

1. Electoral Bonds


Topic: Economy

Electoral Bonds Scheme Notified

To help cleanse the political funding system in the country

Nature

- Bearer instrument in the nature of a Promissory Note
- Interest free banking instrument



Lifespan

- Shelf life of only 15 days
- Can be used for making donation only to the political parties registered u/s 29A of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951

Eligibility

- A citizen of India or a body incorporated in India
- On fulfillment of all the extant KYC norms
- By making payment from a bank account

Value

- Issued/ Purchased in multiples of Rs.1,000, Rs.10,000, Rs.1,00,000, Rs.10,00,000 and Rs.1,00,00,000
- Available from the Specified Branches of the State Bank of India (SBI)

Period of Purchase

- Available for purchase for a period of 10 days each in the months of January, April, July and October, as may be specified by the Government

In News: According to State Bank of India data accessed under the Right to Information Act five cities, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, New Delhi and Chennai, accounted for nearly 90% of all electoral bonds sold so far.

More on the Topic

- 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.
- On the face of it, the process ensures that the name of the donor remains anonymous.

Eligibility:

- **Registered political parties that secured at least one percent of votes polled in the most recent General or Assembly elections.**

- Buyers of bonds submit full KYC details at the time of buying. But beneficiary political party is not required to reveal the identity of the entity that has given it the bond(s).

Criticisms Faced by Electoral Bond:

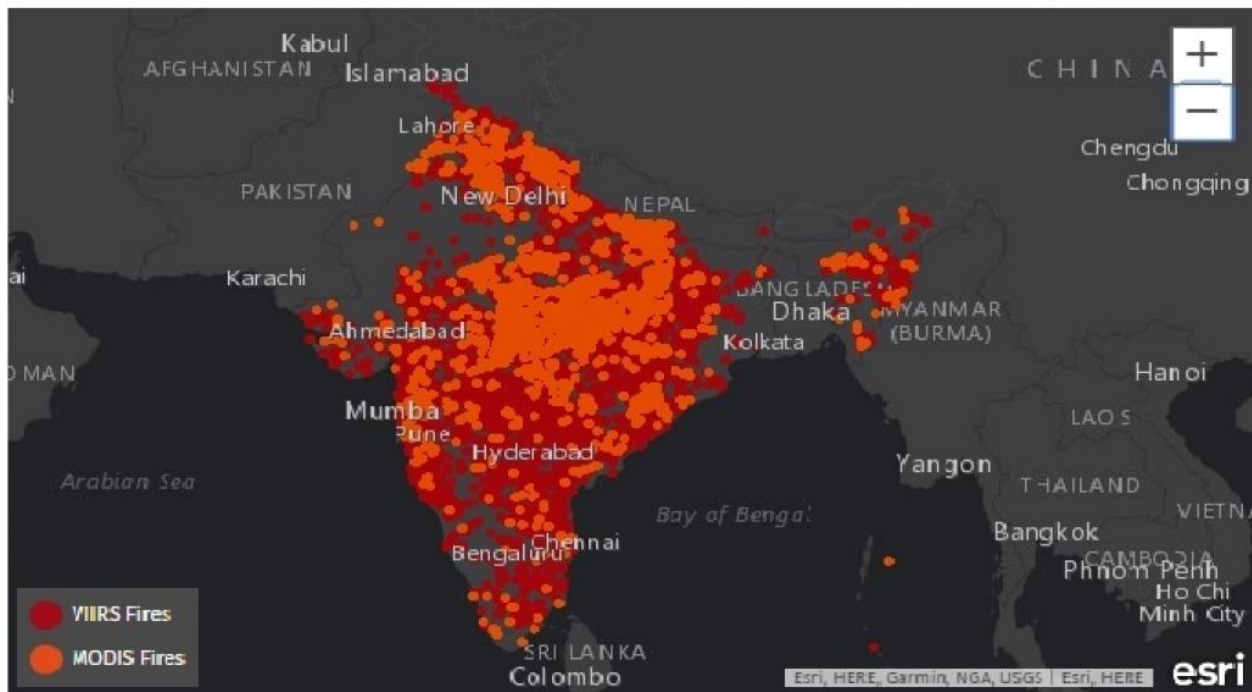
- The fact that such bonds are sold via a government-owned bank (SBI) leaves the door open for **the government to know exactly who is funding its opponents**.
- This may allow the possibility for the government of the day to either extort money, especially from the big companies, or victimise them for not funding the ruling party.
- Anonymous donation may compromise with the principle of free and fair election.
- Allowed possibility of corporate misuse as it removes limits and disclosure requirements on Company donations to Political Parties.

Source: Indian Express

2. Forest Fires - Goa

Topic: Environment and Ecology

DISTRIBUTION OF FIRE ALERTS 19 APR 2018 - 26 APR 2018



In News: A forest department probe into the bushfires that impacted an area of about 4 sq km in Goa in the first half of March is learnt to have concluded that the fires were largely triggered by natural causes.

More on the Topic:



- According to the inquiry report, 74 fire incidents — 32 of which affected three wildlife sanctuaries — were reported in the first fortnight of March in Goa.
- A total of 418 hectares of private land, reserve forests, comunidade land, and protected areas were affected, including more than 320 hectares of forest land.

The connection between weather and fires?

- Very little rain in Goa since October last year, along with heat-wave-like conditions and low humidity, created conditions that were ripe for forest fires.
- Once the carpet of dry leaves on the hilltops caught fire, the flames were fanned and spread by high winds.
- Incidents of forest fires in Goa during the summer have been more in the years following those of poor monsoon rain. A similar pattern has been seen in Karnataka as well.

Trends of rising incidents of forest fires in India:

- A study published by **Council of Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)**, has noted a **tenfold increase in forest fires over the past two decades and says more than 62% of Indian states are prone to high-intensity forest fires.**
- Forest fires have become **more frequent and more intense**, and have occurred in a larger number of months over this period.
- Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Telangana, and the Northeastern states are most prone to forest fires.
- **Mizoram has seen the highest incidence of forest fires** over the last two decades, and 95% of its districts are forest fire hotspots.
- A report by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for 2020-21 identified western **Maharashtra, southern Chhattisgarh, parts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and central Odisha as becoming 'extremely prone' to forest fires.**
- An FSI study based on the spatial analysis of forest fires points during the period 2004-21 has found that nearly 10.66% area under forests in India is 'extremely' to 'very highly' fire-prone.

Government Initiatives:

- **National Action Plan on Forest Fires (NAPFF)** was launched in **2018** to minimise forest fires by informing, enabling and empowering forest fringe communities and incentivising them to work with the State Forest Departments.
- The Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FPM) is the **only centrally funded program** specifically dedicated to assist the states in dealing with forest fires.
- Forest Survey of India (FSI) initiates including Near Real-Time Forest Fire Monitoring and issuing alert to State Forest Departments, Large Forest Fire Monitoring using SNPP-VIIRS sensor, Early Warning Alert based on Forest Fire Danger Rating System and FSI Van Agni Geo-portal.

Source: IE

3. Central Asian Flyway (CAF)

Topic: Environment and Ecology



In News: The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme/ Convention on Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS) had organised a meeting of Range Countries to strengthen conservation efforts for migratory birds and their habitats in the Central Asian Flyway (CAF).

More on the Topic:

- CAF encompasses **overlapping migration routes over 30 countries for different waterbirds linking their northern most breeding grounds in Russia (Siberia) to southernmost non-breeding (wintering) grounds in West and South Asia, Maldives and British Indian Ocean Territory.**
- It is home to more than 400 species of migratory birds, including threatened and endangered species such as the Siberian crane and the lesser white-fronted goose.
- Of these 30 countries, 11 have come on-board for coordinated efforts to save migratory birds within the Central Asian flyway. **These eleven countries are India, Armenia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Mongolia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.**
- The formalisation of the Central Asian Flyway initiative is being seen as **a significant step towards the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats.**
- Other than eleven countries, twenty nine more nations must also come on-board for the formalisation of complete Central Asian Flyway within one single mechanism.

About flyway:

- A flyway is a geographical region within which a number of migratory bird species complete their annual cycle. The annual cycle includes breeding, moulting, staging and non-breeding.
- A total of 370 species of migratory birds visit the Indian subcontinent annually.

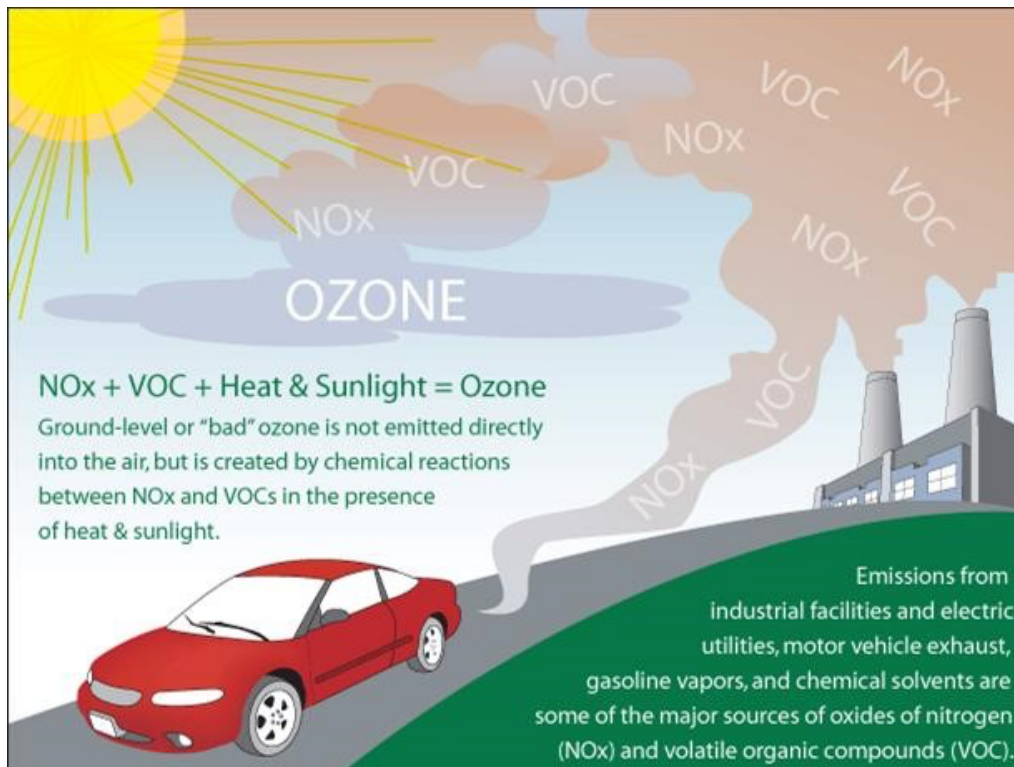
India's leading role in Central Asian Flyway and conservation of Migratory Species:

- India has been taking proactive steps in the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats and has been advocating establishment of a Central Asian Flyway initiative that first began in 2005 in New Delhi.
- India provides **critical stopover sites to over 90% of the bird species known to use this migratory route.**
- Also, India developed a National Action Plan for Conservation of Migratory Birds and their Habitat (2018 - 2023).

Source: Hindu

4.Ozone Pollution

Topic: Environment and Ecology



In News: According to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) bulletins, ozone was identified as a prominent pollutant in New Delhi.

More on the Topic:

- At some air quality monitoring stations, ozone levels have crossed **the hourly standard of 180 µg/m³** set by National Ambient Air Quality Standards.
- Ozone is formed when oxides of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds react in the presence of sunlight, making it a key pollutant.
- NO_x is released by combustion of fossil fuels from vehicles and industries. It also could be transported from far places by strong wind.
- Ozone exposure may result in breathing problems, trigger asthma, reduce lung function, etc.

Source: Indian Express

5. Space Science and Technology Awareness Training (START)

Topic: Government Schemes



For the Indian academic institutes, offering post-graduate / under-graduate courses on physical sciences/ technology

START

An online Space Science & Technology Awareness Training

Major Themes

- ☐ Introduction to space
- ☐ Solar System
- ☐ Comparative Planetology
- ☐ Space Weather
- ☐ Astronomy & Astrophysics
- ☐ Astrobiology
- ☐ Indian Space Exploration Programme
- ☐ Research Opportunities in Space Science & Technology

- Indian academic institutions may send Expression of Interest by **May 20, 2023** through <https://jigyasa.iirs.gov.in/START>

In News: ISRO has launched a new introductory-level online training programme called 'Space Science and Technology Awareness Training (START)' aimed at post-graduate and final-year undergraduate students of physical sciences and technology.

More on the Topic:

- The programme will cover various domains of space science, including Astronomy & Astrophysics, Heliophysics & Sun-Earth interaction, Instrumentation, and Aeronomy. It will be delivered by the scientists from Indian academia and ISRO centres.

- The START programme is part of ISRO's efforts to enable Indian students to become professionals in space science and technology, as the organization's space science exploration program continues to expand into new domains.

Source: Business Standard

6. Arab League

Topic: International Relations



In News: The Arab League voted to reinstate Syria's membership after its suspension more than 10 years ago.

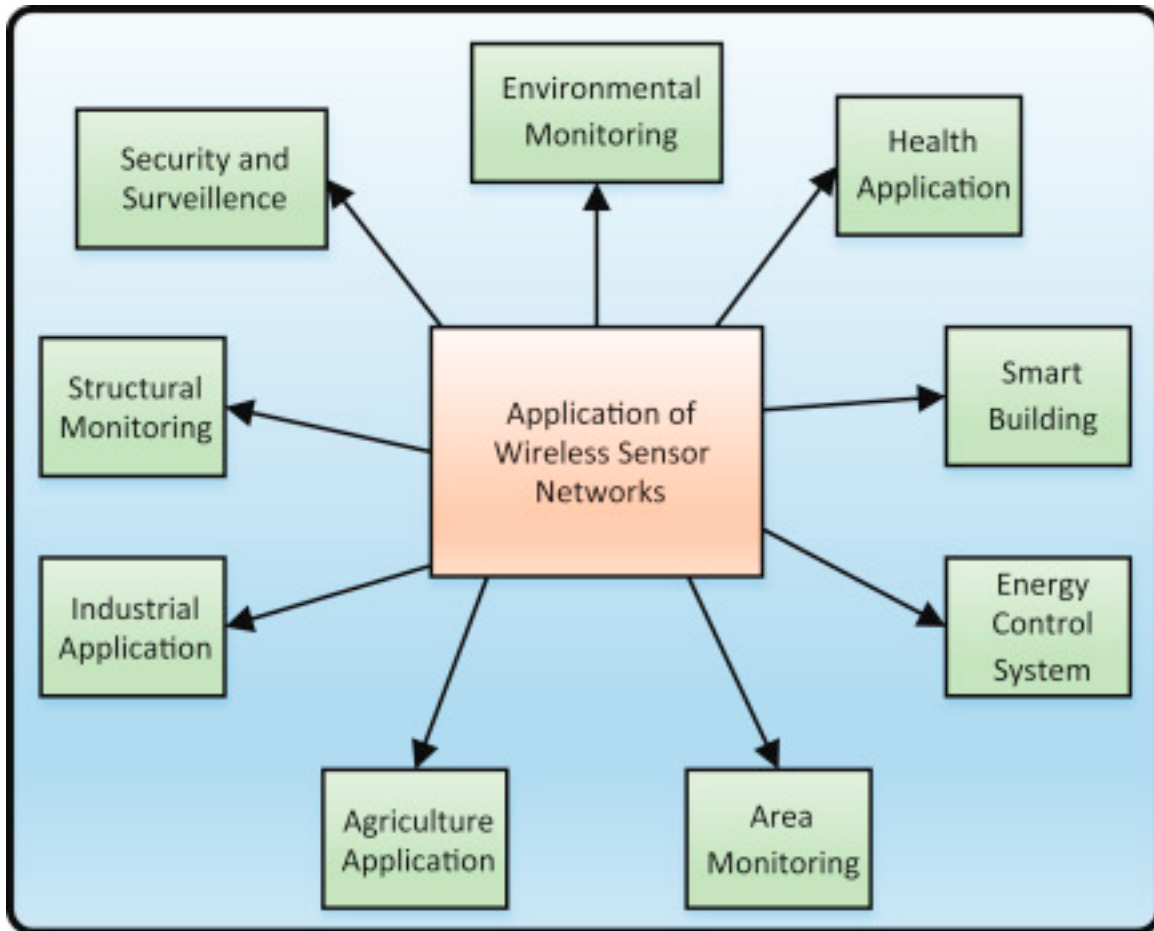
More on the Topic:

- Syria was ousted from the Arab League in 2011 following President Bashar al-Assad's brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests, which led to the ongoing civil war in the country. The conflict has since killed around half of a million people and displaced about 23 million.
- The Arab League, formally known as the League of Arab States, was established in 1945 with initially just six nations: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Currently, it has 22 member states, who have pledged to cooperate on economic and military affairs, among other issues.
- It was established **in response to concerns about post-war colonial divisions of territory and also strong opposition to emergence of a Jewish state on Palestinian territory.**

Source: Business Standard

7. Battlefield surveillance system

Topic: Science and Technology



In News: The Indian Army is working on battlefield surveillance system that will bring in “multi-domain spatial awareness” on a single GIS platform to make itself more potent and efficient.

More on the Topic:

- The initiative comes under **Project SanjayI**, which will integrate thousands of sensors which will enable provision of an integrated surveillance picture to commanders and staff at all levels, besides completing sensor-shooter grid by integrating with Artillery Combat Command and Control System (ACCCS).
- Complementing the BSS is the Army Information and Decision Support System, an upgraded and redesigned version of erstwhile Combat Information Decision Support System, which will integrate inputs from all operational and managerial information systems.

Source: Business Standard