of danger, which is clearly the case in Myanmar. Non-refoulement applies to those countries which have signed the conventions as well as those that have not.
- This is of particular relevance to those police and security personnel refusing illegal orders to attack protesters, instead seeking refuge in India, as multiple credible reports indicate.
- There are growing calls from the UN and states for the atrocities committed by Myanmar security forces in the course of these protests to be investigated as possible crimes against humanity, given their scale, coordination and their widespread and systematic nature.
- Furthermore, this week, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), a UN established body that is mandated to investigate and build case files for international crimes committed in Myanmar since 2011, issued a public call to security personnel to reach out and provide information regarding illegal orders and policies, which are a necessary component of building cases against those higher up in the chain of command.
- India must shelter these individuals and allow the IIMM access, should they indicate willingness to cooperate in these international investigations.

### **Crimes against the Rohingya**

- Coinciding with the mass crackdown against protesters in Myanmar this month, reports emerged of Rohingya refugees being rounded up and detained in India, in preparation for deportation to Myanmar. The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in India was denied access to individuals detained in Delhi.
- The Rohingya are refugees who have fled years of atrocities and a genocidal campaign, and must not be sent back to Myanmar where their lives are in certain danger. There are also international legal proceedings ongoing in relation to the Rohingya.
- A case before the International Court of Justice relates to violations of the Genocide Convention by Myanmar, and has been brought against it by The Gambia, with Canada, the Netherlands and Maldives joining the case recently.
- Simultaneously, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court is investigating international crimes against the Rohingya. These international legal proceedings are indications of the seriousness and gravity of the crimes against the Rohingya, which India would do well to heed.
- To turn its back on the people of Myanmar would be unconscionable now, and India would be in breach of international law in doing so.

### **South Asia's power trade**

(Source: [The Hindu](http://TheHindu.com) )

**Context:** India has released new rules governing the trade of electricity across its borders. They define the contours of the South Asian electricity market, placing clear limits on who can buy from and sell into India. This has ramifications for the electricity markets of Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, which, to varying degrees, have aligned their energy futures with the Indian market. The new rules show that India's approach is unmistakeably political. It attempts to balance China's growing influence in the region with developmental aims, both its own and the region's.

### **Rules on ownership**

- Of central importance is the ownership of power plants wishing to sell to India. In masterful legalese, the rules strongly discourage the participation of plants owned by a company situated in “a third country with whom India shares a land border” and “does not have a bilateral agreement on power sector cooperation with India”.
- Chinese companies hoping to establish plants in Nepal, Bhutan, or Bangladesh will presumably have a hard time making good on their investments with the Indian market cut off.
- The rules place the same security restrictions on tripartite trade, say from Bhutan to Bangladesh through Indian territory. To make things even more airtight, the rules establish elaborate surveillance procedures to detect changes in the ownership patterns of entities trading with India.
- With this, it seems South Asia’s electricity politics has hit a holding pattern after several years of unpredictability. In the months after the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014, India used the framework of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to make historical moves towards liberalising electricity trade. China soon began to make its presence felt in the region, and India responded by walking back its free-market impulses.
- It imposed stringent restrictions that dissuaded everyone other than Indian and government entities from participating.
- That threatened to undermine private sector participation and promising joint ventures across the region. Nepal and Bhutan protested for years, leading to new guidelines in 2018 that tried to find a middle ground; these rules formalise that balancing act. They allow private sector participation but exclude Chinese investments.

### **India-centricity no advantage**

- The institutional structure that has emerged through this churn over the last decade is India-centric. The Government of India, through ministries, regulators, planning bodies and utilities, determines the rules of the road.
- India’s geographic centrality combines with its economic heft to give it a natural advantage in determining the shape of the market; all electrons must pass through it and most electrons will be bought by it.
- The prospect of an independent regional body governing trade, championed by theorists, is thus unlikely to begin with.
- It is nearly impossible to fathom in the context of an ailing South Asian project characterised by low levels of trust. India will thus enjoy pre-eminent rule-setting powers, but continually attract the ire of its smaller neighbours who feel their economic growth is being stunted by decisions in Delhi.

### **Mega solar project**

- These rules provoke some larger questions that must be tackled soon. India’s ambition of anchoring a global super-grid called One Sun One World One Grid, or OSOWOG (<https://bit.ly/3f4lcDj>) needs an institutional vision.
- It aims to begin with connections to West Asia and Southeast Asia and then spread to Africa and beyond. The South Asian lesson, contained in these latest rules, is that political realities will constantly collide with, and damage, expansive visions of borderless trade. Impartial institutions for planning, investments and conflict resolution are crucial to multi-country power pools.
- Managing the needs of three relatively small neighbouring economies in South Asia has consumed large amounts of time and political capital for the better part of a decade. Papering over the cracks of a power pool of a dozen countries or more will be much harder. An ad hoc design also makes the Indian project less attractive to countries looking to sign up to a power trading project.
- The logic underpinning OSOWOG is sound. Renewable energy transitions benefit from grids that cover vast areas and diverse geographic conditions. Multi-country grids allow for the unpredictable outputs from renewable energy plants to be balanced across countries, thus avoiding expensive country-specific balancing technologies such as hydropower and gas plants.



## Countering China

- It is quite likely, though, that India's plans will be one among many in a soon-to-be competitive space. China, for example, has its own power pool ambitions.
- An attractive institutional model can lock countries into the pool by setting standards that investors and utilities plan towards and profit by.
- Once locked in, countries are thus unlikely to defect to other pools. The likely first battle will be in Southeast Asia, where China presently holds sway. A considered, stable institutional model will likely surpass anything China has to offer.
- It is worth considering releasing the vice-like grip on South Asia, aimed at countering China, by creating a rule-based regional institution that can counter Chinese offerings in other theatres.

## Structural pitfalls of MGNREGA

(Source: [Down to Earth](#) )

**Context:** *It was long known. But the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has, in a way, established the potential of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, as an instrument of public policy that can reduce the impact of calamities on rural livelihoods. Since the pandemic gripped the country, media reports have regularly highlighted how the programme has provided, among other things, employment to the highest number of households, surpassing the previous record in 2011-12.*

### Details:

- The liberal proponents of MGNREGA have underscored how it has provided social protection to the poor households in rural India, particularly to those who substantially depend on unskilled manual labour for sustenance.
- Anecdotal evidence shows how the programme has offered a safety net to tens of thousands of migrant labourers, who were forced to return to their native villages after the nationwide lockdown was abruptly imposed in the last week of March to curb the spread of covid-19.
- The Union government has also acknowledged the role MGNREGA plays in mitigating rural distress by allowing its implementation, right from the second fortnight of April and subsequently, by allocating an additional sum of Rs 40,000 crore over and above the budget estimate of Rs 63,000 crore.
- However, critics of the programme argue that there are some inherent flaws in the design of schemes under MGNREGA, which limit its effectiveness as a tool of poverty alleviation.
- One, the programme is primarily targeted at the states with high incidence of poverty. But because of its "open-endedness" better-governed states manage to capture a much higher share of the spending under MGNREGA despite their relatively lower levels of poverty. For instance, in 2014-15, the combined share of the six high poverty states (HPS) — Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh — in the total expenditure was only half of their share of rural poor.
- MGNREGA spending in Bihar that year was Rs 1,056.33 crore, whereas Tamil Nadu with less than one-fifth of Bihar's rural poor spent Rs 3,623.89 crore, or three-and-a-half-times more than the latter, on the programme.
- The second design flaw relates to the quality of assets created under the programme. Though the statute mandates the creation of "productive assets with prescribed quality and durability" as one of the core objectives of MGNREGA, a structured quality monitoring mechanism has not been embedded in the programme.
- As a result, it is contended that the programme is overwhelmingly focused on short-term unproductive employment generation, with a marginal contribution to the long-term objectives of soil and water conservation, strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor and drought-proofing.



- Some operational issues also continue to affect implementation of the programme. Arguably, the most serious implementation problem pertains to the inordinate delays in payment of wages to the workers despite the legal requirement of ensuring it within 15 days of closure of the muster roll. A 2018 study, led by Rajendran Narayanan of Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, based on a large sample survey, found that in 2017-18, only 32 per cent of wage payments were made within the prescribed 15 days.
- Therefore, while evaluating how MGNREGA has contributed to rural livelihoods during the ongoing public health crisis, we need to analyse whether the programme has made some course corrections over the years to address these structural and operational hitches.
- Let us begin with the reported spike in employment generation under the programme during April-July, which is usually the peak period of demand for unskilled jobs in rural areas.
- During the current financial year of 2020-21, the overall employment in terms of person-days during April-July increased by nearly 50 per cent, as compared to the corresponding period in 2019-20. But the increase has been substantially higher—81 per cent — in the six HPS states.
- When compared with the other states, the share of HPS states in the total employment generated across the country has risen from 27.83 per cent in 2014-15 and 30.51 per cent in 2019-20 to 36.81 per cent in 2020-21.

### **LOPSIDED EMPLOYMENT UNDER MGNREGA...**

Employment generation in April-July increased by 50% in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20. But the increase was substantially higher in the six high poverty states (HPS) (figures in million person-days)

STATE	2014-15	2019-20	2020-21	% change in FY21 from FY20
Bihar	24.54	60.49	99.95	65.22
Chhattisgarh	54.19	65.66	93.10	41.80
Jharkhand	19.60	28.71	35.06	22.12
Madhya Pradesh	89.55	84.54	132.93	57.24
Odisha	22.52	28.02	74.57	166.17
Uttar Pradesh	39.06	86.20	203.97	136.62
Total HPS	249.47	353.63	639.58	80.87
Total All states	896.38	11,59.09	1,734.85	49.67
Share of HPS (in%)	27.83	30.51	36.87	
Total other States	646.92	805.46	1,095.27	35.98

- But the figure is still well below the states' share in rural poverty. These numbers point towards an acute job crisis in rural areas during the lockdown period, particularly in poorer regions.
- Since non-farm jobs were not available during the lean period either in the formal or informal sectors, unlike in a normal year owing to the restrictions imposed by the lockdown, the labour-dependent households had no option but to seek subsistence support under MGNREGA.
- An analysis of demand for MGNREGA works during the peak month of June between 2018-19 and 2020-21, also corroborates this conjecture.
- While the overall demand for MGNREGA increased by 71 per cent in June 2020-21, as compared to the same period in 2019-20, the increase was substantially higher in all the HPS states, except Chhattisgarh. The surge in demand was above 200 per cent in Uttar Pradesh and Odisha.
- Another notable finding is that though there has been a significant improvement in the share of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the aggregate employment generated during 2020-21 as compared to 2014-15, it is disproportionately lower in comparison to their share in rural poverty (see '...Has only led to inequitable benefits for poor states').





## ...HAS ONLY LED TO INEQUITABLE BENEFITS FOR POOR STATES

Share of the six high poverty states (HPS) in total employment generated under MGNREGA in April-July is much less when compared with their share in rural poverty (figures in %)

STATE	Share in 2014-15	Share in 2019-20	Share in 2020-21	Share in Poverty
Bihar	2.74	5.22	5.76	14.79
Chhattisgarh	6.05	5.66	5.37	4.10
Jharkhand	2.19	2.48	2.02	4.80
Madhya Pradesh	9.99	7.29	7.66	8.81
Odisha	2.51	2.42	4.30	5.82
Uttar Pradesh	4.36	7.44	11.76	22.12

Source: <https://nrega.nic.in>

- In case of Odisha too, the noticeable improvement in employment generation does not match with its high-level of poverty. Jharkhand's share in the employment created has not risen and it is less than half of its share in poverty.
- The share of Madhya Pradesh in total employment has actually declined between 2014-15 and 2020-21. Only in the case of Chhattisgarh, its share in the employment generation has consistently exceeded its share in rural poverty.

## Why the electoral bonds scheme must go

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** The Supreme Court, after a brief hearing on March 24, reserved orders on the question of whether or not to stay the electoral bond scheme, ahead of the upcoming State elections. For the last three years, electoral bonds have been the dominant method of political party funding in India. In their design and operation, they allow for limitless and anonymous corporate donations to political parties. For this reason, they are deeply destructive of democracy, and violate core principles of the Indian Constitution.

### A blow against democracy

- If democracy means anything, it must mean this: when citizens cast their votes for the people who will represent them in Parliament, they have the right to do so on the basis of full and complete information.
- And there is no piece of information more important than the knowledge of who funds political parties.
- Across democratic societies, and through time, it has been proven beyond doubt that money is the most effective way of buying policy, of engaging in regulatory capture, and of skewing the playing field in one's own favour.
- This is enabled to a far greater degree when citizens are in the dark about the source of money: it is then impossible to ever know — or assess — whether a government policy is nothing more than a quid pro quo to benefit its funders.
- The Indian Supreme Court has long held — and rightly so — that the “right to know”, especially in the context of elections, is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression under the Indian Constitution.
- By keeping this knowledge from citizens and voters, the electoral bonds scheme violates fundamental tenets of our democracy. \
- It is equally important that if a democracy is to thrive, the role of money in influencing politics ought to be limited. In many advanced countries, for example, elections are funded publicly, and principles of parity ensure that there is not too great a resource gap between the ruling party and the opposition. The



purpose of this is to guarantee a somewhat level playing field, so that elections are a battle of ideas, and not vastly unequal contests where one side's superior resources enable it to overwhelm the other.

- For this reason, in most countries where elections are not publicly funded, there are caps or limits on financial contributions to political parties.
- The electoral bonds scheme, however, removes all pre-existing limits on political donations, and effectively allows well-resourced corporations to buy politicians by paying immense sums of money. This defeats the entire purpose of democracy, which as B.R. Ambedkar memorably pointed out, was not just to guarantee one person, one vote, but one vote one value.
- However, not only do electoral bonds violate basic democratic principles by allowing limitless and anonymous donations to political parties, they do so asymmetrically. Since the donations are routed through the State Bank of India, it is possible for the government to find out who is donating to which party, but not for the political opposition to know.
- This, in turn, means that every donor is aware that the central government can trace their donations back to them.
- Given India's long-standing misuse of investigative agencies by whichever government occupies power at the Centre, this becomes a very effective way to squeeze donations to rival political parties, while filling the coffers of the incumbent ruling party.
- Statistics bear this out: while we do not know who has donated to whom, we do know that a vast majority of the immensely vast sums donated through multiple electoral cycles over the last three years, have gone to the ruling party, i.e. the Bharatiya Janata Party.

### **Gaps in government's defence**

- The government has attempted to justify the electoral bonds scheme by arguing that its purpose is to prevent the flow of black money into elections.
- The journalist Nitin Sethi has already debunked this rationale in a detailed 10-part investigative report, which has also highlighted reservations within the government as well as by the Election Commission of India to the electoral bonds scheme.
- That apart, this justification falls apart under the most basic scrutiny: it is entirely unclear what preventing black money has to do with donor anonymity, making donations limitless, and leaving citizens in the dark.
- Indeed, as the electoral bonds scheme allows even foreign donations to political parties (which can often be made through shell companies) the prospects of institutional corruption (including by foreign sources) increases with the electoral bonds scheme, instead of decreasing.
- It is important to be clear that the objections to the electoral bonds scheme, highlighted above, are not objections rooted in political morality, or in public policy. They are constitutional objections.
- The right to know has long been enshrined as a part of the right to freedom of expression; furthermore, uncapping political donations and introducing a structural bias into the form of the donations violate both the guarantee of equality before law, as well as being manifestly arbitrary.

### **The judiciary needs to act**

- This brings us to the all-important role of the courts. One of the most critical functions of an independent judiciary in a functioning democracy is to referee the fundamentals of the democratic process.
- Governments derive their legitimacy from elections, and it is elections that grant governments the mandate to pursue their policy goals, without undue interference from courts.
- However, for just that reason, it is of vital importance that the process that leads up to the formation of the government be policed with particular vigilance, as any taint at that stage will taint all that follows.
- In other words, the electoral legitimacy of the government is questionable if the electoral process has become questionable.

- And since the government itself cannot — in good faith — regulate the process that it itself is subject to every five years, the courts remain the only independent body that can adequately umpire and enforce the ground rules of democracy.
- It is for this reason that courts must be particularly sensitive to and cognisant of laws and rules that seek to skew the democratic process and the level playing field, and that seek to entrench one-party rule over multi-party democracy. There is little doubt that in intent and in effect, the electoral bonds scheme is guilty of both. Thus, it deserves to be struck down by the courts as unconstitutional.
- In this regard, the conduct of the Supreme Court so far has been disappointing. The petition challenging the constitutional validity of the electoral bonds scheme was filed in 2018. The case, which is absolutely vital to the future health of Indian democracy, has been left unheard for three years.
- The Supreme Court's inaction in this case is not neutral: it directly benefits the ruling party which as we have seen, has received a vast bulk of electoral bond funding through the multiple State and one general election since 2018, and creates a continuing distortion of democracy.
- It is a matter of some optimism that a start was finally made when the Court heard the application for stay before this round of elections. One can only hope that the Court will stay the scheme so that it does not further distort the coming round of elections, and then proceed to hear and decide the full case, in short order.

### **Remove the wedges in India-Bangladesh ties**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The friendship between India and Bangladesh is historic, evolving over the last 50 years. India's political, diplomatic, military and humanitarian support during Bangladesh's Liberation War played an important role towards Bangladesh's independence. Nearly 3,900 Indian soldiers gave up their lives and an estimated 10 million Bangladeshi refugees took shelter in India.*

#### **Now it is about cooperation**

- Post-Independence, the India-Bangladesh relationship has oscillated as Bangladesh passed through different regimes.
- The relationship remained cordial until the assassination of Bangladesh's founding President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 15, 1975, followed by a period of military rule and the rise of General Ziaur Rahman who became President and also assassinated in 1981. It thawed again between 1982-1991 when a military-led government by General H.M. Ershad ruled the country.
- Since Bangladesh's return to parliamentary democracy in 1991, relations have gone through highs and lows. However, in the last decade, India-Bangladesh relations have warmed up, entering a new era of cooperation, and moving beyond historical and cultural ties to become more assimilated in the areas of trade, connectivity, energy, and defence.
- Bangladesh and India have achieved the rare feat of solving their border issues peacefully by ratifying the historic Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, where enclaves were swapped allowing inhabitants to choose their country of residence and become citizens of either India or Bangladesh.
- The Bangladesh government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has uprooted anti-India insurgency elements from its borders, making the India-Bangladesh border one of the region's most peaceful, and allowing India to make a massive redeployment of resources to its more contentious borders elsewhere.
- Bangladesh today is India's biggest trading partner in South Asia with exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 at \$9.21 billion and imports at \$1.04 billion. India has offered duty free access to multiple Bangladeshi products.
- Trade could be more balanced if non-tariff barriers from the Indian side could be removed. On the development front, cooperation has deepened, with India extending three lines of credit to Bangladesh in recent years amounting to \$8 billion for the construction of roads, railways, bridges, and ports.



- However, in eight years until 2019, only 51% of the first \$800 million line of credit has been utilised whilst barely any amount from the next two lines of credit worth \$6.5 billion has been mobilised. This has been mostly due to red-tapism from India's end, and slow project implementation on Bangladesh's end.
- Bangladeshis make up a large portion of tourists in India, outnumbering all tourists arriving from western Europe in 2017, with one in every five tourists being a Bangladeshi. Bangladesh accounts for more than 35% of India's international medical patients and contributes more than 50% of India's revenue from medical tourism.

### **The connectivity boost**

- Connectivity between the two countries has greatly improved. A direct bus service between Kolkata and Agartala runs a route distance of 500 km, as compared to the 1,650 km if it ran through the Chicken's Neck to remain within India.
- There are three passenger and freight railway services running between the two countries, with two more routes on their way to be restored. Recently, a 1.9 kilometre long bridge, the Maitri Setu, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, connecting Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh allows the shipment of goods from its Mongla and Chattogram (Chittagong) seaports carried by road, rail, and water ways to Agartala (Tripura) via Akhura; Dawki (Meghalaya) via Tamabil; Sutarkandi (Assam) via Sheola, and Srimantpur (Tripura) via Bibirbazar. This allows landlocked Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura to access open water routes through the Chattogram and Mongla ports.

### **Bones of contention**

- Despite the remarkable progress, the unresolved Teesta water sharing issue looms large. Border killings are yet to stop. The year 2020 saw the highest number of border shootings by the Border Security Force.
- The shots are fired at civilians, usually cattle traders, who are usually unarmed, trying to illegally cross the border. India not only has failed to stop the border killings but at times has even justified them.
- The statement by India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, during his recent visit to Dhaka, that "our shared objective should be a no crime-no death border...", raises questions as to why killings, and not due legal proceedings, are being followed in tackling border crimes.
- The Modi government's proposal to implement the National Register of Citizens across the whole of India reflects poorly on India-Bangladesh relations. It is not comprehensible why people of all religions and ethnicities barring Muslims will be excluded from the Bill. It remains to be seen how India addresses the deportation of illegal Muslim immigrants, some of whom claim to have come from Bangladesh.
- Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives, once considered traditional Indian allies, are increasingly tilting towards China due to the Asian giant's massive trade, infrastructural and defence investments in these countries.
- In spite of its 'Neighbourhood First Policy', India has been losing its influence in the region to China. Bhutan also does not abide by Indian influence as evinced by its withdrawal from the BBIN (Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal) motor vehicles agreement. China, in lieu of its cheque-book diplomacy, is well-entrenched in South Asia, including Bangladesh, with which it enjoys significant economic and defence relations.

### **Keeping the momentum going**

- India-Bangladesh relations have been gaining positive momentum over the last decade. As Bangladesh celebrates its 50 years of independence (March 26, 1971), India continues to be one of its most important neighbours and strategic partners.
- As the larger country, the onus is on India to be generous enough to let the water flow and ensure that people are not killed on the border for cattle even if it is illegal when there are appropriate means for justice.



- These small but important steps can remove long-standing snags in a relationship which otherwise is gradually coming of age in 50 years. To make the recent gains irreversible, both countries need to continue working on the three Cs — cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation.



## GS III

### **Draft amendment to Forest Conservation Act**

(Source: [Down to Earth](#) )

**Context:** *The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has proposed several amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 (FCA), which may enable infrastructure projects to come up in the forest areas more easily.*

#### **Details:**

- The purported documents containing draft amendments to the FCA were acquired for *Down to Earth* by the authors.
- The amendments were reportedly shared with the Union Cabinet in March 2021 but were not made public. They propose to “grant exemptions to railways, roads, tree plantations, oil exploration, wildlife tourism and ‘strategic’ projects in forests,” according to the documents in possession with the authors (see at the end).
- The proposal also aims to empower state governments to lease forest land to private individuals and corporations. If the proposed amendments come into force, they would dilute the provisions of the landmark 1996 decision of the Supreme Court in Godavarman case (TN Godavarman Thirumulkpad vs Union Of India & Ors).
- The case had started off as a petition to stop illegal felling of timber in the Nilgiri hills, but ended up expanding the coverage of the FCA.
- The amendments, however, propose two changes to strengthen the applicability of the FCA, according to the documents accessed:
  - To complete the process of forest identification in a time-bound manner
  - To enable the creation of ‘no-go’ areas, where specific projects would not be allowed

#### **The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**

- The FCA is the principal legislation that regulates deforestation in the country. It prohibits the felling of forests for any “non-forestry” use without prior clearance by the central government.
- The clearance process includes seeking consent from local forest rights-holders and from wildlife authorities. The Centre is empowered to reject such requests or allow it with legally binding conditions.
- In a landmark decision in 1996, the Supreme Court had expanded the coverage of FCA to all areas that satisfied the dictionary definition of a forest; earlier, only lands specifically notified as forests were protected by the enforcement of the FCA.
- The FCA is a brief legislation with only five sections. Section 1 defines the extent of coverage of the law, Section 2 restrictions of activities in forest areas, and the rest deals with the creation of advisory committees, powers of rule-making and penalties.
- The proposed amendments seek to make additions and changes to Section 1 and 2.

#### **Concessions to survey and exploration**

- In the proposed new section 1A, the documents stated, a proviso has been added to exempt application of FCA on forest land that is “used for underground exploration and production of oil and natural gas through Extended Reach Drilling (ERD) originating outside forest land.”
- The exemption is subject to terms and conditions laid down by the central government.
- A new explanation added to Section 2 says that “survey, reconnaissance, prospecting, exploration or investigation” for a future activity in the forest will not be classified as a “non-forestry activity”. This means such survey works would not require any prior permission from the government.

- The only exception is if the activity falls within a wildlife sanctuary, national park or tiger reserve.

### **Exemptions to Railways and roads inside forests**

- Land acquired by the railways for establishing a rail line or a road by a government agency before 25.10.1980 (the day the FCA was passed) would be exempted from seeking a forest clearance — if they put the land to the same use for which it was acquired.
- This is included in a proviso in the proposed section 1A. The exemption is subject to terms and conditions that the central government will lay down through guidelines, which include planting trees to compensate for the loss of forests.

### **Leases on forest land**

- Section 2(iii) of the FCA requires the central government's approval before assigning forest lands on lease to any private person / corporation / organisation not owned or controlled by the central government. This clause, however, has purportedly been deleted in the proposed amendment.
- This may mean that state governments can issue leases for the use of forest land without the Centre's prior approval.

### **Exemptions to plantations**

- A new explanation to Section 2 proposes to exempt plantation of native species of palm and oil-bearing trees from the definition of “non-forest purpose”.
- Since the FCA applies to conversion of forest land to “non-forest purpose”, this proposed amendment would effectively mean that anyone who wants to clear a natural forest to raise such plantations would not require any approval from the government.
- The government will only impose conditions for compensatory afforestation and payment of other levies and compensations.
- Another explanation to Section 2, according to the documents acquired, says that tree plantations or afforestation project would be exempted from the Act altogether if they come up on lands that are not notified under the Indian Forest Act, not identified by state expert committees as forests, or are described as forests in government records before 1980 and were so “till 31.12.2020.”

### **Exemptions to wildlife tourism, training infrastructure**

- The FCA classifies activities related to wildlife conservation as “non-forestry” purposes, which means such activities — building checkposts, communication infrastructure, fencing, boundary, etc — which include do not need a forest clearance.
- The proposed amendment claims to add to this list “forest and wildlife training infrastructure” and the “establishment of zoos and safaris” managed by the government or any authority under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. It may also add ecotourism facilities approved under the Forest Working Plan or Working Scheme approved by the central government.

### **States may grant forest clearance for strategic / security projects**

- The proposed Section 2A may empower the central government to provide for state government approval for projects on forest land for “strategic” or security projects of “national importance”, according to the documents accessed.
- There is no clarity on the scope of these terms, or on the determination of national importance, or illustrative examples of such projects.

### **Limiting the coverage of the Supreme Court's decision in *Godavarman***

- The Supreme Court in *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulkpad v. Union Of India & Ors.* (Godavarman) on December 12, 1996 had held that the meaning of “forest” under the FCA would include not only statutorily recognised forests; it would include any area recorded as forest in government records, regardless of ownership.

- The restrictions in the FCA would, therefore, be applicable to both *de jure* and *de facto* forests.
- The proposed amendment purportedly seeks to reduce the scope of this judgment by limiting the applicability of the FCA to only such land that has been:
  - Declared or notified as forest under the Indian Forest Act, 1927
  - Recorded as forest land in the government record prior to 25 October 1980, with the exception of such land if its use has been changed from forest to non-forest purpose prior to 12 December 1996
  - Identified as “forest” by a state government expert committee up to one year from the date of the amendment.
- The judgment interpreted the Act as it stood then. The addition of a specific definition thus limits the scope of the judgment. *De facto* forests are, therefore, excluded from the purview of the FCA.

### Creation of ‘No-Go’ areas

- The proposed amendment inserts a new Section 2B, which will allow the central government to delineate forest areas where conversion to specific non-forest uses would not be permitted for a fixed period of time.
- The delineation would be based on the basis of pre-defined criteria. This could mean, for instance, that a certain dense forest would not be allowed to be converted to a coal mine for the next 30 years, but it could be allowed to be cleared for a thermal power plant.
- In the Godavarman case, the Supreme Court had directed states to set up expert committees to draw up a list of forests that were not notified under the Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA), but deserved to be protected by the FCA.
- Several states are yet to comply with this requirement. The proposed section 1A(iii) claims to seek completion of this process within a year of the commencement of the amendment.

### Impact

- The proposed amendments are relevant to a bevy of forest land-related issues.
- The proposed Section 1A(ii) excludes from the purview of the FCA those forests which were described as such in government records (but not notified under the IFA) and were put to non-forest use by a government order issued before the 1996 judgment.
- The Karnataka High Court in *Gireesh Achar v. Government of India and Ors* case recently dealt with a matter wherein the state government had passed several orders from 1959 to 1969 to de-notify lands classified as “state forest” (but not notified under IFA), and to divert them for non-forest purposes.
- The lands were then allotted for rehabilitation of displaced people. The state government completed this process of dereservation of reserved forests in 2017.
- On March 4, 2021, the high court struck down actions of the state government for not taking “prior approval of the central government” as required under Section 2 of the FCA. It recommended criminal action against any officers responsible for allowing non-forest use of forest land.
- If the proposed amendment is enacted, the insertion of Section 1A(ii) would exempt the application of the FCA to the land which was converted to non-forest use by the Karnataka government.
- The exemption of zoos and safaris from “non-forest purpose” comes a year after the government proposed to open a zoo in Mumbai’s Aarey forest and a tiger safari in Madhya Pradesh led to objections from biologists.
- The Goa government since 1996 has formed several expert committees to demarcate the ‘private forests’ that are owned by individuals and are not notified as forests. But it is yet to conclude the process.
- In January 2021, the National Green Tribunal criticised the state government for the delay and warned of coercive action against officials responsible in case of further delays.
- On issuing leases on forest land, the Centre and the Himachal Pradesh government have communicated since 2018 on the state’s desire to enter names of lessees of forest land in the local land rights records.
- This would be to allow them to mortgage forest land in favour of financial institutions. This was despite central rules and guidelines clearly prohibiting such mortgage.



- While state governments may certainly continue to seek dilution of the FCA during enforcement, the removal of the requirement of central government approval is a step towards dilution of restrictions on forest land use by the centre itself.

### **Only 11% low-income countries make their data open: World Bank report**

(Source: [Down to Earth](#) )

**Context:** *Only 11 per cent low-income countries consistently made available with a license classifiable as 'open', the report flagged. The comparable rate for lower-middle-income countries was 19 per cent, for upper-middle-income countries 22 per cent and high-income countries 44 per cent.*

#### **Details:**

- Public intent data should be safeguarded as a global public good and resource to achieve equitable and sustainable development, the report released March 25, 2021 underscored.
- Public intent data, a foundation of public policies, can bring value to development by:
  - Improving service delivery
  - Prioritising scarce resources
  - Holding governments accountable and empowering individuals
- The exercise can also lead to a better emergency response during disasters — environmental, financial, health or conflict-related. For example, weather data, especially weather forecasts, can help people anticipate and prepare for extreme events, the report said.
- Odisha State Disaster Management Authority and the Government of Odisha, for example, invested in acquiring data on weather forecast and disaster response measures after the cyclone in 1999.
- The report flagged underinvestment in public intent data systems: Only half the countries had a national statistical plan that was fully funded as of 2019. While 93 per cent of high-income countries had a fully funded national statistical plan, not a single low-income country had one.
- According to the report:
  - Lower-income countries were unable to harness the potential of data due to a lack of institutions, decision-making autonomy, and financial resources, all of which hold back their effective implementation and effectiveness of data systems and governance frameworks.
  - Gaps in data on women and girls were particularly severe: Only 10 of the 54 gender-specific indicators (19 per cent) in the United Nations-mandated sustainable development goals were widely available. Only 24 per cent of the available gender-specific indicators were from 2010 or later.
  - The report acknowledged that gender impacts of the pandemic have been incompletely measured due to gaps in sex-disaggregated data.

#### **Data gaps in India**

- The report echoed concerns on assessment of global poverty by World Bank, which has been skewed due to absence data on poverty from India.
- India monitors 54 out of the 130 SDG indicators. While the overall number of monitored indicators has gone up, the country has dropped four indicators from its tracking list pointed out the State of India's Environment In figures, 2020.
- While the report underlined importance of updated granular data, it called for strategic repurposing of existing data. Using data collected for public or commercial purposes, by traditional or modern methods does not diminish their value to be reused for some other purpose. Data, that is, are inexhaustible.
- For example, the Government of Tanzania was able to profile the level of poverty across only 20 regions of the country's mainland using only household survey data.



- Real-time health data by using text messaging was able to cut the response time to outbreaks of disease by half. The technology was used after the 2012 Ebola outbreak to help implement quarantines and other protective measure by the Ugandan government.
- But reusing or repurposing data requires well-functioning systems. These systems, however, typically do not function well in many low- and middle-income countries, the report said.

### Way ahead

- Data can advance development outcomes, so the challenges in data governance systems needs to addressed, the World Bank said.
- Data offer tremendous potential to create value by improving program and policies, driving economies, and empowering citizens. The perspective of poor people has largely been absent from the global debate on data governance and urgently needs to be heard.
- Making data accessible to more users and creating systems that facilitate their reuse also opens the door for data to be misused in ways that can harm individuals or development objectives.
- The report flagged concerns over protection of personal data; misinformation; and attacks on software, networks and data systems.
- The mounting nature of such concerns has prompted calls for a new social contract around data. Governments can abuse citizens' data for political ends, cautioned the World Bank.

## Current Affairs Quiz

1) Consider the following statements:

1. Near Earth Objects are asteroids and comets which passes close to the Earth's orbit with perihelion distance less than 3 astronomical unit.
2. Comets are formed in the cold outer planetary system whereas rocky asteroids are formed in the warmer inner solar system between Mars and Jupiter.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

2) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Electoral Bond ?

1. The minimum face value of this bond is Rs.1000 and its maximum limit is Rs.1 crore.
2. These bonds are only redeemable in the designated account of a registered political party.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

- Electoral Bond is a financial instrument for making donations to political parties.
- The bonds are issued in multiples of Rs. 1,000, Rs. 10,000, Rs. 1 lakh, Rs. 10 lakh and Rs. 1 crore without any maximum limit.

3) Consider the following statements:

1. Open Market Operations is a quantitative tool under which the central bank usually purchases longer-term securities from the open market.
2. RBI uses Open Market Operations to smoothen the liquidity conditions through the year and minimise its impact on the interest rate and inflation rate levels.

Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

- Open Market Operations refers to buying and selling of bonds issued by the Government in the open market.
- In usual open market operations, the central bank will create money, use this money to buy **short term** Treasury securities from banks, individuals, institutions in the open market.

4) Which of the following recently released World Happiness Report 2021?

- a) United Nations
- b) World Bank
- c) Amnesty International
- d) IMF

Answer : a

5) Consider the following pairs:

Name	Product
1. Jaapi -	Conical Bamboo Hat
2. Gamosa -	Metal Crafts
3. Xorai -	Traditional Towel

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- 1 only
- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3

Answer : a

- Jaapi -conical hat made of bamboo
- Gamosa – Traditional towel
- Xorai – Metal crafts

6) Consider the following statements with respect to Helium:

- It is colourless, odourless, tasteless, inert and a noble gas.
- India's Rajmahal volcanic basin is the store house of helium.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

7) World Water Development Report, 2021 was recently published by-

- UNESCO
- UN Environment Programme
- UN Development Programme
- Food and Agricultural Organization

Answer : a

8) Which of the statements given below is/are incorrect with respect to Right to Counsel in Custody?

- It is right of an accused to be informed of the reasons for an arrest, the charges against him and the right to be provided legal assistance.
- In police custody, officials need permission of the court for questioning while in judicial custody, the investigating authority can interrogate a person.

Select the correct answer code:

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

- In the judicial custody in jails, while the person under responsibility of the magistrate, the Prison Manual comes into picture for routine conduct of the person.
- Thus in police custody, the investigating authority can interrogate a person while in judicial custody, officials need permission of the court for questioning.

9) Consider the following statements with respect to Resolution on Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka:

- The resolution was recently adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).



2. India has recently voted in favour of this resolution which is against Sri Lanka for war crimes against Tamils.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : a

- India along with 13 other countries abstained from voting on a resolution against Sri Lanka for war crimes against Tamils at United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva.

10) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to the judges of Supreme Court?

- 1. The senior most judge of the Supreme Court should alone be appointed as the Chief Justice of India (CJI) was decided in the Third Judges Case (1998).
- 2. The Constitution has not prescribed a minimum age for appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2
- From 1950 to 1973, the practice has been to appoint the seniormost judge of the Supreme Court as the chief justice of India. This established convention was violated in 1973 and 1977.
- This discretion of the government was curtailed by the Supreme Court in the Second Judges Case (1993), in which the Supreme Court ruled that the seniormost judge of the Supreme Court should alone be appointed to the office of the chief justice of India.

11) Consider the following statements about Parosmia:

- 1. It is a condition on loss of smell and taste, a well-known symptom of COVID-19.
- 2. Some common triggers of the condition includes roasted, toasted or grilled foods, coffee, chocolate and etc.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

**Parosmia**

- Anosmia is loss of smell and taste and it is a well-known symptom of COVID-19.
- While parosmia is characterised by a change in perception of odours.

12) Which of the following statements is/are correct with respect to Suez Canal?

- 1. It is an artificial waterway running north to south across the Isthmus of Suez connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea.
- 2. The canal was jointly controlled by the British and the French Government.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : a

13) Who among the following are eligible for postal ballot under the Conduct of Elections (Amendment) Rules 2020?

1. Overseas electors
2. Senior citizens above 80 years of age
3. COVID 19 suspect or affected persons
4. Persons with disability flagged in the electoral roll

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- a. 1 and 3 only
- b. 3 and 4 only
- c. 2, 3 and 4 only
- d. All of the above

Answer : c

- Government of India has recently said it will not be possible to extend postal ballot facility to overseas electors in the upcoming assembly elections.

14) Which of the following statements is/are incorrect with respect to Shigmo Festival?

1. It is the celebration of a rich, golden harvest of paddy by the tribal communities of Goa.
2. It last over a fortnight in the months of Phalgun-Chaitra months of the Hindu calendar

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : d

Both statements are correct

15. The 102<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act is related to which of the following?

- a) 10% reservation for Economically weaker sections
- b) Abolition of Legislative Councils in certain States
- c) Extend reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) to Lok Sabha and legislative bodies
- d) Constitutional status to National Commission for Backward Classes

Answer: d)

16. Which of the following countries are members of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)?

1. Afghanistan
2. Belarus
3. Mongolia
4. Iran
5. Russia
6. Pakistan
7. India

Select the correct answer code:

- a) 1, 4, 5 and 7 only
- b) 5, 6 and 7 only
- c) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- d) All of the above

Answer: b)

The SCO currently comprises eight Member States (China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).



17. Bhasan Char, sometimes seen in news is located in –

- a) Bay of Bengal
- b) Gulf of Aden
- c) Gulf of Mannar
- d) Arabian sea

Answer: a)

18. Consider the following statements about administration of Union Territories:

- 1. Every union territory is administered by the President acting through an administrator appointed by him.
- 2. An administrator of a union territory is an agent of the President and head of state like a governor.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: a)

An administrator of a union territory is an agent of the President and not head of state like a governor.

19. The status of Great Indian Bustard according to IUCN Red data list is:

- a) Vulnerable
- b) Least Concerned
- c) Endangered
- d) Critically Endangered

Answer: b)

20. Bharat 22 scheme, recently seen in news is related to

- a) Bolster Government's disinvestment programme
- b) Increase maritime and land security of all coastal and border states of India
- c) Improve conservation of the 22 scheduled languages in the Constitution of
- d) Facilitate housing for all by 2022

Answer: a)

Bharat 22 ETF is an open-ended exchange traded fund investing in S&P BSE Bharat 22 Index. Bharat 22 scheme was launched by the Government to fulfill its disinvestment target in PSUs.