

GOVERNANCE**Supreme Court strikes down electoral bonds scheme-II****Why in News?**

- Along with the Electoral Bonds Scheme (EBS), the Supreme Court 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.

Existing system before the introduction of EBS

- Situation before The Finance Act 2016, and The Finance Act 2017
 - Before the two Finance Acts were passed, political parties were required to;
 - declare all contributions more than Rs 20,000 with no exceptions, and
 - maintain a record of all donations more than Rs 20,000 for purposes of taxation.
 - Also, there was a cap on the amount of money that a company could donate to a political party in a financial year.
 - Companies could contribute a maximum of 7.5% of their average net profits from the preceding three years.
- Amendments introduced through The Finance Act, 2017
 - The Finance Act of 2017 amended several key laws including the Representation of the People Act, 1951, the Income-tax Act, 1961, and the Companies Act, 2013.
 - These changes introduced electoral bonds, which significantly eased restrictions on political party funding.
 - Electoral bonds removed donation limits for companies and eliminated the need to declare and maintain records of donations made through them.

The Verdict of the Supreme Court

- Recent judgment by the Supreme Court has restored the status quo that existed before the Finance Act, 2017 was passed, in all of these statutes.
- The Representation of the People Act, 1951
 - Section 29C of the Act requires political parties to prepare a report detailing the donations received by them in a financial year.
 - Parties are required to declare all contributions higher than Rs 20,000 in this report, and specify whether they were received from individual persons or from companies.
- Finance Act 2017 and amendments in RPA 1951
 - The Finance Act, 2017, amended the RP Act to include an exception to Section 29C.
 - It said that the requirement to declare all donations in excess of Rs 20,000 would not apply to donations received through Electoral Bonds.
- SC Judgement and RPA 1951
 - The Supreme Court struck down the amendment.
 - It observed that the original requirement to disclose contributions of more than Rs 20,000 did an effective job of balancing voters' right to information with the right to privacy of donors.
 - Donations below this threshold were far less likely to influence political decisions.
- The Companies Act, 2013
 - Section 182(1) of the act placed a cap on the amount of money a company could donate in a single financial year, limiting it to 7.5% of the company's average net profits during the previous three financial years.
 - Section 182(3) required a company to disclose any amount contributed to any political party along with the particulars of the amount donated and the name of the receiving party.
- Finance act 2017 and the Companies Act
 - This section was amended to remove the cap on the amount of money a company could donate to a political party.
 - Also, only the total amount contributed had to be disclosed — and the company would no longer be required to declare which political party it had sent a donation to, nor the specific amount.
- SC Judgement and Companies Act 2013
 - The court struck down this amendment.
 - It observed that “permitting unlimited corporate contributions authorises unrestrained influence of companies in the electoral process”.

- The Income-tax Act, 1961
 - Section 13A(b) of The Income-tax Act says that a political party shall not include voluntary contributions as part of its total income.
 - However, it is required to maintain a record of all contributions received that are above Rs 20,000.
 - This record must include the name and address of the person who has made the donation.
- Finance Act 2017 and Income Tax act
 - The Act amended this section to include the words “other than contribution by way of Electoral Bond”.
 - Also, a new Section 13A(d) was added, which required that all donations exceeding Rs 2,000 must be given through certain methods, which included Electoral Bonds.
- SC Judgement and Income Tax Act
 - The court held that exempting political parties from maintaining a record of donations received through Electoral Bonds would violate the right to information of voters under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
 - The court struck down both the amendment to Section 13A(b), and the new Section 13A(d).

Directions issued by the court

- Direction to SBI
 - The SBI has been ordered to;
 - immediately stop the issuance of any further electoral bonds and
 - Furnish details of such bonds purchased by political parties since April 12, 2019, to the ECI by March 6.
 - Such details must include the date of purchase of each bond, the name of the purchaser of the bond and the denomination of the bond purchased.
- Directions to Election Commission of India
 - The ECI shall subsequently publish all such information shared by the SBI on its official website by 13 March 2024.
- Direction towards return of electoral bonds
 - Electoral bonds that are within the validity period of fifteen days but have not yet been encashed by the political party will have to be returned following which the issuing bank will refund the amount to the purchaser's account.

Analysis of the recent verdict

- The Supreme Court has set a higher standard for the state to justify encroaching on a fundamental right, even when its action is perceived to further a competing right.
- It ruled that the state must demonstrate that its action is the "least restrictive" and that no other "equally effective" methods exist to achieve its objective.
- The judicial approach in balancing two fundamental rights has largely been done by attaching significance to one right over the other.
- The court has also, in several cases framed this debate by placing public interest over individual fundamental rights which gave the state an upper hand.
 - For example, in 2018, the Supreme Court had restricted the right to protest around Delhi's Jantar Mantar to give effect to the right to a peaceful residence and the state's power to regulate such activities.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**India on UNSC reform****Why in News?**

- India's Permanent Representative at the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, speaking at the Inter-Governmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform stressed upon the need for comprehensive reform of the Security Council.
- India has questioned how much longer can the will of five permanent members of the UNSC continue to override the collective voice of the world organization's 188 member states.
- India also stressed that equity must be the cornerstone of global efforts to reform the 15-nation UN body.
 - Equity demands that every nation, irrespective of its size or power, be afforded an equal opportunity to shape global decision-making.

- India highlighted that expanding only in the non-permanent category of the Council will not solve the problem.
 - It will in fact will widen the difference between permanent and non-permanent members' even more, thereby perpetuating inequities instead of removing.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

- About
 - The United Nations Charter established six main organs of the United Nations, including the UN Security Council (UNSC).
 - UNSC has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.
 - Under the UN Charter, all Member States are obligated to comply with Council decisions.
 - The Security Council has a permanent residence at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City.
- Powers:
 - Establishment of peacekeeping operations.
 - Establishment of international sanctions.
 - Authorisation of military action through Security Council resolutions.
- Members:
 - The U.N. Charter provides for 15 members of the UNSC:
 - Five permanent members are known as P5, including the United Kingdom, China, France, Russia and the US.
 - They have veto power over decisions of the UNSC.
 - 10 non-permanent members. Each year the 193-member General Assembly elects five non-permanent members for a two-year term at the UNSC.

UNSC Reform

- About
 - UNSC reform refers to the process of revising and updating the structure, composition, and functioning of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).
 - The UNSC is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and is primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security.
 - However, its current configuration and decision-making processes is not representative of the current geo-political realities.
 - Hence, there is a demand for reform in the UNSC.
- Reforms in areas
 - The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform includes five key issues:
 - Categories of membership
 - The veto held by the five permanent members
 - Regional representation
 - The size of an enlarged Council and its working methods
 - The Security Council-General Assembly relationship
- Challenges faced
 - Resistance from Current Permanent Members (P5)
 - Lack of Consensus among Member States
 - Different countries have diverse interests, priorities, and visions for how the council should be reformed.
 - Complexity of Reform Proposals
 - There are various proposals for reforming the UNSC, including those related to the expansion of permanent and non-permanent membership, the question of veto power, and regional representation.
 - Finding a consensus on these complex issues requires diplomatic negotiation and compromise among member states.
 - Slow Pace of Negotiations
 - The process of UNSC reform has been characterized by slow progress and incremental changes.
 - Negotiations within forums like the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) have often been protracted, with divergent views among member states impeding substantive reform efforts.

Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN)

- About
 - IGN is a series of discussions and negotiations among member states of the United Nations aimed at reforming the structure and functioning of the UNSC.
 - The IGN process was initiated to address the perceived need for the expansion of the Security Council's membership to better reflect contemporary geopolitical realities and to enhance its legitimacy and effectiveness.
 - IGN was formally recognized by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2008 as a platform for member states to engage in discussions and negotiations regarding the reform of the UNSC.
 - However, the diplomatic impasse persists in part because member states have never agreed to negotiate on.
- Composition
 - The IGN is composed of several different international organisations, namely:
 - The African Union;
 - The G4 nations (India, along with Brazil, Japan and Germany are pressing for a permanent seat in the reformed UNSC);
 - The Uniting for Consensus Group (UfC), also known as the "Coffee Club";
 - The L.69 Group of Developing Countries;
 - The Arab League; and
 - The Caribbean Community (CARICOM).
- Features
 - Each group represents a different set of positions vis-a-vis reforming the UNSC.
 - The group's conversations are considered "informal" in nature due to the lack of single text, and thus, UNGA rules of procedure do not apply.
 - But in 2015, a framework document was agreed when it comes to the reform, which can be the basis for future talks.

PRELIM FACTS**1. Cassini Spacecraft**

- Recent findings from data collected by NASA's Cassini spacecraft reveal the presence of a vast ocean beneath the icy surface of Saturn's moon Mimas.
- About Cassini Spacecraft:
- Cassini-Huygens was a joint NASA/European Space Agency (ESA)/Italian Space Agency (ASI) space mission to Saturn.
 - It was launched on October 15, 1997.
 - The mission consisted of NASA's Cassini orbiter, which was the first space probe to orbit Saturn, and the ESA's Huygens probe, which landed on Titan, Saturn's largest moon.
 - Spacecraft:
 - It was one of the largest interplanetary spacecraft.
 - The Cassini orbiter weighed 2,125 kg (4,685 pounds) and was 6.7 metres (22 feet) long and 4 metres (13 feet) wide.
 - The instruments on board Cassini included radar to map the cloud-covered surface of Titan and a magnetometer to study Saturn's magnetic field.
 - The disk-shaped Huygens probe was mounted on the side of Cassini. It weighed 349 kg (769 pounds), was 2.7 metres (8.9 feet) across, and carried six instruments designed to study the atmosphere and surface of Titan.
 - Highlights:
 - It orbited Saturn from 2004 to 2017, circling the planet 294 times and teaching us almost everything we know about Saturn.
 - It measured the structure of Saturn's atmosphere and rings, as well as how they interact with the planet's moons.
 - It also discovered six named moons and revealed Enceladus and Titan as promising locations to search for extra-terrestrial life.

Key Facts about Mimas:

- It is the smallest and innermost of the major regular moons of Saturn.
- The surface is icy and heavily cratered.

- The most striking feature of this small moon is a gigantic crater known as Herschel. This crater measures 80 miles (130 km) across.
 - A central peak in the center of the crater rises to a height of 4 miles, almost as high as Mount Everest on Earth.
 - Herschel is one of the largest impact structures, relative to the size of the body, known in the solar system.
- The low density of Mimas indicates that it is composed almost entirely of water ice.

2. Micellar water

- Micellar water, a product found in supermarkets, chemists and bathroom cabinets around the world, is a very effective cleanser and many people swear by it as part of their skincare routine.

About Micellar water:

- Micellar water products contain something called micelles – clusters of molecules that are very effective at removing oily substances.
- The micelles in micellar water are formed by special molecules known as surfactants.
- These micelles have a hydrophilic exterior, meaning that they are very happy to remain mixed throughout water.
- It is a commonly used skin care product that helps remove impurities and makeup from your skin.
- It's a very gentle solution that contains a very mild detergent.
- Working
 - When you apply some micellar water to a cotton pad, another convenient interaction occurs.
 - The wet cotton is hydrophilic (loves water). Consequently, some of the micelles will unravel, with the hydrophilic heads being attracted to the wet cotton pad.
 - Now, sticking out from the surface will be a layer of hydrophobic tail groups.
 - These hydrophobic tails cannot wait to attract themselves to makeup, sunscreen, oils, dirt, grease and other contaminants on your face.
 - As you sweep the cotton pad across your skin, these contaminants bind to the hydrophobic tails and are removed from the skin.
 - Some contaminants will also find themselves encapsulated in the hydrophobic centres of the micelle.
 - Either way, a cleaner surface is left behind.

3. KajiNemu

- Recently, the Assam government declared the GI-tagged 'KajiNemu' (Citrus Limon) as the State Fruit.

About KajiNemu:

- It is elongated and oblong compared to other lemon varieties.
- It is popular for its unique aroma and health benefits. It has been traditionally associated with Assamese cuisines.
 - The fruit had been exported to several countries, including to the Middle East.
 - With its unique aroma and antioxidant properties, the Assam lemon enriched the local cuisines.
 - The oval-shaped KajiNemu is a lot juicier than other lemon varieties. KajiNemu is majorly used in culinary and commercial purposes, and it is extensively used for its medicinal properties.
 - Cultivation: It is grown in almost all the districts of the state, and is available throughout the year.
 - The fruit is a powerhouse of nutrients, boosting health
 - Assam has as many as 16 species and 52 varieties hybrids of citrus.
 - KajiNemu' (Citrus Limon) bears GI Geography Indication tag in 2019, is linked to Assamese food.

4. Pallava Dynasty

- Archaeologists recently discovered an eighth-century Kotravai sculpture, an artifact that dates back to the Pallava period, near Ulundurpet, Tamil Nadu.

About Pallava Dynasty:

- The Pallava Dynasty was a famous power in South India that existed between the 3rd and 9th Centuries.
- They ruled the northern parts of Tamil Nadu, parts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, with Kanchipuram as their capital.
- The Pallavas supported Buddhism, Jainism, and the Brahminical faith and were patrons of music, painting, and literature.

- Origin:
 - Pallava Dynasty was earlier feudatories of Andhra Satavahanas. Pallavas grew to be autonomous subsequent to their decline at Amaravati.
 - They progressively moved southward and instituted their capital at Kanchipuram in the 4th century CE.
 - The rule of Mahendravarman I (571 - 630 CE) and Narasimhavarman I (630 - 668 CE) witnessed the augment in the wealth and vigour of the Pallava realm.
- Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang, who visited Kanchipuram during the Pallava statute and adorned their benevolent decree, depicts Bodhidharma, the initiator of the Chan (Zen) school of Buddhism in China, as a prince of the Pallava Empire.
- Architecture:
 - The Pallava Dynasty was typically distinguished for their benefaction of Dravidian architecture.
 - They were the most noted for temple architecture. They were instrumental in the transition from rock-cut architecture to stone temples.
 - The most noted architectural accomplishments of the Pallavas are at Mahabalipuram, which, under the Pallava reign, became an important centre of art, architecture, and literature.
 - The Kailasanatha Temple in Kanchipuram and the Shore Temple were built by Narasimhavarman II.
 - Of all the temples, Kailasanatha and Vaikuntaperumal are best known for their architectural virtues.
- The Vaikuntaperumal shrine is a multi-storied temple built in the 8th century A.D and is acknowledged for the sculptures illustrating the history of the Pallavas.
- Religion: They adopted the local religion Shaivism, and became Dravidians.
- Combats of the Pallava Dynasty:
 - Throughout their supremacy, they were in steady conflict with both the Chalukya Dynasty in the north and the Tamil kingdoms of Chola and Pandyas in the south.
 - The Pallavas were occupied in continuous combat with the Chalukyas of Badami and lastly concealed by the Chola kings in the 8th century CE.
- Decline:
 - The rise of Rashtrakutas had seen the decline of the Pallava Dynasty.
 - Vijayalaya, the Chola King, completely overpowered Aparajitavarman, the last Pallava King, in 897 AD.

5. Baltic Sea

- A Stone Age wall has been discovered beneath the Baltic Sea in Germany, believed to be the oldest megastructure built by humans in Europe.

About Baltic Sea:

- It is a semi-enclosed inland sea located in Northern Europe.
- It is an arm of the North Atlantic Ocean, extending northward from the latitude of southern Denmark almost to the Arctic Circle and separating the Scandinavian Peninsula from the rest of continental Europe.
- It has a coastline of approximately 8,000 km, shared by several countries, including Sweden, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Estonia, Germany, Denmark, and Russia.
- It covers an area of approximately 377,000 sq.km. The sea is approximately 1,600 km long and 193 km wide.
- It is connected to the White Sea via the White Sea Canal and to the North Sea's German Bight via the Kiel Canal.
- It connects to the Atlantic Ocean through the Danish Straits.
- The Baltic Sea contains three major gulfs: the Gulf of Bothnia to the north, the Gulf of Finland to the east, and the Gulf of Riga slightly to the south of that.
- It is often cited as the world's largest brackish inland water body.
- Its water salinity levels are lower than that of the World Oceans due to the inflow of fresh water from the surrounding land and the sea's shallowness.
- More than 250 rivers and streams empty their waters into the Baltic Sea. Neva is the largest river that drains into the Baltic Sea.
- Islands: It is home to over 20 islands and archipelagos. Gotland, located off the coast of Sweden, is the largest island in the Baltic Sea.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. Discuss the factors due to which farmers are transitioning towards animal husbandry for dependable sources of livelihood and income.

Answer: Animal husbandry is the branch of agriculture concerned with animals that are raised for meat, fiber, milk, and other products. Its branches include Poultry, dairy, aquaculture, Meat etc. Animal husbandry contributes almost 5 percent to India's GDP and forms almost a fourth of the agriculture GDP. The sector has been growing at an impressive pace with a compound annual growth rate of 8 percent in the last few years.

Animal Husbandry as a dependable source of livelihood and income for farmers

- **Income Diversification:** Farmers are increasingly recognizing the benefits of diversifying their income sources. Animal husbandry provides an additional stream of revenue, reducing dependency on a single crop.
 - The contribution of livestock in total agriculture and allied sector GVA (at constant prices) has increased from 24.32 per cent (2014-15) to 30.13 per cent (2020-21).
- **Stable Income Streams:** Livestock farming often provides a more stable and predictable income compared to crops, as animals can be a consistent source of products such as milk or eggs throughout the year.
 - Milch animals produce milk regularly. Milk production during 2020-21 and 2021-22 is 209.96 million Tonnes and 221.06 million Tonnes respectively showing an annual growth of 5.29%.
- **Market Demand:** Changing consumer preferences and increasing demand for animal products such as meat, milk, and eggs have led to a higher market value for livestock.
 - The country has exported 79,929.17 MT of Natural Honey to the world for the worth of Rs. 1,622.77 Crore/ 203.07 USD Million during the year 2022-23. (APEDA).
- **Value-Added Products:** Farmers are exploring value-added products from livestock such as organic or speciality meats, artisanal cheeses and other niche products which can command higher prices in the market.
 - India is the top country producing Butter and Ghee in the world. The Indian Ghee Market was estimated to be valued at INR 2907 billion in 2022. Ghee is produced from milch animals.
 - In 2022, the largest producer of cow milk cheese was Germany. That year, Germany produced 26 per cent of the total amount of cow milk cheese in the EU.
 - India is the 4th largest exporter of leather goods in the world. India's exports of leather, footwear and leather products touched \$5.26 Bn during 2022-23.
- **Technological Advancements:** Advances in animal husbandry technologies include improving breeding techniques, better healthcare practices and efficient feed management contributing to increased productivity and profitability.
 - Hybrid cows: Jersey cross cows, Holstein Friesian cross etc., are recommended as suitable dairy cows for the tropical plains of India. They produce more milk in comparison to indigenous breeds.
- **Government Support:** Government initiatives and support programs such as subsidies, loans, and training programs may be specifically directed towards promoting animal husbandry, encouraging farmers to invest in this sector.
 - Rashtriya Gokul Mission, Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund, PM Matsya Sampada Yojana, National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP) etc.
- **Global Trade Opportunities:** Increased globalization and trade opportunities in the livestock sector have expanded markets for farmers allowing them to tap into international demand for meat, dairy, and other animal products.
 - India's exports of Animal Products in 2022-23 were Rs. 32,597.39 Crores/ 4,062.15 USD million. (APEDA).

Conclusion

Animal husbandry is integral to economic progress which impacts agriculture, rural employment, and food security. The Ashok Dalwai Committee advocates a holistic approach with sustainable practices and technology which position the sector as a key driver of economic development and poverty reduction in India. Promoting Animal husbandry could help to achieve doubling the farmer's income.

MCQs

1. Consider the following statements regarding the Human-rated LVM3 launch vehicle:
 1. It is a three-stage vehicle consisting of the solid stage, liquid stage, and cryogenic stage.
 2. It consists of a Crew Escape System (CES).

- 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
2. Consider the following statements regarding Solar Maximum:
 1. It occurs at the end of the solar cycle every year.
 2. It's associated with a greater number of sunspots observable on the sun's surface.
 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. With reference to the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), consider the following statements:
 1. It is a statutory body under the administrative control of the Union Ministry of Labor and Employment.
 2. It administers a contributory provident fund and an insurance scheme for the workforce engaged in the organised sector.
 3. The schemes offered by EPFO cover only Indian workers.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
 (a) Only One
(b) Only two
 (c) All three
 (d) None
4. With reference to the Committee of Privileges in Lok Sabha, consider the following statements:
 1. It consists of 10 members elected by the members of the Lok Sabha from amongst themselves.
 2. It examines every question involving a breach of privilege of the House or of the members.
 3. The Speaker of Lok Sabha does not have the authority to pass final orders on its reports.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
(a) Only One
 (b) Only two
 (c) All three
 (d) None
5. The Chenchu tribe is primarily found in:
 (a) Gujarat
 (b) Madhya Pradesh
(c) Andhra Pradesh
 (d) Karnataka
6. Consider the following:
 1. Energy Storage
 2. Electromagnetic Shielding
 3. Water Purification
 In which of the above-mentioned areas does MXene, a class of two-dimensional (2D) ceramic nanomaterials, find application?
 (a) 1 and 2 only
 (b) 2 and 3 only
 (c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3
7. What is Smishing, sometimes seen in the news?
(a) form of phishing that targets individuals through text messages
 (b) Artificial Intelligence method to develop deepfakes
 (c) toolkit to curb fake news
 (d) spyware targeting government infrastructures
8. Consider the following statements:
 1. The paintings and sculptures in the Ajanta Caves illustrate the life and teachings of the Buddha.
 2. Mosaic art painting has been used to create the intricate paintings found in the Ajanta and Ellora Caves.
 Select the correct statements using the codes given below:
(a) 1 only
 (b) 2 only
 (c) Both 1 and 2
 (d) Neither 1 nor 2
9. Consider the following statements regarding the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP):
 1. It is fixed by the Union Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.
 2. It is governed by the Sugarcane Control order, 1966.
 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
10. Regarding the Global Pulses Conference, 2024, consider the following statements:
 1. It was organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare and NITI Aayog.
 2. It is the industry's largest global event, bringing together key players from more than 50 countries.
 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