

### WHAT IS THE ORDINANCE MAKING POWER OF THE PRESIDENT?

The Delhi government recently urged the Supreme Court to quash the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023.



#### About Ordinance making power of the President:

- Article 123 of the Indian Constitution grants the President of India certain Lawmaking powers, i.e., to Promulgate Ordinances when either of the two Houses of the Parliament is not in session, which makes it impossible for a single House to pass and enact a law.
- These Ordinances **have the same effect as an Act of Parliament.**
- Ordinances **may relate to any subject that the Parliament has the power to make law, and would be having the same limitations.**
- The Ordinances **may have a retrospective effect and may modify or repeal any act of Parliament or other ordinances. It may be used to amend a tax law, but it can never amend the Constitution.**
- The President **may withdraw an ordinance at any time.** However, he **exercises his power with the consent of the Council of Ministers headed by the President.**

Following limitations exist on the Ordinance making power,

- **Legislature is not in session:** The President can **only promulgate an Ordinance when either of the two Houses of Parliament is not in session.**
- **Immediate action is required:** The President cannot promulgate an Ordinance **unless he is satisfied that there are circumstances that require taking 'immediate action'.**
- **Parliament should approve:** Ordinances **must be approved by Parliament within six weeks of reassembling** or they shall cease to operate. The same will **cease to operate if disapproved by either House.**
- In various judicial pronouncements, the Supreme Court has held that the **President's Ordinance making power is not beyond the scope of judicial review.**

## SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION (SCO)

Chinese Foreign Ministry recently said that the Chinese President will attend the virtual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) being hosted by India.



### About Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

- SCO is an intergovernmental organization founded in Shanghai, China, on 15 June 2001 by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- Apart from Uzbekistan, the other five countries have been a part of the 'Shanghai Five' constituted in 1996 by China to address border security issues with four of its neighbours.
- The cooperation was renamed SCO after Uzbekistan joined the organization in 2001.
- The SCO currently comprises eight Member States: China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- India and Pakistan became permanent members in 2017.
- The main objectives of the SCO are as follows:
  - Strengthening mutual trust, friendship and neighbourly relations among the member states;
  - Promoting effective cooperation in political, trade, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural spheres as well as in the realm of educational, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas;
  - Jointly maintaining and safeguarding peace, security and stability in the region; and
  - Fostering creation of democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.

### Structure:

- The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the supreme decision-making body in the SCO. It meets once a year and adopts decisions and guidelines on all important matters of the organisation.
- The organisation has two permanent bodies:

- The **SCO Secretariat based in Beijing.**
- The Executive Committee of the **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent.**
- RATS serves to promote cooperation of member states against terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- **The official working languages: Chinese and Russian.**

## HOW GROUNDWATER EXTRACTION HAS SHIFTED THE EARTH'S AXIS?

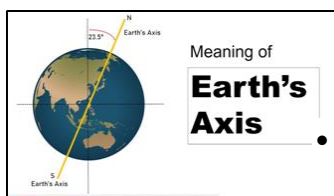
### Why in News?

- According to a new study, excessive extraction of groundwater for drinking and irrigation has shifted the Earth's axis of rotation.

### About the Study:

- The study, '**Drift of Earth's Pole Confirms Groundwater Depletion as a Significant Contributor to Global Sea Level Rise 1993–2010**', was published in the journal **Geophysical Research Letters**, earlier this month.
- The study was carried out by researches from countries such as USA, South Korea, Australia and Hong Kong.
- The study says that **humans pumped out around 2,150 gigatons of groundwater between 1993 and 2010 and this has led the planet's axis to drift at the rate of 4.36 cm per year towards the east.**
- Although the shift is not significant enough to have real-life consequences, the study shows that humans have extracted so much water from the ground that it has impacted the planet's axis and contributed to global sea level rise.

### About Earth's Axis:



The Earth's axis is the imaginary line through the earth that extends from the **North Pole** to the **South Pole**.

• Today, the Earth's axis is tilted 23.5 degrees from the plane of its orbit around the Sun.

- But this tilt changes. During a cycle that averages about 40,000 years, the tilt of the axis varies between 22.1 and 24.5 degrees.
- Scientists for years have known that the poles and the axis keep shifting naturally as the mass distribution in and on the planet changes. This phenomenon is known as “**polar motion**”.
- For instance, rocks slowly circulating inside Earth’s mantle causes the planet’s mass to shift, leading to a change in the position of the rotational axis.
- There are several other reasons responsible for polar motion like **ocean currents** and even **hurricanes**.

### **How Global Warming/Depletion of Groundwater Can Lead to Changes in Earth’s Axis?**

- In 2016, a team of researchers demonstrated that climate-driven changes in water mass distribution, led by the melting of glaciers and ice in Greenland, can cause Earth’s axis to drift.
- In 2021, another study said climate change was causing the rotational axis to shift more than usual since the 1990s.
- The latest study published in the journal Geophysical Research Letters, earlier this month, took observational data spanning 17 years and a computer model to find out which factors affected the Earth’s rotation of axis the most.
- The study found **redistribution of groundwater as the largest contributor to the drift of the rotational pole**.
- The study also noted that the **groundwater extraction from North America and northwestern India**, both located at the Earth’s midlatitudes, had an outsized impact on the polar motion in comparison to the extraction taking place in poles or equators.
- The water sucked out from the ground for irrigation and meeting the world’s freshwater demands, eventually, goes into the oceans.
- The team that conducted the study confirmed that groundwater extraction is one of the major contributors to the global sea level rise.
- Their calculations matched with previous research, which estimated that **groundwater extraction raised global sea levels by 6.24mm between 1993 and 2010**.

## CENTRE TO ISSUE NORMS AGAINST 'DARK PATTERNS' IN ONLINE ADS

### Why in news?

- The Union Consumer Affairs Ministry is concerned about the increasing dark patterns of misleading advertisements that use tactics like false urgency, confirm-shaming, forced action, subscription traps, and nagging.
- To tackle this issue, they plan to release clear guidelines to regulate these practices.
- The ministry has also urged the consumers to flag such manipulative online practices on the National Consumer Helpline by calling '1915' or through a WhatsApp message to 8800001915.

### Dark Patterns

- Dark patterns refer to **deceptive design techniques** used in user interfaces to manipulate or deceive users into taking certain actions or making specific choices online.
- Such patterns are unethical user interface designs that deliberately make Internet experience harder or even exploit the users.
- These patterns exploit cognitive biases and behavioural tendencies to trick or mislead users, often for the benefit of the platform or business implementing them.
- These tricks can include creating a false sense of urgency, making people feel bad for not doing something, forcing them to take certain actions, trapping them into subscriptions, or constantly bothering them.

### Some major types of Dark Patterns:

- **Urgency:** This tactic creates a sense of urgency or scarcity to pressure consumers into making a purchase or taking an action.
- **Basket Sneaking:** Websites or apps use dark patterns to add additional products or services to the shopping cart without user consent.
- **Confirm Shaming:** It involves guilt as a way to make consumers adhere. It criticizes or attack consumers for not conforming to a particular belief or viewpoint.
- **Forced Action:** This involves forcing consumers into taking an action they may not want to take, such as signing up for a service in order to access content.

- **Nagging:** It refers to persistent, repetitive and annoyingly constant criticism, complaints, requests for action.
- **Subscription Traps:** This tactic makes it easy for consumers to sign up for a service but difficult for them to cancel it, often by hiding the cancellation option or requiring multiple steps.
- **Interface Interference:** This tactic involves making it difficult for consumers to take certain actions, such as canceling a subscription or deleting an account.
- **Bait and Switch:** This involves advertising one product or service but delivering another, often of lower quality.
- **Hidden Costs:** This tactic involves hiding additional costs from consumers until they are already committed to making a purchase.
- **Disguised Ads:** Disguised ads are advertisements that are designed to look like other types of content, such as news articles or user-generated content.

## How do companies use dark patterns?

- Social media companies and Big Tech firms such as Apple, Amazon, Skype, Facebook, LinkedIn, Microsoft, and Google use dark or deceptive patterns to downgrade the user experience to their advantage.
- **Amazon**
  - It came under fire in the EU for its confusing, multi-step cancellation process for the Amazon Prime subscription.
- **Google-owned YouTube**
  - It nudges users to sign up for YouTube Premium with pop-ups, obscuring the final seconds of a video with thumbnails of other videos.
  - This is being viewed as a way of disrupting what should have been an otherwise smooth user experience.
- **LinkedIn**
  - LinkedIn users often receive unsolicited, sponsored messages from influencers.
  - Disabling this option is a difficult process with multiple steps that requires users to be familiar with the platform controls.

## ELECTORAL BONDS

- Electoral bonds are a financial instrument introduced by the Government of India in 2018 as a means to facilitate anonymous political donations.
- An electoral bond is a bearer instrument, like a promissory note, that is payable to the bearer on demand to donate their contributions to political parties.
- **Who are eligible to receive electoral bonds?**
  - Only registered political parties are eligible to receive electoral bonds.
  - However, there are certain criteria that political parties must meet to be eligible to receive electoral bonds. These are:
    - **Recognition:** The political party must be **registered under Section 29A** of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
    - **Recent Election Performance:** The party must have secured **at least 1%** of the votes polled in the most recent Lok Sabha or State Assembly election.
- **Available denominations**
  - The Government of India has specified various denominations for electoral bonds, ranging from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1 crore.
- **Authorized bank**
  - **SBI** is the only bank authorised to sell these bonds.

## **Working**

- A citizen of India or a body incorporated in India is eligible to purchase the bond.
- EBs are issued/purchased for any value, in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1,00,000, Rs 10,00,000 and Rs 1,00,00,000 from the specified branches of the State Bank of India (SBI).
- EBs have a life of only 15 days during which it can be used for making donation only to the registered political parties.
- The bonds shall be 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 Central Government.

- The bond can be encashed by an eligible political party only through a designated bank account with the authorised bank.
- The political parties have to disclose the amount to the Election Commission.

## Key features of electoral bonds

- **Anonymity:**

- Electoral bonds provide anonymity to the donor by not revealing the identity of the donor to the public or the recipient political party.

- **Purchase and Redemption:**

- Electoral bonds can be purchased from authorized banks using legal tender.
- They are available in fixed denominations, and the minimum value of an electoral bond is set by the government.
- These bonds can be redeemed only by registered political parties within a specified time frame.

- **Validity:**

- Electoral bonds are valid for a limited period, typically 15 days, during which they can be used for making donations to eligible political parties.

- **Exclusivity:**

- Only political parties that have secured at least 1% of the votes in the most recent Lok Sabha or State Assembly election are eligible to receive electoral bond donations.

- **Transparency:**

- While the names of donors remain anonymous, the political parties receiving the electoral bond donations are required to disclose details of the donations in their financial statements to the Election Commission of India.

## Criticism

- **Lack of Transparency:**

- While the scheme requires political parties to disclose the amount of donations received through electoral bonds, the identity of the donors remains anonymous.



- This anonymity makes it difficult to trace the original source of funds, potentially allowing for illicit or undisclosed money to enter the political system.
  - **Potential for Money Laundering:**
    - Critics argue that the anonymity provided by electoral bonds can be misused for money laundering or routing black money into the political system.
  - **Unequal Advantage to Ruling Parties:**
    - 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, in turn, allows 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.
  - **Bypassing Election Commission Scrutiny:**
    - Unlike other forms of political funding, electoral bonds do not require ECI approval or verification, which can undermine the ECI's oversight role in regulating political funding and ensuring a level playing field.
  - **No upper limit on funding**
    - Before the electoral bonds scheme was announced, there was a cap on how much a company could donate to a political party: 7.5 per cent of the average net profits of a company in the preceding three years.
    - However, the government amended the Companies Act 2013 to remove this limit, opening the doors to unlimited funding by corporate India.
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