

**Supreme Court strike down electoral bonds scheme-I****Why in News?**

- A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court unanimously struck down the Centre's Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) for being unconstitutional.
  - It underscored that the scheme violates the right to information under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
- Along with the EBS, the Apex Court also struck down several amendments that the government made in key laws to facilitate corporate donations to political parties.
  - The amendments were made through The Finance Act, 2016, and The Finance Act, 2017, before the EBS was introduced in January 2018.

**Electoral bonds (EBs)**

- About
  - Electoral bonds are a financial instrument introduced by the Government of India in 2018 to facilitate anonymous political donations.
  - An electoral bond is a bearer instrument, like a promissory note, that is payable to the bearer on demand to donate their contributions to political parties.
- Who are eligible to receive electoral bonds?
  - There are certain criteria that political parties must meet to be eligible to receive electoral bonds. These are:
    - Recognition: The political party must be registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
    - Recent Election Performance: The party must have secured at least 1% of the votes polled in the most recent Lok Sabha or State Assembly election.
- Available denominations
  - The Government of India has specified various denominations for electoral bonds, ranging from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1 crore.
- Authorized bank: SBI is the only bank authorised to sell these bonds.
- Working
  - A citizen of India or a body incorporated in India is eligible to purchase the bond.
  - EBs are issued/purchased for any value, in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1,00,000, Rs 10,00,000 and Rs 1,00,00,000 from the specified branches of SBI.
  - The bonds shall be available for purchase for a period of 10 days each in the months of January, April, July and October as may be specified by the Central Government.
  - The bond can be encashed by an eligible political party only through a designated bank account with the authorised bank.

**Key features of electoral bonds**

- Anonymity:
  - Electoral bonds provide anonymity to the donor by not revealing the identity of the donor to the public or the recipient political party.
- Purchase and Redemption:
  - Electoral bonds can be purchased from authorized banks using legal tender.
  - They are available in fixed denominations, and the minimum value of an electoral bond is set by the government.
- Validity:
  - Electoral bonds are valid for a limited period, typically 15 days, during which they can be used for making donations to eligible political parties.
- Transparency:
  - While the names of donors remain anonymous, the political parties receiving the electoral bond donations are required to disclose details of the donations in their financial statements to the Election Commission of India.

**Proportionality test and Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS)**

- For the scheme to be considered legitimate, the government scheme would have to essentially satisfy three aspects.
  - This was based on the court's proportionality test, laid down in its 2017 verdict in the *KS Puttaswamy* case over the right to privacy.

- First, the existence of a law.
  - The electoral bond key was brought through the Finance Act which introduced the series of amendments in the Income Tax Act and the Representation of People's Act.
- Second, the law must demonstrate a legitimate state interest, which has nexus to the object sought to be achieved by the Parliament.
  - As per the govt, the objectives of EBS range from curbing black money to protecting the privacy of the donors.
- The third is whether the encroachment on fundamental rights is proportional to the objection sought to be achieved.
  - As per the apex court, in EBS, the state did not adopt the least restrictive method.
  - As an example of the least restrictive methods, the court cited the ₹20,000 cap on anonymous donations.
- Hence, the apex court held that an infringement of the right to information is not proportionally justified to curb black money in electoral financing.

#### **News Summary: Supreme Court strikes down electoral bonds scheme**

- Prioritising voters' right to information regarding political parties' sources of funding, the Supreme Court struck down the Electoral Bonds Scheme (EBS).
  - Petitions were filed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and NGOs Common Cause and ADR.
- The court also struck down the amendments made to key laws on electoral finance which were introduced in the lead up to the introduction of EBS.

#### **Key highlights of the judgement**

- EBS violates voters' right to information
  - The court held that information on the funding of political parties is essential for voting.
  - Economic inequality leads to political inequality because money is closely tied to politics.
  - Having more money provides better access to lawmakers and raises the potential for quid pro quo or mutually beneficial deals, like favourable policy changes.
  - Therefore, the scheme violates the right to information under Article 19(1)(a), which guarantees the freedom of speech and expression.
- Restrictions are disproportionate to the stated goal of curbing circulation of black money
  - The court held that the RTI can only be restricted based on Article 19(2), which speaks of the reasonable restrictions to freedom of speech and expression.
  - It does not include curbing black money as a restriction.
  - Even assuming curbing black money is a legitimate purpose, it is not proportional to the restrictions posed by this scheme.
- Right to donor privacy is not absolute
  - The court considered whether the right to donor privacy includes information about a citizen's political affiliation.
  - If yes, is a financial contribution to a political party an aspect of political information?
  - In the Puttaswamy judgment, the court said that the right to informational privacy includes political affiliation.
    - Forming political beliefs is the first stage of political expression, and political expression cannot be expressed freely without the privacy of political affiliation.
    - Information can be used by the state to suppress dissent and discriminate by denying employment.
  - The court highlighted two main reasons for financial contributions to political parties: support and quid pro quo.
  - It rejected the notion of allowing corporate donations to obscure the motives behind contributions from other groups.
  - The court affirmed the right to informational privacy for political contributions, regardless of corporate involvement.
  - However, it clarified that privacy does not cover contributions aimed at influencing policies, only genuine political support.
    - Hence, the apex court was of the view that the right to donor privacy is not absolute.
- Unlimited political contributions by companies is unconstitutional

- The court said this cannot be permitted. The ability of companies to influence the political process through contributions is much higher compared to individuals.
- Contributions made by companies are purely business transactions made with the intent of securing benefits in return.

### SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

#### **GSLV-F14/INSAT-3DS Mission: ISRO's 'Naughty Boy' Rocket Launched the Meteorological Satellite Why in News?**

- Meteorological satellite INSAT-3DS has been launched into space on board a Geosynchronous Launch Vehicle (GSLV), in a crucial mission for the rocket nicknamed “naughty boy” for its spotty record.
- The GSLV-F14 has lift off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (Sriharikota) and this is the rocket’s 16th mission overall and its 10th flight using the indigenously developed cryogenic engine.

#### **About the GSLV-F14**

- Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) is a three-stage (51.7 m long) launch vehicle having a liftoff mass of 420 tonnes.
  - The first stage (GS1) comprises a solid propellant (S139) motor having 139-ton propellant and four earth-storable propellant stages (L40) strap-ons which carry 40 tons of liquid propellant in each.
  - The second stage (GS2) is also an earth-storable propellant stage loaded with 40-ton propellant.
  - The third stage (GS3) is a cryogenic stage with a 15-ton propellant loading of liquid oxygen (LOX) and liquid hydrogen (LH2).
- It can be used to launch a variety of spacecraft capable of performing communications, navigation, earth resource surveys, and any other proprietary mission.

#### **GSLV-F14/INSAT-3DS Mission and its Primary Objective**

- About the mission:
  - INSAT-3DS Satellite is a follow-on mission of Third Generation Meteorological Satellite from Geostationary Orbit and the Indian industries have significantly contributed to the making of the Satellite.
  - The mission is fully funded by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and it will augment the Meteorological services along with the presently operational INSAT-3D and INSAT-3DR satellites.
- The primary objectives of the mission are:
  - To monitor Earth’s surface, carry out Oceanic observations and its environment in various spectral channels of meteorological importance.
  - To provide the vertical profile of various meteorological parameters of the Atmosphere.
  - To provide the Data Collection and Data Dissemination capabilities from the Data Collection Platforms (DCPs).
  - To provide Satellite Aided Search and Rescue services.

#### **Significance of the GSLV-F14/INSAT-3DS Mission**

- At least four of the 15 launches using the GSLV so far have been unsuccessful.
  - In comparison, only three of the 60 missions so far by ISRO’s workhorse PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle), and none of the seven by its successor LVM-3, have failed.
  - Therefore, the mission’s success will be crucial for the GSLV, which is scheduled to carry later this year the Earth observation satellite, NISAR, which is being jointly developed by NASA and ISRO.
- INSAT-3DS, with a mission life of 10 years, will take over the functions of INSAT-3D (launched in 2013) and INSAT-3DR (2016) that have come to the end of their mission life. It
- The mission will help in short-range forecasts of extreme weather events such as thunderstorms, provide visibility estimation for aviation, and help in studying forest fire, smoke, snow cover, climate studies.

### PRELIM FACTS

#### **1. e-Jagriti Portal**

- Consumer Affairs Secretary recently asserted that integration of artificial intelligence in ‘e-Jagriti’ portal will help reduce the number of pending cases in consumer courts.

**About e-Jagriti Portal:**

- It is an initiative of the Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution.
- It is a portal for consumer commissions.
- This portal has been designed to further improve the customer experience.
- It provides a simple, fast, and more cost-effective consumer dispute redressal software solution at all levels.
- It is envisaged to integrate consumer grievance platforms, namely, Online Case Monitoring System (OCMS), E-Daakhil, the National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission (NCDRC) Case Monitoring System, CONFONET website, mediation application, on a single platform.
- The e-Jagriti platform has case filing, online fee payment, case monitoring modules for seamless disposal of cases by all the Commissions, has Smart search facility on archived consumer complaints / cases / judgements using AI technology for metadata and keyword creation, and Voice-to-text conversion of judgements, case history and other details using AI / ML technology.
- The portal will integrate Virtual court facility for a convenient and accessible resolution of consumer complaints, reducing the time of disposal, multiple hearings, and physical court appearances, bringing effective and fast decisions & disposals in all Consumer Commissions.

**Key Facts about National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission (NCDRC):**

- It is a quasi-judicial commission in India which was set up in 1988 under the Consumer Protection Act of 1986.
- Its head office is in New Delhi.
- The Commission is headed by a sitting or retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India or a sitting or retired Chief Justice of the High Court.
- Section 21 of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, posits that the National Commission shall have jurisdiction to entertain a complaint valued at more than two crore and also have appellate and revisional jurisdiction from the orders of State Commissions or the District, as the case maybe.
- Any person aggrieved by an order of NCDRC, may prefer an appeal against such an order to the Supreme Court of India within a period of 30 days.

**2. PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana**

- Prime Minister of India launched PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana to provide free electricity to its beneficiaries.

**About PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana:**

- In this scheme, the central government will provide 300 units of free electricity per month to its beneficiaries by investing worth ₹75,000 crores.
- The free electricity scheme was earlier announced by the Finance Minister in an interim budget speech.
- Target: It aims to light up 1 crore households.
- Under the scheme Urban Local Bodies and Panchayats shall be incentivised to promote rooftop solar systems in their jurisdictions.
- The Central Government will guarantee no financial burden on the people by providing significant subsidies directly to their bank accounts and offering highly concessional bank loans.
- Expected benefits:
  - Savings up to fifteen to eighteen thousand rupees annually for households from free solar electricity and selling the surplus to the distribution companies;
  - Charging of electric vehicles;
  - Entrepreneurship opportunities for a large number of vendors for supply and installation;
  - Employment opportunities for the youth with technical skills in manufacturing, installation and maintenance.

**3. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species**

- The 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (COP14) has been hosted by the Government of Uzbekistan, in Samarkand from 12-17 February 2024.

**About Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species:**

- It is also known as the Bonn Convention, is an environmental treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme.

- It provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats.
- It was signed in Bonn, Germany, on 23 June 1979.
- It is the only global and UN-based intergovernmental organisation established exclusively for the conservation and management of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range.
- The parties to the convention acknowledge the importance of conserving migratory species, and the need to pay special attention to species whose conservation status is unfavourable.
- Activities by CMS Parties may range from legally binding treaties (called Agreements) to less formal instruments, such as Memoranda of Understanding.
- The Conference of Parties (COP) is the decision-making organ of this convention.
- It has two Appendices.
  - Appendix I lists endangered migratory species and includes prohibitions regarding the take of these species.
  - Appendix II lists species that have an 'unfavourable conservation status' (as per the conditions set out in the Convention) and encourages range states to draft range-wide agreements for conservation and management of these species.

#### 4. Olive Ridley Turtles

- The Andhra Pradesh government recently imposed a month-long ban on fishing in the 5-km radius of Hope Island to prevent the death of Olive Ridley turtles off Kakinada coast.

About Olive Ridley Turtles:

- They are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.
- It gets its name from the olive green colouration of its carapace (shell).
- Scientific Name: *Lepidochelys olivacea*
- They are best known for their unique mass nesting, called Arribada, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
- Distribution:
  - They are mainly found in the warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian oceans.
  - Odisha's Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is known as the world's largest rookery (a colony of breeding animals) of sea turtles.
- Features:
  - An adult typically measures between 62 and 70 cm in length and weighs about 35-45 kg.
  - They have one to two visible claws on each of their paddle-like flippers.
  - They are omnivorous, meaning they feed on both plants and animals.
  - They are solitary, preferring the open ocean.
  - These turtles spend their entire lives in the ocean, and migrate thousands of kilometres between feeding and mating grounds in the course of a year.
- Conservation Status:
  - IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
  - Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule 1
  - CITES: Appendix I

Key Facts about Hope Island:

- It is a tadpole-shaped island, located off the coast of Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, in the Bay of Bengal.
- Hope Island is so named for providing a natural haven to sailors against the forces of wind and tide against the weary traveller.
- This island is young, as it was formed in the late 18th century, by the waters of the Koringa River, which is a tributary of the River Godavari.
- The area between Kakinada coast and Hope Island is known as Kakinada Bay.
- It acts as a natural barrier from storm surges and is a natural breakwater for the Kakinada coast.

#### 5. National Generic Document Registration System

- Secretary, Department of Land Resources, rolled out National Generic Document Registration System (NDGRS) throughout Assam along with the launch of Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) seeding of geo referenced Cadastral Maps.

**About National Generic Document Registration System:**

- It is a project initiated by the Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
- It is a common, generic application developed for registration departments across the country under One Nation One Software initiative.
- The NGDRS application is developed by National Informatics Centre Pune.
- Features
  - It is a common, generic and configurable application developed for registration departments across the country.
  - The application is specifically designed for the use of sub registrars, citizens and apex users from registration departments.
  - NGDRS facilitates states to create state specific instances and configure the software as per requirements.
  - Offering a complete user interface for property and document registration, the application enables citizens to proceed with land buying online.
  - They can find out the circle rate for land, calculate property valuation as per prevailing rates and understand the type of land.
  - Transactions of prohibited properties are restricted for sale like government land, tribal land, mortgaged land etc., is also available, which ultimately helps them decide where and what type of land they should buy.
  - Thereafter, they can apply online for document submission, make instant payment and take prior appointments.
  - Property buyers need to visit the sub-registrar's office only once and that too at the time of final signing and registration.

**What is ULPIN?**

- It is the unique blockchain ID and the land parcel is uniquely identified using ULPIN from Bhunaksha.
- It is a 14-digit alpha numeric identification number to every land parcel can be described as the AADHAR or fingerprint for land.
- The identification is based on the longitude and latitude of the land parcel and is dependent on geo-referenced cadastral maps.
- The benefits of ULPIN are to ensure uniqueness in all transactions, keeping the spatial records up to date, linking of property transactions, sharing of land records data across departments, financial institutions and to eliminate fraudulent transactions.

**ANSWER WRITING****Q. Deepfakes present an opportunity to the cyber-criminal and a challenge to everyone else. Discuss.**

Answer: Deepfake technology is a method for manipulating videos, images, audios utilizing powerful computers and deep learning. It is used to generate fake news and commit financial fraud among other wrong doings. It overlays a digital composite over an already-existing video, picture, or audio; cybercriminals use Artificial Intelligence technology.

Deepfake technology is now being used for nefarious purposes like scams and hoaxes, celebrity pornography, election manipulation, social engineering, automated disinformation attacks, identity theft and financial fraud etc.

**Challenges of Deepfake Technology:**

- Cyber Crime:
  - The potential use of deepfakes is in phishing campaigns, as it would make them more difficult for the individual to detect as a scam.
  - For example, in social media phishing, a faked video of a celebrity could be used to extort money from unwitting victims.
- Fabricated Media:
  - Deep Fake technology makes it possible to fabricate media like swap faces, lip-syncing, and puppeteers, mostly without consent and bring threat to psychology, security, political stability, and business disruption.
  - Deepfake technology has been used to impersonate notable personalities like former U.S. Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, etc.
- New Front of Warfare:

- A deepfake could act as a powerful tool by a nation-state to undermine public safety and create uncertainty and chaos in the target country.
- Nation-state actors with geopolitical aspirations, ideological believers, violent extremists, and economically motivated enterprises can manipulate media narratives using deepfakes.
- It can be used by insurgent groups and terrorist organisations, to represent their adversaries as making inflammatory speeches or engaging in provocative actions to stir up anti-state sentiments among people.
- **Undermining Democracy:**
  - A deepfake can also aid in altering the democratic discourse and undermine trust in institutions and impair diplomacy.
  - False information about institutions, public policy, and politicians powered by a deepfake can be exploited to spin the story and manipulate belief.
- **Disrupting Electioneering:**
  - A deepfake of a political candidate can sabotage their image and reputation. A well-executed one, a few days before polling, of a political candidate spewing out racial epithets or indulging in an unethical act can damage their campaign.
  - A high-quality deepfake can inject compelling false information that can cast a shadow of illegitimacy over the voting process and election results.
  - Leaders can also use them to increase populism and consolidate power.
  - Deepfakes can become a very effective tool to sow the seeds of polarization, amplifying division in society, and suppressing dissent.
- **Measures to Overcome Challenges of Deepfake Technology:**
  - **Enhancing Media Literacy:** Media literacy for consumers and journalists is the most effective tool to combat disinformation and deep fakes.
    - Improving media literacy is a precursor to addressing the challenges presented by deepfakes.
    - Media literacy efforts must be enhanced to cultivate a discerning public.
    - As consumers of media, they must have the ability to decipher, understand, translate, and use the information.
    - Even a short intervention with media understanding, learning the motivations and context, can lessen the damage.
  - **Need for Regulation:** Meaningful regulations with a collaborative discussion with the technology industry, civil society, and policymakers can facilitate disincentivizing the creation and distribution of malicious deep fakes.
  - **Technological Interventions:** There is also a need for easy-to-use and accessible technology solutions to detect deep fakes, authenticate media, and amplify authoritative sources.
  - **Behavioural Change:** On the part of society, to counter the menace of deep fakes, there is a need to take the responsibility to be a critical consumer of media on the Internet, think and pause before sharing on social media, and be part of the solution to this infodemic.

### Conclusion

- As media consumers, we must be able to decipher, understand, translate, and use the information we encounter.
- The best method to deal with this problem is with technical solutions supported by artificial intelligence that can recognize and block deep fakes.
- Prior to resolving the issues associated with deep fakes, media literacy has to be improved.
- There is a need to create cyber arm, which would work on to tackle these types of new and emerging threats.
- There is also a need for easy-to-use and accessible technology solutions to detect deep fakes, authenticate media, and amplify authoritative sources.
- On the part of society, to counter the menace of deep fakes, there is a need to take the responsibility to be a critical consumer of media on the Internet, think and pause before sharing on social media, and be part of the solution.

### MCQs

1. Which one of the following best describes the term greenwashing?
  - (a) Conveying a false impression that a company's products are eco-friendly.

- (b) Non-inclusion of ecological costs in the Annual Financial Statements of a country.  
(c) Ignoring the disastrous ecological consequences of a Road project.  
(d) Making mandatory provisions for measuring environmental costs in a government project.
2. Consider the following statements regarding the La-Nina phenomenon:  
1. It refers to the periodic cooling of ocean surface temperatures in the central and east-central equatorial Pacific.  
2. It negatively impacts the Indian Monsoon.  
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
3. Which one of the following cases in the Supreme Court of India dealt with the issue of ceiling of 50% on reservations under Article 16(4) of the Constitution?  
**(a) MadhuLimaye vs. VedMurti**  
**(b) Indira Sawhney vs. Union of India**  
(c) K M Nanavati vs, State of Bombay  
(d) Sajjan Singh vs State of Punjab
4. Which of the following is a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)?  
1. Iceland  
2. Liechtenstein  
3. Norway  
4. Switzerland  
Select the correct answer using the code given below:  
**(a) 1 only**  
(b) 1 and 2 only  
(c) 1, 2 and 3 only  
**(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4**
5. What is the primary purpose of Section 91 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)?  
(a) To empower the police to arrest suspects  
(b) To appoint legal representatives for defendants  
(c) To establish guidelines for witness testimony in court  
**(d) To ensure the availability of relevant evidence and materials during legal proceedings**
6. Consider the following statements regarding Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH):  
1. It is launched by the World Health Organization (WHO).  
2. Its membership is open to all institutions engaged in digital health.  
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
7. Consider the following statements regarding Shompen Tribe, recently seen in the news:  
1. It resides on the Lakshadweep group of islands.  
2. It is one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India.  
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
8. With reference to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), consider the following statements:  
1. It comes into effect from the time the EC announces the schedule of elections.  
2. All the provisions of the MCC are legally enforceable.  
3. During general elections to the Lok Sabha, MCC is applicable throughout the country.  
How many of the statements given above are correct?  
(a) Only one  
**(b) Only two**  
(c) All three  
(d) None
9. With reference to Rhodamine-B, consider the following statements:  
1. It is water-soluble chemical compound.  
2. Its usage in food products is a punishable offence in India.  
3. It is used in textile and paper industry.  
How many of the statements given above are correct?  
(a) Only one  
(b) Only two  
**(c) All three**  
(d) None
10. Consider the following statements regarding the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Fund:  
1. It is used to support demand-driven, transformational projects in developing countries.  
2. The World Bank serves as the Secretariat of the IBSA Fund.  
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