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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Here is why the electoral bonds scheme must go

The electoral bond scheme issue has been discussed previously in the following article:

[UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis of 09th Mar 2021](#)

2. New Haryana law may hit jobs, growth: stakeholders

The concerns associated with the Haryana government's law to reserve 75% jobs for locals have been discussed previously in the following article:

[UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis of 08th Nov 2021](#)

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E. Editorials

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. Democratised and empower city governments

Syllabus: *Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability.*

Mains: *The challenges faced by the urban bodies and the way forward.*

Context

The [Reserve Bank of India \(RBI\)](#) has suggested that the functional autonomy of civic bodies must increase and their governance structure be strengthened.

Background

- The RBI in its report, "State Finances, Study of Budgets of 2021-22", mentioned that the third-tier governments are playing a frontline role in combating the pandemic by implementing containment strategies, healthcare.
- The finances of civic bodies have come under severe strain, resulting in cutting down expenditures and mobilizing funding from various sources.
- The RBI further added that there should be an increase in their functional autonomy and their governance structure be strengthened.
- This could be achieved by empowering them financially through higher resource availability.

Challenges faced by the Local Governments

- An RBI survey of 221 municipal corporations revealed that more than 70% of the revenues saw a decline and in contrast, their expenditure increased by almost 71.2%.
- The RBI report also shows the limited collection of property tax and its failure in consolidating municipal corporation revenues.
- Data from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that India has the lowest property tax collection to GDP ratio in the world.
- Further, during the pandemic, leaders from both centre and states were taking calls on disaster mitigation strategies, without the involvement of city mayors.
 - Under the disaster management plan of action, cities are at the forefront to fight the pandemic; however, the elected leadership finds no place in disaster management.
 - The approach of treating cities as subordinates of State governments continues in policymaking.
- Earlier during the **value added tax** (VAT) regime, one of the major earnings of cities was from **octroi** i.e. a duty levied on various goods entering a town or city for consumption.
 - In the current tax regime, the finance commissions recommended grants to urban local bodies based on a formula of demographic profile.
 - Earlier, while almost 55% of the total revenue expenditure of urban bodies was met by octroi, in contrast now, the grant covers only 15% of expenditure.
- With Goods and Services Tax (GST), the ability to tax has been completely taken away from local bodies.

Way Forward

- The RBI report has been right in highlighting that functional autonomy of city governments must be allowed.
- Functional autonomy should be accompanied by three **F's: Functions, Finances and Functionaries** to city governments.
- Financial empowerment must be added to the 18 functions listed in the **12th Schedule** introduced by the **74th Amendment** aimed at empowering urban local bodies.
- Cities must be treated as important centres of governance, where democratic decentralisation can bring transparency and adequate participation of the people.
- States should follow the **people's plan model of Kerala** where 40% of the State's plan budget was for local bodies with transfer of important subjects.
- The cities must be considered as spaces for planned development by giving adequate attention to resources.
 - Cities are not prepared for the impact of climate change.
 - The resources required must be immediately provided to the cities to ensure a disaster risk reduction.
- The cities in the Scandinavian countries have been examples of managing various functions, from city planning to mobility to waste management.
 - It is because the income-tax from citizens is given to the city governments.

- In this regard, the recommendations by a committee under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, to transfer 10% of income-tax collected from the cities given back to them, should be implemented.
- The leadership in the cities must be elected for a term of five years. In some cities, the term of the mayor is for one year.

Conclusion

The local governments play an important role in society and in this regard, the grants from the Centre must be enhanced and cities should be asked to formulate plans themselves based on the priority of residents. Citizens must be a part of the decision-making process to manage the functions well.

Nut Graf

The Urban local bodies constitute an important aspect of the governance framework in India. Only an adequately resourced urban local body in terms of finances can help ensure quality governance in urban areas which have become the economic engines of India and also sustain a large proportion of the population.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. What Vladimir Putin really wants

Syllabus: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries.

Mains: Examining the defensive aggressiveness of Russia.

Context

The West cannot ignore a determined Russian President any more as Moscow prepares for its next act on Ukraine.

Historical Background

- **Catherine the Great**, the 18th century Empress Regnant of Russia, said, "I have no way to defend my borders but to extend them."
 - Under her reign, the empire grew, encompassing New Russia, Crimea, the Caucasus, Belarus and the Baltic region.
- **Empress Catherine**, like her predecessors, saw a Russia, surrounded by ambitious powers, that was vulnerable to external threats.
- **Joseph Stalin**, defeated the Nazis and expanded the Soviet boundaries.
- **Vladimir Putin**, annexed Crimea in 2014 and has now mobilized 100,000 troops on the Ukraine border.
- Russia, is the world's largest country by land mass but lacks natural borders except the Arctic Ocean in the north and the Pacific in the far east.

Reasons for defensive aggressiveness of Russia

- There are no natural barriers that stop invading forces from its western borders (Europe) reaching the Russian heartland.

- Russia has seen two devastating invasions from the west in 1812, attack by Napoleonic France and in 1941 attack by Nazi Germany.
- Russia successfully defended both, but suffered huge material and human losses.
- After the Second World War, Russia re-established its control over the rim lands in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which it hoped would protect its heartland.
- The disintegration of the Soviet Union again deepened its historical insecurity.
- This insecurity is the source of what is called the “defensive aggressiveness” of Russia.

NATO's Threats

- When the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia lost over three million square kilometres of sovereign territory and the heartland was vulnerable to future threats.
- The West had promised that the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) would not “expand an inch to the east”.
- But despite the promises, NATO continued its expansion.
 - In March 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland (all were members of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact) joined NATO.
 - Five years later, seven more countries including the three Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, all of which share borders with Russia joined the alliance.
- Russia saw this as a direct challenge to its security.
- In 2008, when the U.S. promised membership to Georgia and Ukraine in the Bucharest summit, Russia, which was coming out of the post-Soviet retreat, responded forcefully.
- Russia sent troops to Georgia over the separatist conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
- And in 2014, when the Kremlin-friendly regime of Ukraine was toppled by pro-western protesters, Russia moved to annex the Crimean peninsula, expanding Russia's Black Sea coast.

Read more about [Russia – Ukraine Crisis](#)

Recent Developments

- In recent years, Mr. Putin has tried to turn every crisis in the former Soviet region into a geopolitical opportunity for Russia.
- South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the self-proclaimed republics that broke away from Georgia, are controlled by Russia-backed forces.
- In Ukraine, the eastern Donbas region is in the hands of pro-Russian rebels.
- In 2020, when protests erupted in Belarus after a controversial presidential election, Mr. Putin sent assistance to the country to restore order.
- In 2020, Russia sent thousands of “peacekeepers” to end the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, re-establishing its strategic dominance in the Caucasus.
- In 2022, Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko, with Mr. Putin's backing, manufactured a migrant crisis on the Polish border of the European Union.

- Again in 2022, when violent unrest broke out in Kazakhstan, the largest and wealthiest country in Central Asia, its leader turned to Russia for help and a willing Mr. Putin immediately dispatched troops under [Collective Security Treaty Organization \(CSTO\)](#) to quell the protests.

Read more about [Russia-led troops deployed in Kazakhstan](#)

The Geopolitical Situations favouring Russia

- By destabilizing Georgia and Ukraine and re-establishing Russia's hold in Belarus, Caucasus and Central Asia, Russia has stopped NATO's further expansions.
- The U.S.'s withdrawal from Afghanistan has resulted in Afghans' deeper ties with Russia.
- Having failed to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan, NATO is unlikely to start a war with Russia over Ukraine.
- While Europe is vocal about its opposition to Russia's aggressive actions, it is currently dependent on Russian gas, which limits its response.
- Moreover, the West's inability to inflict any serious damage on Russia over its Crimea annexation appears to have empowered Russia further.
- One weapon that is available to the west is more economic sanctions.
 - But deepened Russia's ties with China to meet its strategic goals have balanced against the West's economic coercion.

Conclusion

Unless the West led by NATO re-establishes its deterrence and takes counter actions against Russia, Putin's defensive aggression would continue.

Nut Graf

The "defensive aggressiveness" of Russia due to its history of insecurity poses complex challenges and has huge geopolitical implications.

Category: SOCIETY

1. The many problems of online anonymity

Syllabus: Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Mains: Reasons and concerns associated with online anonymity

Context

Examining the Pseudonymous social media handles and platforms that encourage amplify issues around fake news.

Anonymity

- The Security researchers define anonymity as being 'unidentifiable within a set of subjects'.
- Anonymity means that the real author of a message or content is not shown.
- Anonymity can be implemented to make it impossible or very difficult to find out the real author of a message.

- The most common type of anonymity involves the use of a **pseudonym**, i.e. use of a fake photo or the lack of one, and nothing specific in the bio.
- Pseudonymity is the state of using or being published under a pseudonym—a false or fictitious name, especially one used by an author.

Reasons for Anonymity

- The most famous reason for anonymity is to be able to speak the truth against vindictive governments.
- Enthusiasm to participate in conversations without being judged for past experiences.
- To not let the views be associated with the real person being spoken about, in the offline world.
- People may get more objective evaluation of their messages, by not showing their real name.
- People are more equal in anonymous discussions, factors like status, gender, etc., will not influence the evaluation of what they say.

Concerns Associated with Anonymity

- **Promotes unruly behaviour** – Anonymity is a serious problem as, when the anonymity-seeker knows that their real-world self will not get impacted, they seem less inhibited and bolder about what they share.
- **Promotion of hate** – It is true that the most angry, abusive, abrasive, and obfuscatory conversations/replies seem to come from anonymous handles.
- **Disrupts peace** – Anonymity-seekers exploit ‘freedom of expression’ rights and target specific persons or communities that disrupt harmony in the society.
- **Online bullying** – Recent events suggest that anonymity is used to promote hatred on persons or on certain communities.
- **Promotes Fake news** – Poses challenges not only about abuse or extreme opinions but also of misinformation and disinformation.
- **Evades public judgements** – Anonymity gives the power to a person to evade judgment by public opinion. Only a legal mandate can hold them accountable for spreading lies.

Encouragement by platforms

- The platforms know the real person, but they hide identifiable information when allowing people to participate in online conversations.
- Platforms like Glassdoor promote anonymous reviews.
 - Glassdoor mentions in its guidelines that “to safeguard privacy, we do not allow you to identify yourself or include any contact information.”
- Fishbowl, is another platform that thrives on anonymity.
 - The platform says, “Your posts can be made privately using only your Company name or Professional title if you choose.”
- Reddit, is another platform famous for anonymity.
 - Its leader said, “When people detach from their real-world identities, they can be more authentic, more true to themselves”.

Conclusion

Anonymity and pseudonymity can be used for good and bad purposes. And anonymity can in some cases be desirable for one person and not desirable for another person, hence Countries should have laws both protecting and forbidding anonymity. Every site which allows anonymity must publish a privacy policy, which explains exactly in what cases they will break the anonymity.

Nut Graf

Given the tendency of people to behave in undesirable ways when their reputation is not affected by what they say, the increase in both pseudonymous social media handles and platforms that encourage pseudonymous profiles, further increase already existing issues around online misinformation and fake news.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Art forms of India

Art form	Associated region
Pashmina wool weaving Walnut wood carving	Jammu and Kashmir
Chikankari	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
Longpi pottery	Manipur
Blue pottery	Jaipur, Rajasthan
Dhokra metal craft	Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh
Channapatna Toys	Karnataka
Aranmula mirror	Kerala
Pipli applique	Odisha
Villianur pottery	Puducherry

2. Dip in eastern swamp deer numbers

Context:

- As per a recent number estimation, the population of the eastern swamp deer has dipped in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

Eastern swamp deer:

- The **eastern swamp deer is endemic to Kaziranga**. Notably though the overall population of the eastern swamp deer has decreased, the distribution of this species has increased beyond its traditional confines of the Kaziranga to even the **Orang National Park and Laokhowa-Burachapori wildlife sanctuaries**.
- The eastern swamp deer is extinct elsewhere in South Asia.

3. Miss Kerala not endangered: aquarists

Context:

- A section of aquarists and ornamental fish breeders have expressed disappointment over the **inclusion of the Denison barb (Miss Kerala) in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021**.

Sahyadria denisonii:

- Sahyadria denisonii (Miss Kerala) is a **native freshwater fish** commonly found in **Karnataka and Kerala**.
- It is endemic to around 11 **fast-flowing hill streams and rivers of the Western Ghat** states of Kerala and Karnataka in India
- Also known as Denison barb/red-line torpedo barb, or roseline shark it is an **endangered species of cyprinid fish**.

G. Tidbits

1. The rising tensions in the Balkans

- **Tensions have been rising in Bosnia** after **Serbian ultra-nationalists** led by Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, resorted to hate speech against Bosnia Muslims and initiated moves to withdraw the Serbian-dominated region from institutions of the multi-ethnic institutions of Bosnian state. Dodik has also said that he will build exclusively Serbian institutions, including an army.
- Such a move would amount to violation of the **Dayton agreement**, the framework holding up a fragile peace in the region.
 - The **Bosnian war following the break-up of Yugoslavia** came to an end with the signing of the Dayton Agreement in November 1995. As per this accord, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Bosnia was divided into two semi-autonomous units: the Serbian-majority Republika Srpska, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is dominated by Bosniak Muslims and Catholic Croats.
 - The Presidency of Bosnia would be jointly held by three members, a Croat, a Bosniak and a Serb, with the Chair rotating between the three.
- Experts have warned that the creation of 'mono-ethnic' institutions in a multi-ethnic society, along with hate speech could be an early pointer to the **danger of ethnic cleansing and genocide**. It could **trigger a civil war** that would massively **destabilise the region**.

2. RP-2041 can spell doom for Aravalis, fear environmentalists

- Environmentalists have expressed fears that large chunks of forests and the Aravalis in Gurugram and Faridabad could lose protection from construction activities under the **National Conservation Zone** if the revamped provisions in the **Draft Regional Plan-2041** are implemented. They have argued that the **diminished legal protection threatens environmental degradation of the fragile Aravali ranges and threatens the region's biodiversity.**
- The environmentalists have called for the declaration of the **Mangar Bani sacred grove** hill in Faridabad as a "no construction zone" for its wildlife presence. Notably, the Mangar Bani sacred grove is part of an important inter-state wildlife corridor with animals including leopards, hyenas, and foxes moving between the **Asola Wildlife Sanctuary in Delhi** and **Damdama lake catchment area in Gurugram.**
- The environmentalists have also expressed fears over the suggestions of interlinking of all green trails of the Aravali range and river Yamuna running in the region to become a part of integrated cycle trails and drive corridors in the region. This they fear could lead to motorised traffic and adversely impact the wildlife habitat.
- This issue has brought to light the issue of **need of more sustainable development models in environmentally fragile areas** such as the Aravalis.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Public services:

1. According to Article 310, members of the defence services, the civil services of the Centre and the all-India services or persons holding military posts or civil posts under the Centre or Civil services of a state, hold office during the pleasure of the president.
2. A civil servant cannot be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to that by which he was appointed.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Article 310 of the Indian Constitution deals with the tenure of office of persons serving the Union or a State
- It states that except as expressly provided by this Constitution, every person who is a member of a defence service or of a civil service of the Union or of an all India service or holds any post connected with defence or any civil post under the Union, holds office during the pleasure of the President, and every person who is a member of a civil service of a State or holds any civil post under a State holds office during the pleasure of the Governor of the State.

- A civil servant cannot be dismissed or removed by an authority subordinate to that by which he was appointed.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. The eastern swamp deer is only found in Assam
2. The IUCN status of Barasingha (*Rucervus duvaucelii*) is Near Threatened

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The eastern swamp deer is endemic to Kaziranga. Notably though the overall population of the eastern swamp deer has decreased, the distribution of this species has increased beyond its traditional confines of the Kaziranga to even the Orang National Park and Laokhowa-Burachapori wildlife sanctuaries, both located in the state of Assam. The eastern swamp deer is extinct elsewhere in South Asia.
- The barasingha, also called swamp deer, is a deer species distributed in the Indian subcontinent. The IUCN status of Barasingha (*Rucervus duvaucelii*) is vulnerable.

Q3. With reference to Denison barb, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. It is a 'mysterious' frog species endemic to Western Ghats
2. Its IUCN status is endangered

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- *Sahyadria denisonii* (Miss Kerala) is a native freshwater fish commonly found in Karnataka and Kerala. Also known as Denison barb/red-line torpedo barb, or roseline shark it is an endangered species of cyprinid fish.

- It is endemic to around 11 fast-flowing hill streams and rivers of the Western Ghat states of Kerala and Karnataka in India

Q4. Which of the following statements is/are correct about National Commission for Safai Karamcharis?

1. It is a statutory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
2. It takes suo-moto notice of all such matters that are in relation to the non-implementation of the provisions of Manual Scavengers Act 2013

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis is currently a temporary non-statutory body that investigates the conditions of Safai Karamcharis and makes recommendations to the Government of India regarding their welfare.
- Recently the Cabinet approved the extension of tenure of the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis for three years.
- National Commission for Safai Karamcharis can take suo-moto notice of all such matters that are in relation to the non-implementation of the provisions of Manual Scavengers Act 2013.

Q5. For election to the Lok Sabha, a nomination paper can be filed by (UPSC-2017)

- a. anyone residing in India.
- b. a resident of the constituency from which the election is to be contested.
- c. any citizen of India whose name appears in the electoral roll of a constituency.
- d. any citizen of India.

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Any citizen of India whose name appears in the electoral roll of a constituency can file a nomination paper for election to the Lok Sabha.
- Anyone who is 25 years of age or older is eligible to contest an election to a Lok Sabha seat. The candidate must be a registered elector of a constituency and a citizen of India. If he/she is a registered voter in a particular state, he/she can contest from any seat in any state.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What are some of the lacunas in the Electoral bond scheme? What can be the possible solutions to make the scheme better? (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, Polity]
2. Is it time for India's federalism to consider another tier and empower city governments for ensuring grassroot development? (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, Governance]

