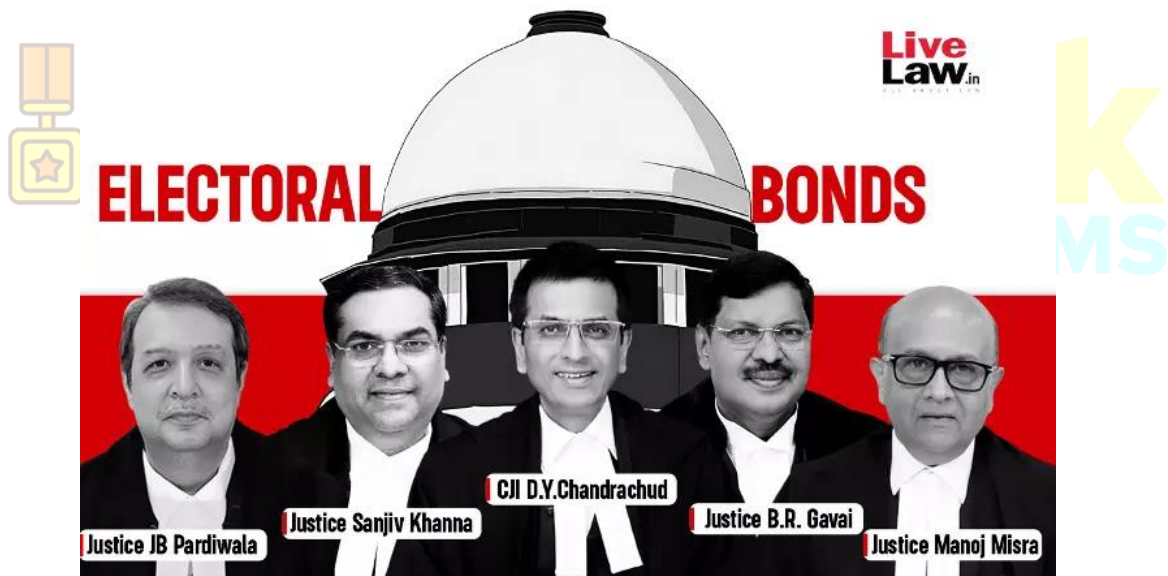


Daily Current Affairs

16 February 2024

Electoral Bonds Scheme Unconstitutional

- A unanimous verdict was delivered by a **five-judge bench comprising Chief Justice Inda DY Chandrachud** and Justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala, and Manoj Misra, effectively **dismantling the scheme** that allowed for anonymous funding to political parties.
- Addressing a batch of petitions **challenging the legality of the scheme**, the bench focused on **two primary issues**: whether the scheme infringed upon the Right to Information under Article 19(1)(a) and whether unlimited corporate funding undermined the principles of free and fair elections.



- The bench unequivocally ruled that anonymous electoral bonds infringed upon the Right to Information and Article 19(1)(a).
- The court **emphasized the need for transparency** in political funding, pointing out that information regarding corporate contributors through electoral bonds must be disclosed, given the implicit expectations of quid pro quo associated with such donations.
- Deeming the **amendments in the Companies Act**, which permitted unlimited political contributions by companies, as arbitrary and unconstitutional, the

Supreme Court said that such provisions opened the floodgates for undue influence and compromised the integrity of the electoral process.

- Taking a **firm stance against the encroachment** on the Right to Information, the apex court said that any infringement of this right cannot be justified, particularly in the **pursuit of curbing black money**.



- As a consequential measure, the Supreme Court ordered banks to immediately cease the issuance of electoral bonds.
- The **State Bank of India (SBI)** was specifically instructed to furnish details of electoral bonds encashed by political parties, with the mandate for the Election Commission of India (ECI) to publish these details on its website, ensuring transparency and accountability.
- The verdict culminates a prolonged **legal battle, with a five-judge Constitution bench** having reserved its decision on November 2 of the previous year. Introduced by the government on **January 2, 2018, the Electoral Bonds scheme** aimed ostensibly at bringing transparency to political funding, offering an alternative to cash donations.
- Under the provisions of the scheme, **only political parties meeting** specific criteria were eligible to receive electoral bonds, which functioned as instruments for contributing funds.
- Despite assertions by the government that the **scheme was transparent**, critics raised concerns regarding its potential for facilitating the **influx of black or unaccounted money** into the political arena.
- Numerous petitions challenging the amendments introduced through the **Finance Act of 2017 and 2016** were pending before the apex court, with critics

contending that these amendments paved the way for unchecked and unlimited funding of political parties.

Rachna Kumari Banned

- **Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU)** and **the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA)** have imposed significant suspensions on **two athletes for anti-doping** rule violations.
- These decisions highlight the unwavering commitment of sporting authorities to maintain fairness, integrity, and a level playing field in athletics.
- **Hammer thrower Rachna Kumari** faces a **12-year suspension** for her second anti-doping rule violation, marking a severe penalty that reflects the seriousness with which doping offenses are treated.



Indian Hammer Thrower Rachna Kumari Banned For 12 Years For Doping

- Kumari tested positive for multiple anabolic androgenic steroids in samples collected both out of competition in **Patiala on September 24** and during the National Games on **November 1 last year**.
- This suspension comes after Kumari had already served a **four-year ban** from 2015 to 2019 for a prior doping offense.
- Her latest suspension commenced on November 24, putting her athletic career on hold and serving as a stern warning to others in the sport.
- **Quarter-miler Nirmala Sheoran**, another athlete with a history of doping violations, has been handed an **eight-year suspension** by NADA for her second offence.
- Sheoran reportedly tested positive for anabolic androgenic steroids and testosterone, substances known to enhance **performance unlawfully**.

- Following a **four-year suspension in 2018**, this additional penalty significantly impacts Sheoran's career, sidelining her from competition and emphasizing the consequences of repeated doping violations.



Mukhyamantri Vishwakarma Pension Yojana

- In a significant move towards the **welfare of laborers and street vendors** in Rajasthan, Finance Minister Diya Kumari presented the state's budget on February 8, 2024, under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhajan Lal.
- This budget marks the **presentation of the financial budget** in Rajasthan after nearly 22 years.



- Notably, it includes **special announcements for the youth**, farmers, women, and the elderly. The Rajasthan government announced a special scheme for laborers and street vendors, named the Mukhyamantri Vishwakarma Pension Yojana.

- Under this scheme, **eligible workers aged 60** or above will receive a monthly **pension of Rs. 2,000**.
- This pension aims to **assist street vendors** in meeting their daily needs without relying on others.
- The **primary objective** of launching the Mukhyamantri Vishwakarma Pension Yojana is to ensure the welfare of laborers and street vendors in Rajasthan.
- The scheme **aims to empower laborers and street vendors** to lead a dignified life independently.
- The Rajasthan government has allocated a budget of approximately **Rs. 350 crores for the successful implementation** of this scheme.

Guidelines To Address Pesky

- Centre has constituted a Committee to **draft guidelines** to address the **issue of pesky, promotional or unsolicited commercial calls** received by consumers.
- The Department of Consumer Affairs has constituted a Committee comprising members from the cellular industry, and regulatory bodies to draft the guidelines.

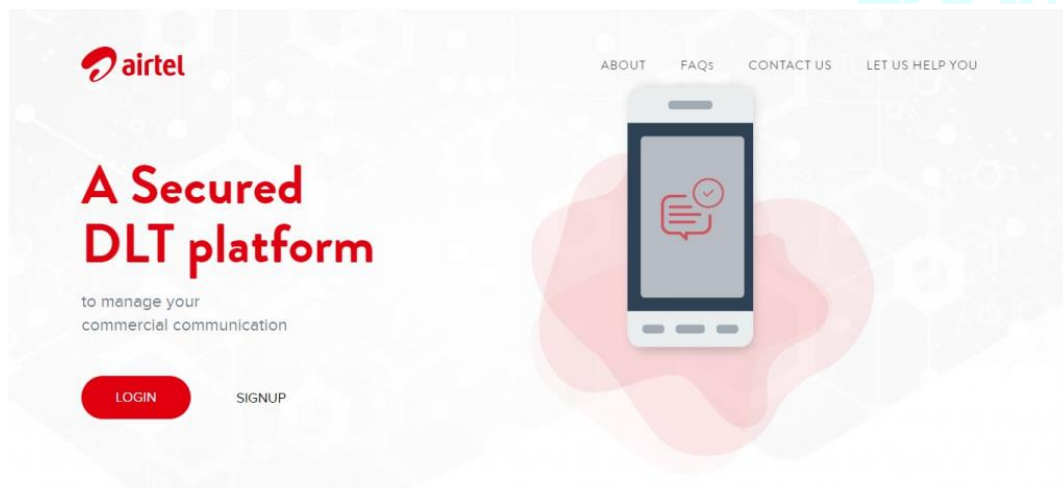


- The Department convened a meeting under its Secretary, Rohit Kumar Singh yesterday to discuss the issues related to **unsolicited commercial calls**.
- It was observed that **these calls not only violate the privacy of users** but also the rights of the consumers.
- Most of such **calls are from the financial services** sector followed by real estate. It was also pointed out that spam callers are now switching to internet calls,

especially using **WhatsApp to lure customers into Ponzi schemes**, and crypto investments and offer job opportunities.



- Efforts have already been made by the **Department of Telecommunication and Telecomm Regulatory Authority** to address the issue related to spam messages and pesky calls from registered telemarketers.
- The telemarketers have been advised to get their business entity, sender IDs and SMS templates on DLT platforms.
- **DLT platforms are operator-run portals** such as Airtel, Vodafone, Jio, and BSNL where businesses need to register by giving their business details.



Indonesia Conducts Massive Single Phase Polls

- On February 15 2024, **Indonesia organized simultaneous** regional direct **elections across 171 cities** and districts to elect hundreds of local leaders in what is considered the single largest polling exercise globally.
- Indonesia is the **world's third-largest democracy** with around 205 million voters eligible to cast ballots.



- It represented the **fifth edition of synchronized nationwide** regional elections since being introduced in 2015 for selecting provincial governors, district heads and city mayors on the same day through direct voting.
- This **system of simultaneous regional elections** strengthens localized democracy by enabling efficient and transparent choice of local executives who manage key governance issues impacting citizens like infrastructure, health and public services.
- The streamlined approach helps **consolidate Indonesia's democracy** from ground by systematically nurturing local leadership hierarchies which form crucial building blocks for national politics.



Japan Loses Spot As Third Largest Economy

- **Japan's economy slipped** into a recession and Japan has dropped from being the **third to fourth largest economy** globally, overtaken by economic powerhouse **Germany**.
- With **China** further cementing **second position**, the **US** remains the world's largest economy.



- As per the analysts, the numbers highlight how the **Japanese economy** has **gradually lost** its competitiveness and productivity while the **population shrinks** as Japanese people age and have fewer children.

- The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, in October last year, had forecast that **Germany was likely to overtake Japan** as the world's third-largest economy when measured in US dollars.



- Japan's gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by a **worse-than-expected 0.4 per cent** in the last three months of 2023, compared to a year earlier.
- In 2022, **Japan registered a GDP growth rate of 1.1%** which was lower than Germany's 1.9% rate resulting in the slip in ranking.
- Japan's economy also contracted briefly signalling an uneven recovery from the pandemic. **ageing demography**, fluctuating **Covid cases** and **supply chain issues** contributed to Japan's economic challenges.
- But consumer spending and investments cushioned the downturn as political stability under the Kishida government imparted some continuity.

Dzuds in Mongolia

- The **ongoing "white and iron" dzud in Mongolia** has reached a "critical" level, with over **90 per cent of the country** facing high levels of risk from the unique weather phenomenon, according to a recent report by UN agencies.
- About **190,000 herder households** are struggling with inadequate feed, skyrocketing prices and heightened vulnerabilities.
- **Dzuds are extreme winters** unique to Mongolia characterized by freezing temperatures, heavy snow and frozen ground that prevents animals from reaching pasture.



- They often **follow dry summers** when **livestock are unable** to build up fat reserves.
- According to the **UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**, the frequency and intensity of dzuds have increased since 2015 due to worsening climate change impacts and poor environmental governance.
- This **winter's dual "white" and "iron" dzud** involves deep snow cover preventing animal access to grass (white dzud) and a freeze-thaw cycle that turns pastures to ice (iron dzud).



- Herding and livestock are integral to Mongolia's economy, culture and lifestyle, with over **64 million animals** affected this winter.
- Over **258,000 people**, including over **100,000 children**, have been impacted as heavy snow obstructs roads, limiting access to health, nutrition, education and social services.
- Herder families often **leave children with relatives** or at boarding schools, increasing risks and psychological stress.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Rachna Kumari Seen In News Related To

- A. Discus Throw
- B. Hammer Thrower
- C. Tennis
- D. Badminton

ANSWER: B

2. Japan Loses Spot As Third Largest Economy To

- A. Germany
- B. Finland
- C. Sweden
- D. Italy

ANSWER: A

3. Issue Of Pesky Is Related To

- A. Sky Diving
- B. Promotional Calls
- C. Satellites
- D. Pollution

ANSWER: B

4. What Is Brumation

- A. A Type Of Reptilian Hibernation During Warmer Months
- B. A Period Of Dormancy In Reptiles That Usually Happens During Colder Months
- C. A Term For The Active And Alert State Of Reptiles During Hunting
- D. A Process Where Reptiles Shed Their Skin To Adapt To Environmental Changes

ANSWER: B

5. Bor Tiger Reserve Is Located In Which State

- A. Maharashtra
- B. Gujarat
- C. Rajasthan
- D. Karnataka

ANSWER: A

6. Kawal Tiger Reserve Is Located In Which State

- A. Punjab
- B. Telangana
- C. Andhra Pradesh
- D. Uttar Pradesh

ANSWER: B

7. What Is Alaskapox , Recently Seen In The News

- A. Bacterial Infection
- B. DNA virus
- C. Fungus
- D. Helminths

ANSWER: B

8. Where Was 1st Council Meeting Of Global Biodiversity Framework Fund Held

- A. United States
- B. United Kingdom
- C. Russia
- D. India

ANSWER: A

9. National Women's Day Observed Every Year In India

- A. 12 February
- B. 13 February
- C. 14 February
- D. 15 February

ANSWER: B

10. Which Ministry Inaugurated The Pilot Project Titled 'Smart Gram Panchayat'

- A. Ministry of Agriculture
- B. Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj
- C. Ministry of Home Affairs
- D. Ministry of Tourism

ANSWER: B

11. Which State Government Announced A Financial Assistance Package For Kendu Leaf Pluckers And Binders

- A. Chattisgarh
- B. Odisha
- C. Uttar Pradesh
- D. Bihar

ANSWER: B

12. India And Bangladesh Launched Inaugural Trial Movement Of Vessels Between Which Two Ports

- A. Petrapole Land Port & Ghojadanga Land Port
- B. Maia Port & Sultanganj Port
- C. Banglabandha Land Port & Mongla Port
- D. Ashuganj Port & Mongla Port

ANSWER: B

13. Objective Of 'e- Jagriti Portal', Mentioned In The News

- A. To Facilitate Consumer Dispute Redressal
- B. To Promote Awareness About Agricultural Crops
- C. To Offer Loans To Small Businesses
- D. To Provide Health Facilities To Remote Areas

ANSWER: A

14. FIFA World Cup 2026 Will Be Hosted By Which One Of The Following Countries

- A. Canada, Mexico, and the United States
- B. Italy and France
- C. Spain and Russia
- D. Africa, Europe and South America

ANSWER: A

15. Who Released Report Titled 'LNG As A Transportation Fuel In Medium And Heavy Commercial Vehicles'

- A. NITI Aayog and Netherlands Embassy
- B. Ministry of Renewable Energy and Netherlands Embassy
- C. NITI Aayog and Russian Embassy
- D. Ministry of Agriculture and NITI Aayog

ANSWER: A

16. Where Was Cultural Festival 'Vividhta Ka Amrit Mahotsav' Organized

- A. Bhopal
- B. Chennai
- C. New Delhi
- D. Jaisalmer

ANSWER: C

17. Theme Of 'International Day Of Women And Girls In Science 2024

- A. Innovate. Demonstrate. Elevate. Advance
- B. Women And Girls In Science Leadership, A New Era For Sustainability
- C. Investment In Women And Girls In Science For Inclusive Green Growth
- D. Equality And Parity In Science For Peace And Development

ANSWER: B

18. Save Wetlands Campaign Is Launched By Which Ministry

- A. Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
- B. Ministry of Agriculture
- C. Ministry of Home Affairs
- D. Ministry of Textiles

ANSWER: A

19. Kalingarayan Anicut barrage, is located in which state

- A. Maharashtra
- B. Karnataka
- C. Tamil Nadu
- D. Kerala

ANSWER: C

20. Who Is The Father Of Botany

- A. Adam Smith
- B. Greco-Roman
- C. Theophrastus
- D. Carl Linnaeur

ANSWER: C