

CAN PROMISES OF 'IRRATIONAL' POLL FREEBIES BE CURBED, SUPREME COURT ASKS GOVERNMENT

In News:

- The Supreme Court has asked the central government to inquire with the Finance Commission of India (FCI) about a way to prevent political parties from promising and distributing irrational freebies during election campaigns.
- The hearing was held in response to a writ petition alleging that the distribution of irrational freebies amounted to bribery and undue influence over voters.

The freebies politics in India:

Overview:

- The term "freebies" means a dole or a gift given to the general public. However, freebies can come in a variety of forms.
- It includes expenditure under populist pressure or with elections in mind as well as expenditure in the form of subsidies to provide relief to the population.
- The first one may be questionable, while the second one may not be unjustified, as it may be necessary for the economy to maintain its current growth rate.

Political freebies:

- Freebies are the best gainful methods adopted by political parties **to lure voters**.
- In order to secure the vote of the people, political parties promise free electricity, free water supply, as well as gadgets such as laptops, smartphones, etc.
- The origin of freebie culture in the country can be traced to Tamil Nadu's politics. Following that, political parties across the country used this as a method of wooing voters.
- It is not a corrupt practice under the Representation of People Act.

Previous court ruling on freebies:

- **Promise of freebies in polls a 'serious issue' says SC (Jan, 2022):**

- The SC said political parties competing with each other to announce freebies during electioneering has the potential to **upset states' finances and vitiate free and fair polls.**
- The apex court noted that freebies culture **disturbs the level playing field**, by giving a candidate of a political party (which announces a large number of freebies), a winning edge in the elections.
- The court had directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to frame guidelines in this respect.
- **Political parties shouldn't promise freebies says SC (2013):**
 - The apex court observed that freebies shake the root of free and fair elections to a large degree.
 - A SC bench ruled that currently the election manifesto (containing provisions for freebies) is not governed by any law.
 - Hence, it directed the Election Commission to frame guidelines for the same in consultation with all recognised parties.
 - The apex court also said that separate legislation should be made on this issue.

News Summary:

- According to the petitioner, the debts of the states totaled more than 70 lakh crore.
- Hence, the petitioner appealed that the Law Commission of India be asked to examine the statutes to control the distribution of unreasonable freebies.

[RUSSIA TO QUIT ISS AFTER '24](#)

In News:

- Russia will pull out of the International Space Station (ISS) after 2024 and focus on building its own orbiting outpost.

International Space Station (ISS):

- A space station is essentially a large spacecraft that remains in low-earth orbit (LEO) for extended periods of time. It is like a large laboratory in space.
- LEO is normally at an altitude of less than 1000 km but could be as low as 160 km above Earth.

- ISS is placed in an orbit at an altitude of about 400 km above Earth.
- It allows astronauts to come aboard and stay for weeks or months to carry out experiments in microgravity.
- ISS has been known for the exemplary cooperation between the five participating space agencies that have been running it. These countries are:
 - NASA (United States), Roscosmos (Russia), JAXA (Japan), ESA (Europe), and CSA (Canada).

Features

- The ISS has been in space since 1998. It orbits the earth at an altitude of 430 km, with an inclination of 52 degree with an orbital velocity of 7.7 km/s.
- It circles the Earth in roughly 93 minutes, completing 15.5 orbits per day.
- For over 20 years since its launch, humans have continuously lived and carried out scientific investigations on ISS under microgravity conditions.
- So far, the floating laboratory has hosted more than 3,000 research and educational investigations, carrying out cutting edge research in various disciplines.

Why Russia is Quitting ISS?

- **Relations between Russia and West**
 - Relations between the West and Russia have been going from bad to worse.
 - The US had blamed the Kremlin for carrying out the “SolarWinds” hack and interfering in the 2020 election.
- **Russian invasion in Ukraine**
 - At a time, when western countries are imposing sanctions of Russia, they cannot seem to be cooperating in space.
- **Increased US – Russia space rivalry**
 - US-Russia space rivalry has also been increasing.
 - In 2020, the US accused Russia of carrying out a weapons test after a projectile was said to have been fired from a Russian satellite.
 - Russia, in return, blamed the US for treating space as a military theatre.

- US has started to use the SpaceX system, developed by Elon Musk, for transporting astronauts to the ISS.
- Not only this ended the reliance on Russian Soyuz passenger vehicle, the Russian Space Agency also lost a major source of income.
 - Russian transport vehicle served as the only way for transporting astronauts ever since the US retired its Space Shuttle Program in 2011.
 - NASA had been paying tens of millions of dollars per seat for rides to and from the station aboard Russian Soyuz rockets.
- **Russia's plan to launch its own space station**
 - Russia is planning to build and manage its own space station, which would be launched into orbit by 2030.
 - The station will orbit the Earth at a higher latitude, enabling it to better observe the polar regions.
 - As Russia plans to develop the Arctic Sea route as the ice melts, this station will be very helpful.
 - It would also help Russia tide over challenges associated with the ageing ISS.
 - Astronauts, presently, conduct experiments and adapt the latest technology to a hardware architecture that is over two decades old.

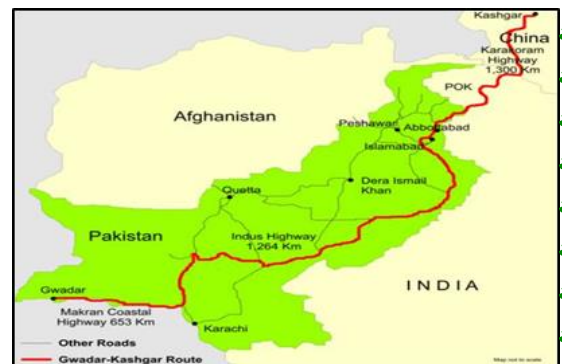
THIRD PARTIES JOINING CPEC IS INHERENTLY ILLEGAL: INDIA

In News:

- India has slammed China and Pakistan for seeking participation of third countries in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

- During an April 2015 visit to Islamabad, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif unveiled the \$46 billion CPEC.



- CPEC quickly ballooned to \$62 billion in pledges—one-fifth of Pakistan’s GDP—covering dozens of envisioned high-profile projects.
- The corridor links Xinjiang with Gwadar, and also passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) where China is investing in a number of projects.
- Often described as a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative(BRI), the stated goal of CPEC is:
 - to transform Pakistan’s economy by modernizing its road, rail, air, and energy transportation systems;
 - to connect the deep-sea Pakistani ports of Gwadar and Karachi to China’s Xinjiang province and beyond by overland routes.

India & CPEC

● CPEC: Threat to Sovereignty of India

- It passes through Gilgit-Baltistan area of Kashmir which is occupied by Pakistan. The corridor enters into Gilgit-Baltistan through Khunjerab Pass.
- This area is a part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir and claimed by India.
- India believes that CPEC violates the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of India.

● CPEC and Security threat to India

- Ever since the construction of the corridor is started, the Chinese military presence in the area is also embarked.
- In 2017, Chinese troops marched in the parade of Pakistan’s day in Islamabad.
 - This was the first time when Chinese military took part in any parade outside its country
- Apart from the naval vessels deployed in Pakistan, eight submarines are also delivered to it by China.
- China is planning to build its second naval base in Gwadar port after Djibouti in 2017.

Background:

- Recently, in July 2022, the 3rd meeting of the CPEC Joint Working Group (JWG) on International Cooperation and Coordination (JWG-ICC) was held in virtual mode.

- During the meeting, both China and Pakistan expressed their interest in inviting other countries to make investments in the project.
- Although, it has not been officially revealed who might be investing in the project, analysts believe that Saudi Arabia, UAE and Germany might come on board.
- Soon after coming to power in Afghanistan last year, the Taliban had expressed desire to join the infrastructure project.

News Summary:

- New Delhi has opposed a bid by Beijing & Islamabad to include third countries in CPEC

India's response

- India opposed the move by saying that the project passes through illegally occupied Indian Territory and such a move will be illegal and unacceptable.
- Time and again, India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK).
- As per India, the initiatives of the connectivity must be based on the universally accepted and the other recognized international norms, transparency and equality, rule of law and must respect the sovereignty and the territorial integrity.

INDIA ADDS FIVE MORE RAMSAR SITES

In News:

- Union Government has designated five new wetlands of international importance, taking the total number of Ramsar sites in the country to 54.
- These are –
 - Karikili Bird Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu)
 - Pallikaranai Marsh Reserve Forest (Tamil Nadu)
 - Pichavaram Mangrove (Tamil Nadu)



- Sakhya Sagar (Madhya Pradesh)
- Pala Wetland (Mizoram)

Ramsar Convention:

- The Ramsar Convention, signed in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, is the only global treaty that focuses specifically on wetlands.
- It is an intergovernmental treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- **Objective:** To halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve, through wise use and management, those that remain.
- **Members:** 170 countries are signatories to the convention.
- A contracting party agrees to nominate at least one wetland in its territory to the List of Wetlands of International Importance based on enumerated criteria.

Ramsar Site

- A Ramsar Site is a wetland site designated to be of international importance.
- Wetlands include swamps, marshes, lakes, mudflats, mangroves, coral reefs, fens, or bodies of water - whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary.
- These wetlands are protected under strict guidelines of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.
- Ramsar convention defines wetlands as “areas of marsh, fen, peat land or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters.”

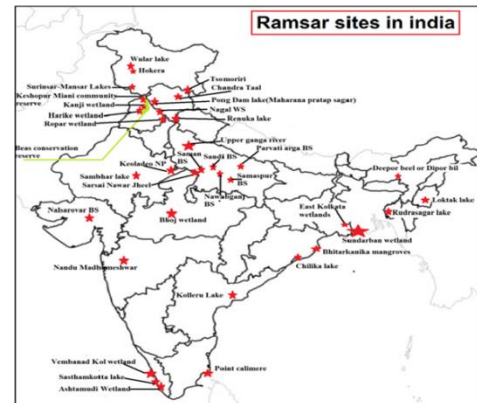
Significance of ‘Ramsar Site’ Designation:

- Once designated, these sites are added to the Convention's List of Wetlands of International Importance and become known as Ramsar sites.
- In designating a wetland as a Ramsar site, countries agree to establish and oversee a management framework aimed at conserving the wetland and ensuring its wise use.
- Wise use under the Convention is broadly defined as maintaining the ecological character of a wetland.
- Wetlands can be included on the List of Wetlands of International Importance because of their ecological, botanical, zoological, limnological or hydrological importance.

Ramsar Sites in India:

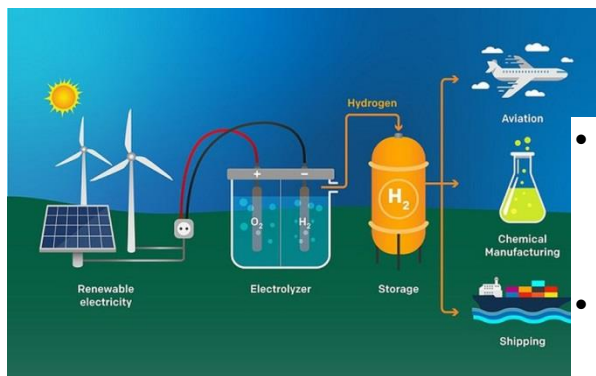
India signed the Ramsar convention in February 1982.

- There are over 2,400 Ramsar Sites around the world covering over 2.5 million square kilometres.
- India's tally of 49 (without including the recently designated 5 sites) designated wetlands spread over 10,936 sq. km in 18 states and two union territories is the largest network of Ramsar Sites in South Asia.
- **United Kingdom** (175) and **Mexico** (142) have the maximum Ramsar sites in the world.



GREEN HYDROGEN

Energy major Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with M/s Greenko ZeroC Private Limited (Greenko), to jointly pursue opportunities in Renewables, Green Hydrogen, Green Ammonia and other derivatives of green hydrogen.



About:

- This MoU is in line with the National Hydrogen Mission launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister in making India a global green hydrogen hub.
- The activities envisaged under this MoU will contribute towards India's target of producing of 5 million tonnes of Green hydrogen per annum by 2030.
- This MoU will also act as a stepping stone for ONGC to achieve renewable energy targets as per its Energy Strategy 2040.

'HAR GHAR TIRANGA' CAMPAIGN

Spending on 'Har Ghar Tiranga' campaign declared CSR activity under Companies Act.



About:

- Corporate Affairs Ministry has said that companies can spend their Corporate Social Responsibility CSR funds for activities related to the Har Ghar Tiranga campaign.
- The Ministry said spending of CSR funds for the activities related to this campaign such as mass scale production and supply of the national flag, outreach and amplification efforts and other related activities are eligible CSR activities under Schedule VII of the Companies Act pertaining to promotion of education relating to culture.

Do you know?

- Under the Companies Act, 2013, certain class of profitable companies are required to shell out at least two per cent of their three-year annual average net profit towards CSR activities.
- Har Ghar Tiranga campaign is being organised by the Government as part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to encourage people to bring home the national flag and hoist it to mark the 75th year of India's independence.

DEFENCE ACQUISITION COUNCIL (DAC)

The Defence Ministry on July 26, 2022 approved the procurement of military equipment and weapons worth ₹28,000 crore, which included swarm drones, carbines and bulletproof jackets.



About:

- The procurement proposals were cleared by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.



CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK



- Among the proposals approved by DAC in the meeting are three proposals of the Indian Army, viz. Guided Extended Range Rocket Ammunition, Area Denial Munition Type I and Infantry Combat Vehicle – Command have been designed and developed by DRDO.
 - The DAC also approved Navy’s proposal to procure upgraded 1250KW capacity Marine Gas Turbine Generator for power generation application onboard Kolkata class of ships through Indian Industry.
 - The approval to the new procurement proposals came amid India's over two-year-long border row with China in eastern Ladakh.
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