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THE HINDU Page 12

SCHENGEN AREA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – IR)

Why did Kosovo face delays in Schengen approval?

What factors contributed to the landmark development of Kosovo gaining visa-free access to the Schengen zone? What complexities arise in Schengen entry?

Garimella Subramaniam

The story so far:

Kosovo recently secured visa-free access to the Schengen zone in Europe, world's largest zone of free movement, becoming the last western Balkan non-European Union nation to be waived visa requirements. . The zone is known after Schengen, the tiny Luxembourg village bordering France and Germany, where the agreement was signed in 1985 among five of the six EU founding members except Italy. Citizens of Kosovo can now enter the Schengen as tourists for 90 days within 180 days. Croatia, a European Union (EU) member since 2013, joined Schengen in 2023, while Romania and Bulgaria, EU members since 2007, will gain partial Schengen entry in March.

Why was Kosovo's application kept pending for years?

The case of Kosovo is egregious given that the European Commission had in 2018 cleared Pristina's preparedness to tackle illegal migration and corruption, preconditions for the entry.

Arguably, the single biggest obstacle to the country's Schengen visa waiver was strong opposition from several EU members, which do not recognise the 2008 unilateral declaration of independence by the breakaway state from Serbia.

Kosovo has not been accorded legal statehood by the UN and denied recognition by Russia and China.

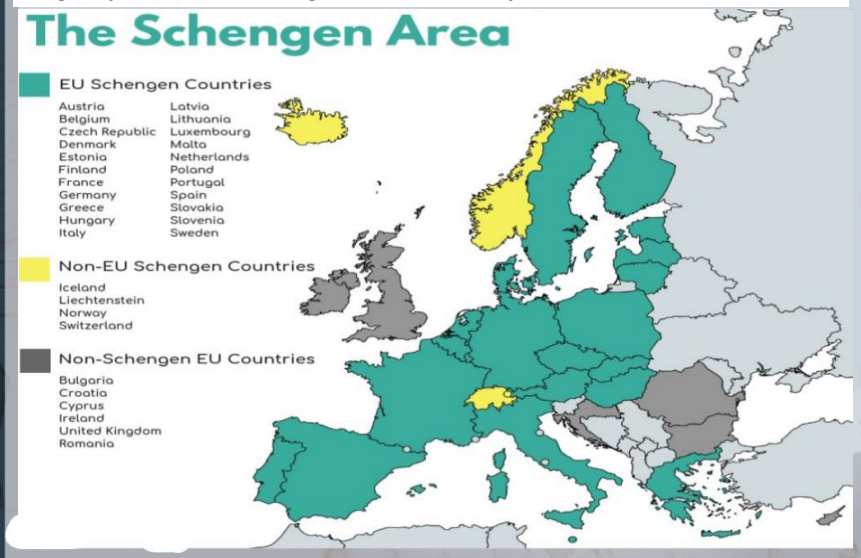
Is admission to Schengen mandatory for EU members?

Yes and no. When the Schengen agreement took effect in 1995, only seven of the entire 15 member union at the time joined the passport-free area. Today, 23 of the 27 EU states are part of the passport-free zone, excluding Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria and Ireland. But then, the Schengen area comprises 27 countries, including four non-EU members: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Norway.

It is important not to confuse the status of the four countries with the recent entry of Kosovo and the other five western Balkan entrants which are not counted among the Schengen 27 members.

How did the region cope with the COVID-19 crisis?

Schengen had come under enormous strain following the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis during the last decade, the arrival of thousands of migrants from conflict zones in Africa and West Asia and



Context: Kosovo recently secured visa-free access to the Schengen zone in Europe, world's largest zone of free movement, becoming the last western Balkan non-European Union nation to be waived visa requirements.

Schengen Area

- **About**: The Schengen Area, also known as the Schengen Countries Zone, comprises 27 European nations.
- **Members:** Include 23 of the 27 EU member states, excluding Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ireland, and Romania, and all members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), namely Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.
- **Non-EU Members Inside Schengen**: Switzerland, Iceland, and Norway, although not part of the EU, are integral members of the Schengen Area.
- **Origin of the Schengen Zone**: The zone is named after Schengen, a small Luxembourg village bordering France and Germany.
- The agreement establishing the Schengen Zone was signed in 1985 among five of the six EU founding members, excluding Italy.
- **Access for Kosovo Citizens**: Citizens of Kosovo are now permitted to enter the Schengen Zone as tourists for a duration of 90 days within a 180-day period.
- **Expansion of the Schengen Zone**: Croatia, which became a European Union (EU) member in 2013, officially joined the Schengen Zone in 2023.
- Romania and Bulgaria, EU members since 2007, are set to gain partial entry into the Schengen Zone in March.
- **EU's border-free policy:** For nationals of any country, the benefit is the freedom to travel with a single Schengen visa to other European nations within the borderless area. For EU states, the Visa-free borderless travel, alongside the single currency adopted by 20 EU countries, is the most visible symbol of European integration.
- **Schengen Visa**: It is an official document mandatory for some non-Europeans to travel to all the 27 countries which are part of the Schengen area.

SC VERDICT & IMPACT ON OTHER LAWS

Syllabus GS Paper 2 – Polity)

Amendments in 3 key laws that SC struck down, restored status quo

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 15

ALONG WITH the Electoral Bonds Scheme, the Supreme Court on Thursday struck down amendments that the government made in key laws to facilitate corporate donations to political parties.

Before the Electoral Bonds Scheme was introduced in January 2018, the Finance Act, 2017 amended the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA), the Income-tax Act, 1961, and the Companies Act, 2013. The amendments allowed electoral bonds to cut through restrictions on political party funding by doing away with the donation limit for companies, and removing the requirements to declare and maintain a record of donations through electoral bonds.

TURNING BACK THE CLOCK

Thursday's judgment has restored the *status quo* that existed before the Finance Act, 2017 was passed, in all of these statutes.

The RP Act, 1951

Section 29C requires parties to prepare a report detailing the donations received by them in a financial year. They are required to declare all contributions higher than Rs 20,000, and specify whether they were received from individuals or from companies.

WHAT FINANCE ACT, 2017 DID: 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.

WHAT THE SC SAID: The court struck down the amendment, and 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, as donations below this threshold were far less likely to influence political decisions.

Companies Act, 2013

Changes were made to Section 182, which details the prohibitions and restrictions a company must abide by when giving to parties.

Prior to the amendment, Section 182(1) capped 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.

WHAT FINANCE ACT, 2017 DID: 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.

WHAT THE SC SAID: The court struck down this amendment. Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud observed that "permitting unlimited corporate contributions authorises unrestrained influence of companies in the electoral process".

The court held that this violated the right to free and fair elections, and restored the original provision which is meant to curb corruption in electoral financing.

Income-tax Act, 1961

Section 13A(b) of the Act says that a political party shall not include voluntary contributions as part of its total income, but 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.

WHAT FINANCE ACT, 2017 DID: 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.

WHAT THE SC SAID: 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).

Context: Recently, the Supreme Court invalidated numerous amendments made by the government in crucial laws, including those aimed at facilitating corporate donations to political parties, alongside the **Electoral Bonds Scheme (EBS).**

- In its judgment, the court struck down the amendments to **Section 29C of the RP Act, Section 182(3) of the Companies Act and Section 13A(b) of the Income Tax** for violating "the right to information of citizens guaranteed in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution."

Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA)

- Section 29C of the Act requires political parties to prepare a report detailing the donations received by them in a financial year.
- **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.

The Companies Act, 2013

- A number of changes were made to Section 182 of the Act, which details the prohibitions and restrictions a company must abide by when giving political contributions.
- **Section 182(1)** 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.
- **Finance Act, 2017**: 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

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, but it is required to maintain a record of all contributions received that are above Rs 20,000.
- **Finance Act, 2017**: 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.

PIB Feb 15

RASHTIRYA KRISHI VIKAS YOJANA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Govt Policies)

Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare released Rs.235.14 crores today to the Govt of Karnataka as 3rd instalment under Rashtirya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) for the financial year 2023-24 - Ms. Shobha Karandlaje

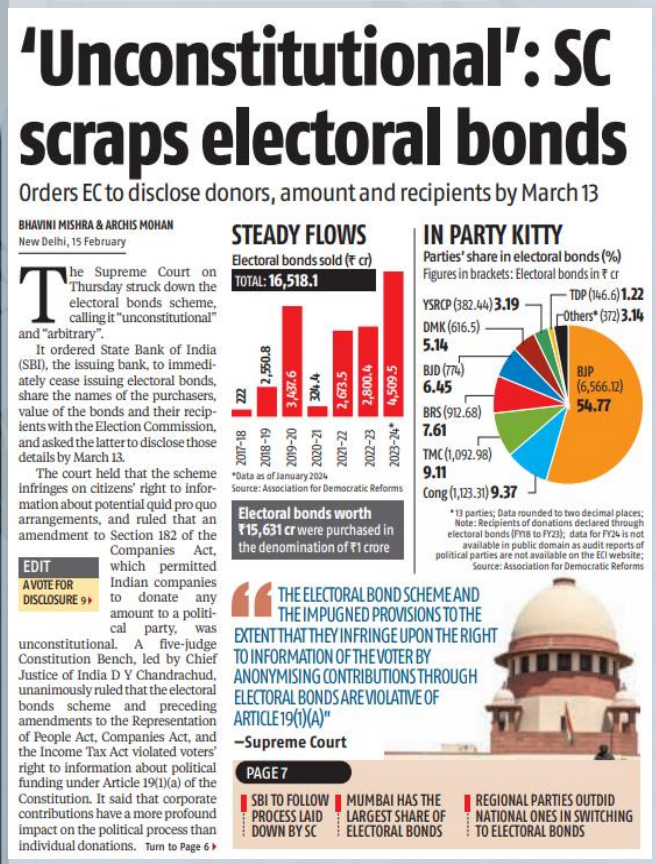
Context: Recently, Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Ms. Shobha Karandlaje announced that the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Govt of India released Rs.235.14 crores to the Govt of Karnataka on 15th Feb 2024 as the 3rd instalment under Rashtirya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) for the financial year 2023-24.

Rashtirya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)

- **About**: was launched as a flagship scheme of the Department of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare (DA&FW) in 2007-2008.
- **Objective**: To incentivize States to draw up comprehensive agriculture development plans, taking into account agroclimatic conditions, natural resources and technology for ensuring more inclusive and integrated development of agriculture and allied sectors.
- **Features of the RKVY Scheme**
  - **State Plan Scheme Operation:** States are entrusted with the responsibility of planning and executing it.
  - **Flexibility and Empowerment**: It empowers states to customize the scheme according to their unique requirements.
  - **Diverse Covered Sectors**: Covered sectors include crop production, animal husbandry, horticulture, fisheries, and agro-processing.
- **Main components of this programme:**
  - Strengthening of existing Agribusiness Incubators (ABI) and setting up new one R-ABI
  - 2 months training/incubation support to entrepreneurs/startups.
  - To provide technical and financial support to Agri-startups.
  - .Mentorship support on technical, IP issues, testing, product & technology validation, etc.
  - Seed Stage Funding of R-ABI Incubatees – Funding upto Rs. 25 lakhs Grant-in-aid.
  - Idea/Pre-Seed Stage Funding of Agripreneurs – Funding up to Rs. 5 lakhs Grant-in-aid.

BUSINESS STANDARD Page 1

ELECTORAL BONDS
(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Polity)



‘Unconstitutional’: SC scraps electoral bonds

Orders EC to disclose donors, amount and recipients by March 13

BHAVINI MISHRA & ARCHIS MOHAN
New Delhi, 15 February

The Supreme Court on Thursday struck down the electoral bonds scheme, calling it "unconstitutional" and "arbitrary".

It ordered State Bank of India (SBI), the issuing bank, to immediately cease issuing electoral bonds, share the names of the purchasers, value of the bonds and their recipients with the Election Commission, and asked the latter to disclose those details by March 13.

The court held that the scheme infringes on citizens' right to information about potential quid pro quo arrangements, and ruled that an amendment to Section 182 of the Companies Act, which permitted Indian companies to donate any amount to a political party, was unconstitutional. A five-judge Constitution Bench, led by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, unanimously ruled that the electoral bonds scheme and preceding amendments to the Representation of People Act, Companies Act, and the Income Tax Act violated voters' right to information about political funding under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. It said that corporate contributions have a more profound impact on the political process than individual donations. Turn to Page 6

EDIT
A VOTE FOR DISCLOSURE 9

STEADY FLOWS
Electoral bonds sold (₹ cr)
TOTAL: 16,518.1

*Data as of January 2024
Source: Association for Democratic Reforms

Electoral bonds worth ₹15,631 cr were purchased in the denomination of ₹1 crore

IN PARTY KITTY
Parties' share in electoral bonds (%)
Figures in brackets: Electoral bonds in ₹ cr

*13 parties; Data rounded to two decimal places; Note: Recipients of donations declared through electoral bonds (FY18 to FY23); data for FY24 is not available in public domain as audit reports of political parties are not available on the ECI website; Source: Association for Democratic Reforms

"THE ELECTORAL BOND SCHEME AND THE IMPUGNED PROVISIONS TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY INFRINGE UPON THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION OF THE VOTER BY ANONYMISING CONTRIBUTIONS THROUGH ELECTORAL BONDS ARE VIOLATIVE OF ARTICLE 19(1)(A)"
—Supreme Court

PAGE 7

SBI TO FOLLOW PROCESS LAID DOWN BY SC | MUMBAI HAS THE LARGEST SHARE OF ELECTORAL BONDS | REGIONAL PARTIES OUTDID NATIONAL ONES IN SWITCHING TO ELECTORAL BONDS

Context: The Supreme Court recently directed the State Bank of India to stop issuing electoral bonds immediately.

Electoral Bonds

- **About**: Electoral bonds are bearer instruments, akin to promissory notes, available for purchase by any Indian citizen or an Indian-incorporated company.
- **Introduced**: In 2018 by the Union government.
- **Objectives**: to cleanse the system of political funding in the country by eradicating the menace of unaccounted money coming into the country's economy through political funding.
- **Donation Option**: Citizens or corporations can buy these bonds and subsequently donate them to any eligible political party of their choice.
- **Resemblance to Bank Notes**: Electoral bonds are akin to banknotes and are payable to the bearer on demand, devoid of any interest.
- **Digital or Cheque Purchase**: Individuals and parties can acquire these bonds either digitally or through a cheque.
- **Eligibility**: Only political parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and those securing at least 1% of votes in the last general election to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly of the State can receive electoral bonds.
- **Encashment Procedure**: Political parties can encash these bonds solely through a designated bank account with the authorized bank.
- **Mandatory Disclosure:** Political parties must disclose the amount received via electoral bonds to the Election Commission.
- **Donor Anonymity:** Importantly, electoral bonds do not bear the name of the donor, ensuring the anonymity of the contributor.

Amendments Related To Political Funding

- **Amendment to the Representation of the People Act 1951**: The government amended Section 29C effectively exempting political parties from informing the ECI about the details of contributions made to them through electoral bonds.
- **Amendment to the Companies Act 2013**: No companies are required to give details of political contributions in their annual profit and loss accounts.
- The government has also removed the cap of 7.5% (seven point five percent) on corporate contributions to the political parties.
- **Amendment to the FCRA Act 2010**: allowed foreign companies with subsidiaries in India to fund Indian political parties.
- **Amendment to the Income Tax Act 1961**: allowed anonymous donations only less than Rs. 20,000.

PIB Feb 15

NATIONAL AYUSH MISSION

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Govt Schemes)

Union Minister of Ayush participated in Regional Review Meeting of National Ayush Mission

Context: Recently, during the Regional Review Meeting of Bihar, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh organized by the Ministry of Ayush in Patna, Bihar, the Union Minister of Ayush and Ports, Shipping, and Waterways highlighted the global interest in holistic healthcare, with Yoga and Ayush gaining prominence worldwide.

National Ayush Mission

- **About**:It is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented by the Government of India.
- **Aim**: To mainstream AYUSH Systems into health care services, to develop evidence-based AYUSH management protocol through scientific documentation and to ensure the accessibility of quality AYUSH services.
- **Launched**: In 2014 by the Department of Ayush, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the National Ayush Mission is a centrally sponsored scheme.
- **Funding**: 60% share is provided by the Central Government and 40% is provided by the State Government.
- **Values**: Committed to provide Quality Care, Availability of conventional and alternative medicines, Cost-effective medicine and Strengthen public health
- **Objectives of the National AYUSH Mission**
  - **Offering Cost-Effective AYUSH Services**: Providing AYUSH services through AYUSH hospitals, dispensaries, and integrating AYUSH facilities into Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Community Health Centres (CHCs), and District Hospitals (DHs).
  - **Strengthening Institutional Capacities**: Upgrading educational institutions, drug testing labs, AS&U pharmacies (Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani), and enhancing the AS&U enforcement mechanism at the state level for AYUSH systems.
  - **Supporting Medicinal Plant Cultivation**: Promoting the cultivation of medicinal plants using Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) to ensure a sustained supply of quality raw **materials for AYUSH drugs.**
  - **Establishing Clusters and Infrastructure**: Assisting in the establishment of clusters by integrating cultivation, value addition, warehousing, marketing, and developing infrastructure to support entrepreneurs in the AYUSH sector.

ALL INDIA RADIO

Feb 15

EMPLOYEES STATE SCHEME

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Govt schemes)

Over 18.86 lakh new workers enrolled under ESI Scheme in Dec, 2023

Context: Over 18.86 lakh new workers enrolled under Employees State Insurance, ESI Scheme in December last year.

Employees State Insurance

- **About**: The Employees' State Insurance Scheme is a comprehensive initiative outlined in the Employees' State Insurance Act.
- **Inaugurated**: In Kanpur on 24th February 1952 (ESIC Day) by then Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru.
- **Objective**: To safeguard employees defined within the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, against various contingencies such as sickness, maternity, disablement, and employment-related death.
- **Financed by:** Contributions from employers and employees.
- **Scope and Coverage**: The scheme extends its coverage to a range of establishments, including factories, road transport, hotels, restaurants, cinemas, newspapers, shops, and educational/medical institutions.
    - It applies specifically to establishments where 10 or more individuals are employed, although in certain states, the threshold limit for coverage remains at 20.
- **Eligibility Criteria**: Employees falling under the designated categories mentioned earlier, with wages up to Rs. 15,000/- per month, are eligible for social security coverage under the ESI Act.
- **Enhancement of Wage Ceiling**: Notably, the ESI Corporation has made a significant decision to increase the wage ceiling for coverage under the ESI Act from Rs. 15,000/- to Rs. 21,000/-.
- This enhancement aims to broaden the social security net and extend the benefits of the scheme to a larger segment of the workforce.

NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Feb 14

KAJI NEMU

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Govt Policies)

'Kaji Nemu' declared as State Fruit, Assam government says will benefit farmers



Context: Recently, the Assam government declared the GI-tagged 'Kaji Nemu' (Citrus Limon) as the State Fruit.

Kaji Nemu

- **About:** It is a tangy fruit native to the Assam state of India.
- **Shape and Size**: It is elongated and oblong compared to other lemon varieties.
  - The oval-shaped Kaji Nemu is a lot juicier than other lemon varieties.
- **Traditional Use**: It is popular for its unique aroma and health benefits..
- **Export and Culinary Importance**: 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.
  - Kaji Nemu is majorly used in culinary and commercial purposes, and it is extensively used for its medicinal properties.
- **Cultivation and Availability**: It is grown in almost all the districts of the state and is available throughout the year.
- **Nutritional Value**: The fruit is a powerhouse of nutrients, boosting health.
- **Citrus Varieties**: Assam has as many as 16 species and 52 varieties hybrids of citrus.

Geographical Indications (GI)

- **It means:** A name or a sign given to certain products that relate to a specific geographical location or origins like a region, town, or country.
- **Governed and directed by:** World Trade Organisation's (WTO's) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).
- **Administered by:** Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999.
- **Issued by:** The Geographical Indications Registry (Chennai) under the Department of Industry Promotion and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- **First product with GI tag:** Darjeeling tea in the year 2004-05.
- **Validity:** 10 years following which it can be renewed.

HINDUSTAN TIMES Feb 15

ADJOURNMENTS IN SUPREME COURT

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Polity)

Supreme Court introduces new ground rules to seek adjournments

Context: The Supreme Court recently issued a circular tightening provisions regarding the circumstances under which lawyers may seek adjournment of cases and imposed a bar on seeking two consecutive adjournments.

Adjournments in Supreme Court (SC)

- **About:** An adjournment refers to the court practice of delaying a scheduled hearing to a later date.
- **Order XVII of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908**: Order XVII of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908 provides rules for courts to follow when faced with adjournment requests.
  - Courts shall not grant an adjournment to a party more than three times during the hearing of a suit.
  - Sufficient cause must be shown, and the circumstances are beyond the control of the party requesting the adjournment.
- **Impact of Adjournments**: While adjournments are often necessary, the delay caused has a cascading effect of increasing the number of pending cases.
- **Causes of Delay**: The 239th Law Commission Report (2012) listed causes for delay in criminal cases at the trial court stage.

Guidelines for Adjournment Requests

- **Consent Requirement**: Lawyers must obtain consent from the opposing side before circulating a request for an adjournment.
- **Limit on Consecutive Adjournments**: Two consecutive adjournments in a case are prohibited.
- **Specific Reasons Mandate**: The party seeking an adjournment must: Provide a specific reason for the request and Indicate the total number of adjournments already sought in the case.
- **Non-Entertainment Criteria:** Related to bail/anticipatory bail.
  - Where an exemption from surrendering has been granted.
  - Where an interim order is operating in favor of the adjournment-seeking party.
  - Where suspension of sentence has been sought for.
  - In all other cases, adjournment letters will be entertained a day before the publication of the case list.
- **Mandatory Listing Within Four Weeks**: Matters that get adjourned must be listed before the court within the following four weeks.
- **Advance Date Requests Prohibition**: No requests to mention the matter to seek an advance date will be permitted after adjournment.

INDIAN EXPRESS

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VENEZUELA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 – Geography)

As sanctions ease, India becomes top buyer of Venezuelan crude in Dec, Jan

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 15

AFTER A gap of over three years, India emerged as the top buyer of Venezuelan crude in December and January, as per shipping fixtures and ship tracking data. Indian refiners had stopped oil imports from the Latin American country in 2020 after the United States (US) imposed sanctions on Caracas. With Washington temporarily easing restrictions on Venezuela's oil sector in October, Indian refiners — mainly Reliance Industries (RIL) — are back in the market for Venezuelan oil that is likely available at a discount.

Crude oil dispatches from Venezuela to India in December were almost 191,600 barrels per day (bpd), while in January, the loadings rose to over 254,000 bpd — over 45 per cent of the Latin American nation's oil exports of almost 557,000 bpd for the month, according to data from commodity market analytics firm Kpler. The data shows that Venezuela last dispatched crude oil to India in September 2020, with the last of the deliveries at Indian ports in November of that year.

India — specifically private sector refiners RIL and Nayara Energy (NEL) — was a regular buyer of Venezuelan crude prior to imposition of US sanctions on Caracas in 2019. Following the sanctions, oil imports from Venezuela stopped within a few months. As per India's official trade data, Venezuela was New Delhi's fifth-largest supplier of oil in 2019, providing close to 16 million tonnes of crude to Indian refiners.

In October, the US eased sanctions on Venezuela's petroleum sector, authorising oil exports without limitation for six months. Venezuela, a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries has the largest proven oil reserves in the world.

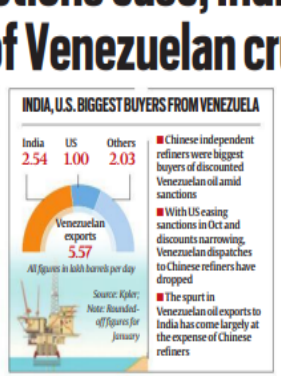
Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri has been saying that India is willing to buy Venezuelan oil if the economics are favourable. India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and depends on imports to meet over 85 per cent of its requirement.

Venezuela was offering steep discounts to Chinese independent refiners, who were its biggest buyers of oil through the sanctions. Trade sources suggest that the discounts have narrowed considerably over the past few months due to the easing of sanctions and other buyers now willing to pick up Venezuelan oil. Nevertheless, even low levels of discounts can lead to massive savings for Indian refiners.

The spurt in Venezuelan oil exports to India has come largely at the expense of Chinese refiners. Venezuelan oil exports to China averaged at almost 244,000 bpd between January 2021 and October 2023, as per Kpler data. With the US easing sanctions in October, Venezuelan oil dispatches to Chinese refiners have dropped to under 70,000 bpd in the following months.

Venezuelan oil dispatches to RIL in December stood at around 127,000 bpd, while nearly 37,000 bpd were dispatched to Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and around 28,000 bpd to HPCL-Mittal Energy. January loading data shows similar volumes for RIL. The destination ports for the balance volumes headed to India — around 127,000 bpd — are not clear yet, though there are indications that a bulk of those volumes could be headed for RIL's refineries. An RIL spokesperson did not respond to a request seeking comment on the matter.

"Four fully-laden VLCCs (very large crude carriers) equivalent to around 255,000 bpd or half of Venezuela's exports, sailed towards India last month, while the second-largest buyer US bought around 100,000 bpd. So, India's interest is really strong. The question is whether there would be a lull in buying before April (the month when the first six-month US sanctions waiver runs out), with Indian refiners prudently waiting for the Biden administration to extend the waivers for another six months," said Viktor Katona, Lead Crude Analyst at Kpler.





Context: After a gap of over three years, India emerged as the **top buyer of Venezuelan crude** for two consecutive months of December 2023 and January 2024, as per shipping fixtures and ship tracking data.

- Venezuela was India's fifth largest oil supplier in 2019, but imports stopped after US sanctions.

Venezuela

- **About:** A country on the northern coast of South America, consisting of a continental landmass and many islands and islets in the Caribbean Sea.
- **Capital:** Caracas.
- **Boundary:**
  - North - Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean,
  - West - Colombia,
  - South - Brazil ,
  - North-east - Trinidad and Tobago ,
  - East - Guyana.
- **Significance**: Venezuela has the world's largest known oil reserves and has been one of the world's leading exporters of oil.
- **Geographical features**: Lake Maracaibo, Lake Valencia, Guiana Highland/Shield, Los Llanos, or "the plains", Orinoco Delta etc.

India's dependence on crude oil import:

- India imports over 85% of its crude oil requirements and around 50% of its natural gas requirements.
- Russia has become the largest crude oil exporter replacing west Asian countries because of heavy concessions in recent times.

NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Feb 14

KOTAVARI SCULPTURE

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 – History)

Kotravai sculpture from Pallava period unearthed near Ulundurpet

Context: A team of archaeological researchers have discovered an 8th-century Kotravai sculpture, an artefact that dates back to the **Pallava period**, near Ulundurpet.

Kotravai Sculpture

- **About**: It is made in a slab stone of five-feet height and four-feet width. The idol is depicted with eight hands, indicating its origin in the eighth century during the Pallava period.
- **Features**: Its local artistic style, crown, batrakundalams on ears, sarapali neck ornament, tholvalai on shoulders, kaivalai in all hands, and marbu kachai covering the chest
  - Kotravai is portrayed standing on the head of a buffalo, with two guards on each side," he said. Raj also noted the uniqueness of the sculpture's crown compared to other eighth-century Kotravai sculptures found in the area.

Pallava Dynasty

- **About:** The Pallava Dynasty, a prominent power in South India, flourished from the 3rd to the 9th centuries, leaving a significant mark on the region's history, culture, and architecture.
- **Origin:** Initially, the Pallavas were feudatories of the Andhra Satavahanas.
- They gained autonomy following the decline of the Andhra Satavahanas at Amaravati.
- The Pallavas gradually migrated southward, establishing Kanchipuram as their capital in the 4th century CE.
- The reigns of Mahendravarman I and Narasimhavarman I marked periods of increased wealth and influence for the Pallava dynasty.
- Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang's accounts shed light on Pallava patronage of Buddhism and notable figures like Bodhidharma.
- **Architecture**
  - The Pallava Dynasty was renowned for its contributions to Dravidian architecture, particularly temple architecture.
  - Mahabalipuram emerged as a vital center of art, architecture, and literature under Pallava rule.
  - Narasimhavarman II commissioned significant structures like the Kailasanatha Temple and the Shore Temple.
  - Temples like Kailasanatha and Vaikuntaperumal exemplify Pallava architectural prowess and feature intricate sculptures depicting their history.
- **Religion:** The Pallavas embraced Shaivism, aligning with the prevalent religious practices of the Dravidian region.
- **Conflicts**: Throughout their reign, the Pallavas engaged in frequent conflicts with the Chalukya Dynasty to the north and the Tamil kingdoms of Chola and Pandyas to the south.
  - Their battles with the Chalukyas of Badami culminated in their eventual subjugation by the Chola kings in the 8th century CE.
- **Decline:** The ascent of the Rashtrakutas signaled the decline of the Pallava Dynasty.
  - Vijayalaya, a Chola king, decisively defeated Aparajitavarman, the last Pallava king, in 897 AD, marking the end of Pallava rule.

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