

**INDIAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE**
**SaraswatiSamman:**

- Telugu poet K Siva Reddy has been selected for the prestigious SaraswatiSamman, 2018 for his work PakkakiOttigilite which is a collection of poetry.
- SaraswatiSamman is the annual award given to an outstanding literary work in any Indian language mentioned in Schedule VIII of the Constitution and published in 10 years preceding the specified award year.
- It is the highest recognition in the field of Indian literature in the country and carries a citation, a plaque and award money of ₹15 lakh.
- The award is presented by the KK Birla Foundation, a literary and cultural organisation that also gives the VyasSamman for Hindi, and BihariPuraskar for Hindi and Rajasthani writers of Rajasthan.

**GEOGRAPHY**
**Saturn's moon Titan has 100-m deep methane lakes**

Saturn's largest moon Titan has small liquid lakes that run more than 100 metres deep, perched atop hills and filled with methane, scientists have found using data from NASA's Cassini spacecraft.

**Methane Rains on Saturn**

- Scientists have known that Titan's hydrologic cycle works similarly to Earth's — with one major difference. Instead of water evaporating from seas, forming clouds and rain, Titan does it all with methane and ethane.
- We tend to think of these hydrocarbons as a gas on Earth, unless they're pressurized in a tank.
- However, Titan is so cold that they behave as liquids, like gasoline at room temperature on our planet.

**About Cassini Mission**

- Launched in 1997, the Cassini mission is a cooperation between NASA, the European Space Agency and the Italian Space Agency.
- It has sent back thousands of stunning images and made numerous discoveries about the ringed planet and its moons.
- Cassini-Huygens is an unmanned spacecraft sent to the planet Saturn.
- Cassini is the fourth space probe to visit Saturn and the first to enter orbit. Its design includes a Saturn orbiter and a lander for the moon Titan.
- The lander, called Huygens, landed on Titan in 2005.

**CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**
**Sealed disclosure**

The Supreme Court's interim order asking political parties to disclose, to the Election Commission in sealed covers, details of the donations they have received through anonymous electoral bonds is an inadequate and belated response to the serious concerns raised about the opaque scheme.

**Details of the Judgement**

- The scheme, under which one can purchase bonds of various denominations from a designated bank and deposit them in the accounts of any political party, had been challenged in the apex court a year ago.
- When the matter was taken up last week, it was considered that the time available was too limited for an in-depth hearing.
- Maintenance of status quo – The order, unfortunately, preserves the status quo, and any effect that the possible asymmetry in political funding would have on the election process will stay as it is.
- Availability of donor's name with EC – The only concession given to those concerned about the dangers of anonymous political funding is that the names would be available with the EC, albeit in sealed envelopes, until the court decides if they can be made public.
- Large donations to ruling Party – There is some concern that a disproportionately large segment of the bonds purchased by corporate donors has gone to the BharatiyaJanata Party.
- This donor anonymity may end if the court decides that the EC should disclose the names at the end of the litigation, but the influence such donations would have had on the electoral outcome would remain undisturbed.
- Bearing on the electoral Process – The court notes in its order that the case gives rise to "weighty issues which have a tremendous bearing on the sanctity of the electoral process in the country"

### Implications of Judgement

- All it has done now is to ensure that its interim arrangement does not 'tilt the balance' in favour of either side.
- Petitioner's Argument – The petitioners, the Association for Democratic Reforms, questioned the anonymity-based funding scheme on the grounds that it promotes opacity, opens up the possibility of black money being donated to parties through shell companies and empowers the ruling party, which alone is in a position to identify the donors and, therefore, well placed to discourage donations to other parties
- Government's Argument – The government, on the other hand, argued that electoral bonds would prevent unaccounted money from entering the system through funding of parties.

### Conclusion

- Supreme court's role in maintaining Transparency -For the last two decades, the Supreme Court has been proactive in empowering voters and in infusing transparency in the system.
- It has developed a body of jurisprudence that says the electoral process involves the voter being given information about candidates, their qualifications, assets and crime records, if any.
- Therefore, it is disappointing to hear the Attorney General arguing that voters do not have a right to know who funds parties.
- Now that there is no stay on the operation of the scheme, the court must render an early verdict on the legality of the electoral bond scheme.

## **INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**

### Indian elections, South Asian concerns

The rest of South Asia wants the very best of democracy for India, plus to share in the peace dividend, growth and camaraderie. The level of worry is also at a pitch, for India should be the bulwark against weakening democracy in a world of Bolsonaro (Brazil), Duterte (the Philippines), Erdoğan (Turkey), Putin (Russia) and Trump (the U.S.) not to mention the People's Republic of China.

### The current democratic scenario in India

- The term 'world's largest democracy' is achieving banality as India gains majoritarian momentum.
- Centralisation and majoritarianism – Centralised control of society would never be possible in such a vast and variegated society of sub-nationalities.
- Degradation in quality –
  - The high principle and probity of India's political class, bureaucracy, academia and civil society are now exceptions rather than the rule.
  - India's Ambassadors are no longer the self-confident professionals we knew for decades, they act today like timid note-takers.
  - Higher education is directed by those who insist that the achievements of Vedic era science included flying machines and organ transplants.
  - Meanwhile, the adventurism that marked economic management, including immiseration through demonetisation, has been 'managed' through loyal social and corporate media.

### India As an Example for others in Subcontinent

- Parliamentary democracy – Parliamentary democracy is the governance procedure adopted by each and every country of South Asia, and the Indian practice has always been held up as the example.
- The professionalism of the civil service – The precedents set by India's courts are studied elsewhere, the professionalism of the civil service is regarded as the benchmark, and everyone else seeks the aspirational welfare state set in motion in India in the middle of the 20th century.

### Neighbour's Observations

- Pakistan – Lahore intellectuals watch with apprehension as India copies the excesses of Pakistan's theocratic state.
- Bangladesh – Dhaka observers are numbed into silence with New Delhi's vigorous backing of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed as she constructs an intolerant one-party regime.
- Sri Lanka – Colombo rides a geopolitical see-saw as New Delhi shadow-boxes Beijing.
- Nepal – Kathmandu wonders whether New Delhi has it in itself to concede that the amplified Chinese involvement in Nepal is the result of the Great Blockade of 2015-16.

### Challenges

- India is indeed large and important, but the chest size of a country does not translate into equity, social justice or international standing.

- Inequality – Because nearly 20% of humanity lives within its boundaries, when India falters, the pit of despair and the potential for violence open up wide and deep.
- Imagining south asian regionalism in right way–
  - The South Asia that New Delhi's policy and opinion-makers should consider is not the centralised Jambudvipa mega-state of the RSS imagination. Instead, the ideal South Asian regionalism is all about limiting the power of the national capitals, devolving power to federal units and strengthening local democracy.
  - Damage to SAARC -The freeze put by India on the inter-governmental South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is only a cynical means to keep Pakistan out of the club.
  - The sabotaging of SAARC can hardly be considered a victory, for that feather-light geopolitical stratagem fails to consider that regionalism is a potent means to bring economic growth and social justice to India's own poverty-stricken 'peripheral regions' from Assam to Purvanchal to Rajasthan.
  - For its own security and prosperity as well as that of the rest of us, India must re-connect with South Asia.

#### Way Forward

- Subcontinental regionalism – Subcontinental regionalism is also important to achieve New Delhi's ambitions on the world stage, including that coveted seat at the UN Security Council.
- Think tanks approach -India's global comeback will start the day New Delhi think tanks begin questioning South and North Block rather than serving as purveyors of spin.
- Gujral Doctrine – On South Asian matters, they should pull out a copy of the Gujral Doctrine from the archives, to be dusted and re-examined.
- India that is prosperous and advancing at double digit growth, would mean much not only for its 1.35 billion citizens, but to the other 500 million South Asians. For its own selfish interests, the rest of South Asia wants India to succeed in the world.

#### **Bhutan govt to place bill for ratification of BBIN initiative at its upper senate**

The Bhutan government will place the bill for ratification of Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative for road and rail connectivity at its upper senate. The Motor Vehicle Agreement of BBIN countries was signed in 2015 by the four member countries. Bangladesh, India and Nepal have implemented the agreement but Bhutan is yet to accord its ratification of the agreement.

#### **BBIN Initiative**

- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) signed a Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic.
- Aside from facilitating the cross-border movement of passengers and goods, the agreement is expected to "promote safe, economical efficient and environmentally sound road transport in the sub-region
- It will help to create "an institutional mechanism for regional integration."
- It may increase trade within the South Asia region by nearly 60% and trade by the region with outside partners by more than 30% over current levels.
- But nearly two years after ministers from Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal signed the BBIN MVA in Thimphu; the Bhutanese government withdrew from the agreement followed Bhutan's domestic resistance to ratify the agreement.

### **DEFENCE**

#### **Coast Guard patrol ship Veera commissioned:**

- Veera, third in the series of offshore patrol vessels of the Coast Guard, was built by L&T at its shipbuilding facility at Kattupalli in Chennai. A ship of this class has been designed and constructed in India for the first time as part of 'Make in India' concept of the Central government.
- Veera is equipped with the state-of-the-art machinery comprising an integrated bridge system, which includes advanced navigation and communication technology and integrated platform management system.

### **QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**Do not look back. You are not going that way.**