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MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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INDIAN EXPRESS

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ELECTORAL BOND SCHEME

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 - Polity & Governance)

In deep freeze, electoral bonds case may come up in SC on September 19

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 15

THE SUPREME Court will likely hear pending petitions challenging the Electoral Bond Scheme on September 19. The petitions filed by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) figure in the advance cause list of the top court for September 19.

The matter last came up in the court on March 26, 2021, when a bench headed by the then Chief Justice of India S A Bobde dismissed an application filed by ADR seeking a stay on any fresh sale of electoral bonds ahead of the Assembly elections that were due at the time.

The top court questioned claims regarding "complete anonymity" of the purchasers of the bonds and said "it is not as though the operations under the Scheme are behind iron curtains incapable of being pierced".

Dismissing the prayer not to allow any new window for their sale till its main petition challenging the scheme is decided, the court pointed out that the bonds had already been issued in the past without any impediment and that it had ordered "certain safeguards".

"Therefore, in the light of the fact that the Scheme was introduced on 2.1.2018; that the bonds are released at periodical intervals in January, April, July and October of every year; that they had been so released in the years 2018, 2019 and 2020 without any impediment; and that certain safeguards have already been provided by this Court in its interim order dated 12.4.2019, we do not see any justification for the grant of stay at this stage. Hence both the applications for stay are dismissed," the SC had said.

The court's reference was to its April 12, 2019 interim order by which it directed political parties that have received donations through Electoral Bonds to "forthwith" submit the details of these bonds to the EC. That order too had come on the petition filed by ADR in September 2017.

The NGO had again approached the court with the application seeking a stay in view of the Assembly polls. The plea contended that the identity of the donors could never be known to the public and referred to reservations raised by the Reserve Bank of India and Election Commission to the Scheme.

The bench referred to the Election Commission recieving details of contributions received through bonds, in pursuance of its April 2019 order, and said "we do not know at this stage as to how far the allegation that under the Scheme, there would be complete anonymity in the financing of political parties by corporate houses, both in India and abroad, is sustainable".

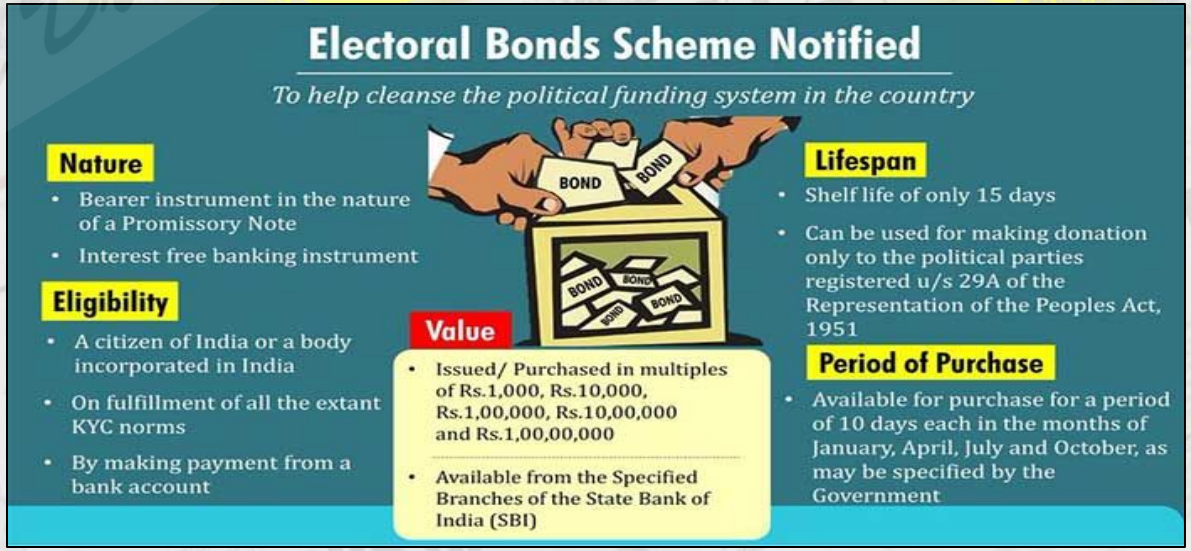
"If the purchase of the bonds as well as their encashment could happen only through banking channels and if purchase of bonds are allowed only to customers who fulfill KYC norms, the information about the purchaser will certainly be available with the SBI which alone is authorised to issue and encash the bonds as per the Scheme. Moreover, any expenditure incurred by anyone in purchasing the bonds through banking channels, will have to be accounted as an expenditure in his books of accounts. The trial balance, cash flow statement, profit and loss account and balance sheet of companies which purchase Electoral Bonds will have to necessarily reflect the amount spent by way of expenditure in the purchase of Electoral Bonds," the bench said.

ADR had argued that though the first purchase may be through banking channels for a consideration paid in white money, someone may repurchase the bonds using black money and hand it over to a political party.

Context: The Supreme Court will likely hear pending petitions challenging the Electoral Bond Scheme on September 19.

Electoral Bond Scheme

- Electoral bonds are an instrument through which anyone can donate money to political parties.
- Such bonds, which are sold in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore, can be bought from authorised branches of the State Bank of India.
- As such, a donor is required to pay the amount - say Rs 10 lakh - via a cheque or a digital mechanism (cash is not allowed) to the authorised SBI branch.
- The donor can then give this bond (just one, if the denomination chosen is Rs 10 lakh, or 10, if the denomination is Rs 1 lakh) to the party or parties of their choice.
- The political parties can choose to encash such bonds within 15 days of receiving them and fund their electoral expenses.
- The process ensures that the name of the donor remains anonymous.



INDIAN EXPRESS

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FINANCIAL STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (FSDC)

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Economy)

26TH MEETING HEADED BY FINANCE MINISTER

FSDC: Early-warning indicators, 2023 G20 presidency in focus

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 15

THE FINANCIAL Stability and Development Council (FSDC), headed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, on Thursday underscored the need for continuous monitoring of risks in the financial sector so that necessary action can be taken on time to mitigate any vulnerability.

At the 26th meeting of the Council, attended by financial sector regulators and other officials, the FM also reviewed issues relating to the financial sector that can be taken up during India's G20 Presidency in 2023.

The meeting comes at a time when key central banks are aggressively raising interest rates to curb runaway inflation, while the conflict in Ukraine continues to pose risks to both inflation and growth forecasts.



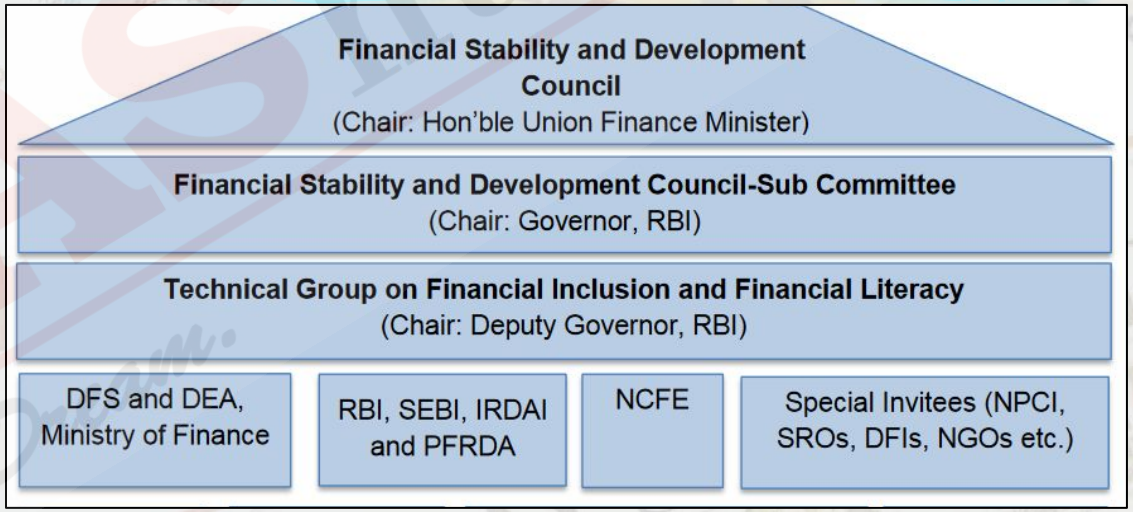
NIRMALA SITHARAMAN
Finance Minister *PTI file*

According to an official statement after the meeting, the FSDC deliberated on the early-warning indicators for the economy and "our preparedness to deal with them". It also discussed improving the efficiency of the existing financial and credit information systems, issues of governance and management in systemically important financial institutions, including financial market infrastructures, strengthening cyber security framework in the financial sector, common KYC for all financial Services and related matters and update on account aggregator system. At the same time, the meeting deliberated on issues relating to the financing of power sector, strategic role the GIFT international financial services centre can play and inter-regulatory there.

"It was noted that there is a need to monitor the financial sector risks, the financial conditions and market developments on a continuous basis by the Government and the regulators so that appropriate and timely action can be taken so as to mitigate any vulnerability and strengthen financial stability," the Finance Ministry said.

The FSDC meeting was attended by ministers of state for finance Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad and Pankaj Chaudhary, Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das, top secretaries of various Finance Ministry departments, IFSC Authority Chairman Injeti Srinivas, Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran, Sebi Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch, Irdai Chief Debasish Panda and IBBI Chief Ravi Mittal, among others. FE

Context: The Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), headed by Finance Minister, underscored the need for continuous monitoring of risks in the financial sector so that necessary action can be taken on time to mitigate any vulnerability.



Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)

- The Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) was set up by the Government as non-statutory apex level forum in December 2010.
- The Chairman of the Council is the Finance Minister.
- Its members include the heads of financial sector Regulators (RBI, SEBI, PFRDA, IRDA & FMC) Finance Secretary and/or Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Secretary, Department of Financial Services, and Chief Economic Adviser. The Council can invite experts to its meeting if required.
- In 2018, the government reconstituted FSDC to include the Minister of State responsible for the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Secretary of Department of Electronics and Information Technology, Chairperson of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) and the Revenue Secretary.
- The Council monitors macro prudential supervision of the economy, including functioning of large financial conglomerates, and addresses inter-regulatory coordination and financial sector development issues.
- The FSDC Sub-committee has also been set up under the chairmanship of Governor, RBI.
- All the members of the FSDC are also the members of the Sub-committee.

LIVEMINT

Page 1

INDIA'S FOREIGN TRADE

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Economy)

China beats US to re-emerge as India's top trading partner

Ravi Dutta Mishra & Dilasha Seth

NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

China overtook the US to return as India's largest trade partner with $11.49 billion worth of goods traded in July, data released by the commerce ministry showed, underscoring the country's growing reliance on its northern neighbour.

In comparison, trade with the US stood at $11.08 billion in July, amid a demand slowdown and recession fears in the US.

The growth in trade with China is largely on account of a surge in imports and near-flat growth in exports to the US during the month. Exports to the US in July grew by 0.41% to $6.78 billion, while imports from China expanded by 45% to $10.2 billion.

The department of commerce had earlier contested China's official data that showed Beijing was India's largest trading partner in 2021-22. Delhi countered it, saying the US was India's largest trading partner that year.

The US, however, remained India's largest trading partner in the four months ended 31 July, with shipments worth $46.2 billion, more than China's $40.4 billion.

Meanwhile, the trade deficit with China is widening, with exports to the neighbouring nation contracting 44% to $1.26 billion in July, increasing the trade gap to nearly $9 billion, which is about a third of India's overall trade deficit during the month. Exports declined even on a month-on-month basis.

"Exports to China may have declined for two reasons. First, China may be imposing some non-tariff measures and, second, exports from countries with whom China has a trade agreement may have an advantage over our exporters," said Arpita Mukherjee, professor, ICRIER.

Queries emailed to the ministry of commerce and industry on Wednesday remained unanswered till press time.

In April-July, India's outbound shipments to China declined by 33% from a year ago. Incidentally, India's imports from China grew by 16% in July from June's $8.8 billion. Major imports from China in July included 'coke and semi-coke of coal', antibiotics, fertilizers, silver, parts for motor vehicles, electrical transformers, air and vacuum pumps, printing machinery, and electrical apparatus for line telephone.

About $154 million worth of silver was imported from China in July, growing more than 20,000 times when compared with a year ago. Air and vacuum pump imports rose 82% in July to $111 million. Refrigerator and

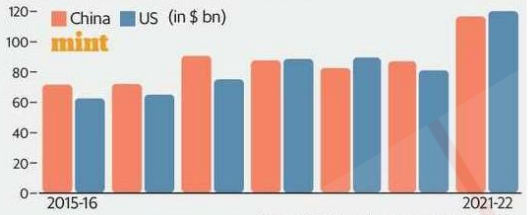
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Taking the lead

China re-emerged as India's largest trade partner in July



India's overall trade with China and US



Source: Ministry of commerce and industry

PARAS JAIN/MINT

Context: China overtook the US to return as India's largest trade partner with $11.49 billion worth of goods traded in July.

India's Foreign Trade Policy

- The Foreign Trade Development and Regulation Act of 1992 makes the Government of India's Foreign Trade Policy a legally binding instrument.
- A foreign trade policy main goal is to promote trade by lowering transaction and transit times and costs.
- A FTP lays down the rules for international commerce and discloses the government's position on a number of concurrent but significant policy factors, such as technology flow and intangibles, among others.
- During the last few years, India has initiated its trade agreement negotiations and reviewed existing agreements with many countries.
- Foreign trade policy 2021-26 is expected to focus on MSMEs and new export potential by identifying potential products and services in each district, mapping Geographical Indication (GI) products, and setting up district export promotion panels.
- In March 2021, the central government announced plans to establish a new mechanism to increase import screening to protect domestic manufacturers.
- The policy is also expected to boost exports of MSMEs by adopting e-commerce platforms and support in identifying new sectors with significant export potential.
- The key initiatives aimed to boost the export of both goods and services by systematically addressing domestic and global trade constraints by reducing the transaction cost; implementing WTO-compliant policies should support the economy to reach the target of a $5 trillion mark by 2025.

LIVEMINT Page 8

SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 - International Realtions/Organisations)

Iran to become member of Asian security body

Last year, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation approved Iran's application for accession

Reuters
feedback@livemint.com

Iran has moved a step closer towards becoming a permanent member of a central Asian security body dominated by Russia and China, as Tehran seeks to overcome economic isolation imposed by US sanctions.

Foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian on Thursday said Iran had signed a memorandum of obligations to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which is holding a summit this week in Uzbekistan.

The body, formed in the 2001 as a talking shop for Russia, China and ex-Soviet states in Central Asia, expanded four years ago to include India and Pakistan, with a view to playing a bigger role as counterweight to Western influence in the region.

"By signing the document for full membership of the SCO, now Iran has entered a new stage of various economic, commercial, transit and energy cooperation," Hossein Amirabdollahian wrote on his Instagram page.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was in the Silk Road oasis of Samarkand, Uzbekistan on Thursday to attend the summit. He held a bilateral meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Iranian state TV reported.

He and Putin both criticized the US at the start of their meeting. Raisi accused the US of breaching its obligations under Iran's nuclear deal with world powers. Putin gibed American officials, saying "They are masters of their word - they give it and then take it back whenever they want."

Last year, the central Asian security body approved Iran's application for accession, while Tehran's rulers called on members to help it form a mechanism to avert sanctions imposed by the West over its disputed nuclear programme.



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. AP

Iran will now be able to take part in the body's meetings, although it is likely to take some time to achieve full membership, deputy secretary-general of the organisation Grigory Logvinov told Russian state TV, which also reported the signing.

Iran's economy has been hit hard since 2018, when former US President Donald Trump abandoned Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers, including Russia and China. Months of indirect talks between Iran and US President Joe Biden's administration have hit a dead end over several obstacles to reviving the nuclear pact, under which Tehran agreed to curbs on its nuclear programme in return for the lifting of sanctions.

Tehran called on SCO members to help it form a mechanism to avert sanctions by the West

The US sanctions and growing concerns about an emerging, US-backed Gulf Arab-Israeli bloc that could shift the Middle East balance of power further away from Tehran have prompted Iran's clerical rulers to pursue closer economic and strategic ties with Russia, itself hit with sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.

"Iran is determined to boost its ties with Russia, from economic to aerospace and political fields," Raisi said during his meeting with Putin, according to Iranian state media.

"The cooperation between Tehran and Moscow can significantly neutralise the limitations imposed on our countries by the US sanctions," he said.

In July, just days after Biden visited Israel and Saudi Arabia, Putin visited Tehran in his first trip outside the former Soviet Union since the 24 February invasion of Ukraine.

Putin said on Thursday that a delegation of 80 large companies will visit Iran next week, Russian state-owned news agency RIA reported, in another sign of the growing ties with Iran.

Putin is also scheduled to meet one-on-one with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan.

AP also contributed to this story.

Context: Iran has moved a step closer towards becoming a permanent member of a central Asian security body (SCO) dominated by Russia and China, as Tehran seeks to overcome economic isolation imposed by US sanctions.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an intergovernmental organization founded in Shanghai on 15 June 2001.
- The SCO currently comprises:
  - Eight Member States (China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan)
  - Four Observer States interested in acceding to full membership (Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia)
  - Six "Dialogue Partners" (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey).
- In 2021, the decision was made to start the accession process of Iran to the SCO as a full member, and Egypt, Qatar as well as Saudi Arabia became dialogue partners.
- Since its inception in 2001, the SCO has mainly focused on regional security issues, its fight against regional terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism.
- To date, the SCO's priorities also include regional development.
- The SCO has been an observer in the UN General Assembly since 2005.
- In April 2010, the UN and SCO Secretariats signed a Joint Declaration on Cooperation.
- SCO Secretariat has also established partnerships with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in addition to its ongoing cooperation with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the UN Office on Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT).

THE HINDU Page 2

COMPENSATORY AFFORESTATION (CA)

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Env & Eco)

Compensatory afforestation in other States likely

Union Environment Ministry has taken cognisance of DDA's letter seeking permission, says official

MUNEEF KHAN
NEW DELHI

The Union Environment Ministry is likely to allow compensatory afforestation (CA) for development projects executed in the Capital in neighbouring States due to shortage of land in Delhi, according to a senior Ministry official.

The official said the Ministry has taken cognisance of the Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) request for the same but refused to elaborate further. The issue of shortage in land for CA was flagged by the DDA in two letters to the Ministry in March this year and in May 2021.

Senior DDA officials, who are familiar with the development, said they have not received any communication on the Ministry's likely move to allow CA in the neighbouring States.



Facing land shortage, the DDA has not been able to attend to requests from service agencies executing development projects in the Capital. ▪FILE PHOTO

On September 11, *The Hindu* had reported that the DDA continued to face land shortage due to which it had not been able to attend to requests from service agencies executing development projects in the Capital. The most recent request, according to a senior DDA official, was for around 25 hectares for CA to the Indian Railways.

In the March 30 letter to the Environment Ministry, DDA's vice-chairman Manish Gupta had sought relaxation in the guidelines issued under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, for CA to be allowed on degraded forest land in neighbouring States for projects implemented by the Centre and public sector undertakings.

In 2021, the DDA had provided 119.76 hectares to various service-providing agencies for CA, according to data provided by the senior DDA official.

Compensatory Afforestation, according to the Handbook of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, has to be carried out for diversion of forest land or deemed forest land for non-forest purposes, while the purpose of CA is to compensate for the loss of "land by land" and loss of "trees by trees".

'Exclusive relaxation'

Earlier, the senior official in the Environment Ministry had told *The Hindu* that the DDA was not facing any land shortage for CA and it was only looking for an "exclusive relaxation" by proposing CA on "double degraded forest land".

According to paragraph 2.3(i) of chapter 2 of the Act, CA has to be raised on suitable non-forest land, which is equal to the area proposed for diversion, at the cost to be paid by the user agency.

Simultaneously, paragraph 2.3 (iii) states that in cases where non-forest land is available but to a lesser extent, CA can be carried out on degraded land which is twice the extent of the forest area that is being diverted.

The Ministry official had earlier said the DDA was pushing for a relaxation to carry out CA on "double degraded forest land, which we will not allow".

He had said that the urban body had over 5,000 hectares on the Yamuna floodplains, which remains encroached upon and "the DDA was not acting on this".

Context: The Union Environment Ministry is likely to allow compensatory afforestation (CA) for development projects executed in the Capital in neighbouring States due to shortage of land in Delhi.

CAMPA

- In April 2004, Ministry of Environment and Forests constituted Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) to overlook and manage the Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) as directed by the SC.
    - TN Godhavarman Vs Union of India case: In 2002, the Supreme Court (SC) ordered that a Compensatory Afforestation Fund had to be created in which all the contributions towards compensatory afforestation and net present value of land had to be deposited.
- The authority was termed as the 'custodian' of the fund.
- Further in 2009, the government ordered that State CAMPAs had to be set up to boost compensatory afforestation at state level and also manage Green India Fund.
- Compensatory afforestation is mandatory in case of diversion of Forest Land
- Whenever forest land is diverted for non-forest purposes, it is mandatory under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 that an equivalent area of non-forest land has to be taken up for compensatory afforestation.
- In addition to this, funds for raising the forest are also to be imposed on whomsoever is undertaking the diversion.
- The land chosen for afforestation, if viable, must be in close proximity of reserved or protected forest for ease of management by forest department.

Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016

- Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016 came into force from 30 September 2018.
- The Act established a National Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of India and State Compensatory Afforestation Fund under the Public Account of each state.
- The payments made for compensatory afforestation, net present value and others related to the project will be deposited in the fund.
- The State Funds will receive 90% of the payments while National Fund will receive remaining 10%.
- These funds will be regulated by State and National CAMPA.
- All states except Nagaland have set up state CAMPAs following the 2018 notification.
- In April 2019, the Ministry of Environment notified that states which have a forest land of more than 75% of their geographical area need not provide non-forest land for compensatory afforestation.

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VEMBANAD LAKE

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Env & Eco)

Demolition of resort begins in Kerala island

Among buildings to be razed include 54 villas and main block

STAFF REPORTER
ALAPPUZHA

The demolition of the illegally constructed villas of Kapico Resorts Pvt. Ltd on Nediyathuruthu island on Vembanad Lake in Kerala began on Thursday.

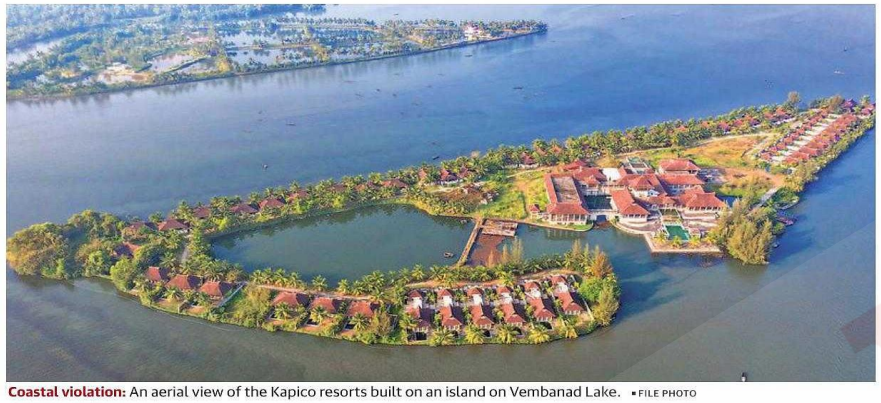
The move comes 32 months after the Supreme Court ordered the razing of the high-end resort, citing that the constructions on the backwater island at Panavally grama panchayat in Alappuzha violated coastal and environmental regulations.

A demolition plan submitted by the resort management was accorded approval by the panchayat on Wednesday, paving the way for bulldozing the resort. Among the buildings to be torn down include 54 villas and a main block among other facilities spread over 35,000 sq ft.

The structures are dismantled by the resort management under the watchful eyes of the Alappuzha district administration and the local panchayat authorities. The demolition and transportation of reusable materials and debris, carried out in an environmentally safe manner, are expected to be completed in six months.

In the initial phase of the demolition, the compound walls of the cottages are removed. Roofs of the buildings will be pulled down in the next stage.

"All the structures will be razed down in six months without using public money. The resort management will bear the entire cost of the operations," said District Collector V.R. Krishna Teja.



Coastal violation: An aerial view of the Kapico resorts built on an island on Vembanad Lake. ▪ FILE PHOTO



Context: The demolition of the illegally constructed villas of Kapico Resorts Pvt. Ltd on Nediyathuruthu island on Vembanad Lake in Kerala began.

About Vembanad Lake

- The Vembanad Lake is the longest lake in the country and the largest in Kerala.
- It lays right by the Arabian Sea, with a narrow reef separating it from the sea.
- India's famous Nehru Trophy Boat Race(Snake Boat Race) is hosted on the waters of this lake, pulling in enthusiasts from all over the country and the world.
- This is the lake that is known by three names, as Punnamada Lake in Kuttanad, Kochi Lake in Kochi, and Vembanad Lake in Kottayam.
- The government of India has recognised the wetland under the National Wetlands Conservation Programme.
    - It is the largest wetland system in India.
- In 2002, it was included in the list of wetlands of international importance, as defined by the Ramsar Convention.
    - It is the second-largest Ramsar site in India only after the Sundarbans in West Bengal.
- The lake has its source in four rivers, Meenachil, Achankoil, Pampa and Manimala.
- One of the most outstanding features of this lake is the 1252 m long saltwater barrier, Thanneermukkom, which was built to stop saltwater intrusion into Kuttanad.
- The Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary is located on the east coast of the lake.
- In 2019, Willingdon Island, a seaport located in the city of Kochi, was carved out of Vembanad Lake.
- Currently, the lake is declining in size and is facing a major ecological crisis, owing to land reclaiming. It is estimated to have reduced by 37% of its original size.

TIMES OF INDIA

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Spl status for backward states if oppn alliance forms govt in '24: Nitish

Patna: Bihar CM Nitish Kumar on Thursday promised special category status for all backward states if the opposition alliance manages to form a government at the Centre after the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, reports **Manoj Chaurasia**.

"If we get a chance to form the next government at the Centre, all the backward states will be granted special status. There is no reason why this can't be done," Nitish said. This is the first major announcement by Nitish in the past one month since he quit the NDA and joined hands with the opposition camp to oust the BJP from power in Bihar.

The announcement assumes much political significance with Nitish trying hard to unite the scattered opposition across the country, and political experts saying he is the one of the potential prime ministerial face from the opposition camp, although the latter has constantly denied. So far, he has met all the prominent opposition politicians and now plans to meet Congress chief Sonia Gandhi.

Bihar prohibition not effective: PK

Election strategist Prashant Kishor Thursday claimed to have told Bihar CM Nitish Kumar during their much-hyped rapprochement meeting two nights ago that the state's six-year-old liquor prohibition law was due for a review as "it isn't effective on the ground", reports **Piyush Tripathi.** "Liquor prohibition in Bihar mostly exists on paper due to rampant corruption. Women, in whose name prohibition had been enforced, are again the worst sufferers if their menfolk end up in prison for flouting the anti-liquor law," the former JD(U) vice-president said.

SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 - Polity & Governance)

Context: Bihar CM promised special category status for all backward states if the opposition alliance manages to form a government at the Centre after the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Special category status

- The concept of a special category status was first introduced in 1969 when the fifth Finance Commission sought to provide certain disadvantaged states with preferential treatment in the form of central assistance and tax breaks, establishing special development boards, reservation in local government jobs, educational institutions, etc.
- Initially, three states; Assam, Nagaland and Jammu & Kashmir were granted special status but from 1974-1979, five more states were added under the special category.
    - These include Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Tripura.
    - In 1990, with the addition of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, the states increased to 10. The state of Uttarakhand was given special category status in 2001.
- The 14th Finance Commission effectively removed the concept of special category status after its recommendations were accepted in 2015.
- The decision to grant special category status lies with the National Development Council, composed of the prime minister, union ministers, chief ministers and members of the planning commission, who guide and review the work of the commission.
- Special category status for plan assistance has been granted in the past by the National Development Council (NDC) to some states that are characterized by a number of features necessitating special consideration.
- **Criteria for special category status:**
    - Hilly and difficult terrain
    - Low population density or sizeable share of tribal population
    - Strategic location along borders with neighbouring countries
    - Economic and infrastructural backwardness
    - Non-viable nature of state finances
- In the present scenario, it is believed that no more states can be given the status of a special category state.
- The Constitution of India does not include any provision for the categorization of any state in India as a 'special category state.
- However, a wide range of provisions are available to as many as 10 states that have been listed under Articles 371, 371-A to 371-H, and 371-J.

DOWN TO EARTH

Sept 16

GREEN FINS HUB

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - Env & Eco)

ENVIRONMENT

UNEP launches new worldwide digital platform to encourage sustainable marine tourism

Green Fins Hub will help diving and snorkelling operators worldwide to make simple, cost-efficient changes to their daily practices by utilising tried and tested solutions

By DTE Staff
Published: Thursday 15 September 2022



United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)

- Since its inception in 1972, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been the global authority that sets the environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.
- **Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya**, UNEP works through its divisions as well as regional, liaison and out-posted offices and a growing network of collaborating centres of excellence.
- U**NEP employs seven interlinked sub programmes for action:** Climate Action, Chemicals and Pollutions Action, Nature Action, Science Policy, Environmental Governance, Finance and Economic Transformations and Digital Transformations.

Context: The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), along with UK-based charity Reef-World Foundation, recently launched the Green Fins Hub, a global digital platform they said would give sustainable marine tourism a 'major boost'.

Key points

- The platform will help diving and snorkelling operators worldwide to make simple, cost-efficient changes to their daily practices by utilising tried and tested solutions.
- It would also help them keep track of their annual improvements and communicate with their communities and customers.
- Green Fins Hub will host two types of membership.
    - One would be digital membership available for diving, snorkelling and liveaboard operations globally.
- Throughout every year of membership, operators will receive environmental scores based on a detailed online self-evaluation and progress made on their action plans.
- Green Fins Certified Members will continue to be assessed annually and trained in person at their operation. The assessment process will continue to be based on set criteria using a scoring system (0-330 point system, with a low score implying low impact of a business on coral reefs).
- There will be a minimum threshold (>200 of a maximum environmental impact score) for becoming a Green Fins Certified Member and a ranking of bronze, silver or gold certified members according to performance.
- **Other features**
    - The Green Fins Community Forum will be for operators around the world to raise industry needs, discuss environmental issues and share lessons and ideas with like-minded industry leaders, nonprofits and governments.
    - The Green Fins Solutions Library will give access to over 100 proven environmental solutions to common daily operational challenges.
    - The Action Plan Tracker will enable members to receive an annual sustainability action plan with set goals. An advanced user interface will allow them to track their progress over time.
- **Significance**: Increasing accessibility of best practice, knowledge and citizen science through the Green Fins Hub could be a game changer in ensuring a future for coral reefs and other fragile marine ecosystems.

PIB

Sept 16

AWAKENING PROGRAMME

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 - Polity & Governance)

Shri Dharmendra Pradhan launches Ramakrishna Mission's 'Awakening' Programme

The Minister calls for a framework for value-based education in all schools

Context: Union Minister for Education and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship launched Ramakrishna Mission's 'Awakening' Programme for students of classes I to V.

Key points

- This 'Awakening' programme is an initiative towards ensuring overall personality development of a child in line with the philosophy of National Education Policy (NEP), 2020.
- While implementing NEP 2020, there must be an emphasis on creating value-based educational programmes for classes 9 to 12, in addition to those in classes 1-8.

Ramakrishna Mission

- Ramakrishna Mission (RKM) is a Hindu religious and spiritual organisation which forms the core of a worldwide spiritual movement known as the Ramakrishna Movement or the Vedanta Movement.
- The mission is named after and inspired by the Indian spiritual Guru Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and founded by Ramakrishna's chief disciple Swami Vivekananda on 1 May 1897.
- The organisation mainly propagates the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta–Advaita Vedanta and four yogic ideals– Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, and Raja yoga.
- Apart from religious and spiritual teaching, the organisation carries out extensive educational and philanthropic work in India and abroad. This aspect came to be a feature of many other Hindu movements.
- The mission bases its work on the principles of karma yoga, the principle of selfless work done with a dedication to God.
- The Ramakrishna Mission has centres around the world and publishes many important Hindu texts. It is affiliated with the monastic organization.

DST

Sept 16

INSPIRE AWARDS-MANAK

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 - Sports and Awards)

The 9th National Level Exhibition and Project Competition (NLEPC) for INSPIRE Awards MANAK was inaugurated at ITPO New Delhi

The 9th National Level Exhibition and Project Competition (NLEPC) of INSPIRE Awards – MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspirations and Knowledge) was inaugurated at ITPO, Delhi, on 14 September 2022, where the exhibits of 556 students from schools across the country were displayed.

Context: The 9th National Level Exhibition and Project Competition (NLEPC) of INSPIRE Awards – MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspirations and Knowledge) was inaugurated.

- The NLEPC is an important milestone under the annual INSPIRE Awards – MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspiration and Knowledge), a flagship scheme jointly implemented by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, and the National Innovation Foundation (NIF) – India, an autonomous body of the DST.

About INSPIRE Awards-MANAK

- 'Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research' (INSPIRE) scheme is one of the flagship programmes of Department of Science & Technology (DST) under Ministry of Science and Technology & Earth Sciences.
- The INSPIRE Awards- MANAK is one of its components.
- The INSPIRE Awards - MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspirations and Knowledge), being executed by DST with National Innovation Foundation - India (NIF), an autonomous body of DST.
- It aims to motivate students in the age group of 10-15 years and studying in classes 6 to 10.
- An award of Rs.10,000 is disbursed into bank accounts of winning students under Direct Benefit Transfer scheme.
- The objective of the scheme is to target one million original ideas/innovations rooted in science and societal applications to foster a culture of creativity and innovative thinking among school children.
- Under this scheme, schools can nominate 5 best original ideas/innovations of students through this website till 30th September,2022.
- It is aligned with the 'Start-up India' initiative.

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