

INTERNATIONAL RELATION**Social Housing Units Project in Mauritius**

Recently, the Prime Minister of India and Mauritius jointly inaugurated India-assisted social housing units project in Mauritius virtually as part of India's development support.

Key Points**About:**

- In May 2016, India had extended a grant of USD 353 mn to Mauritius as Special Economic Package (SEP) to execute five priority projects identified by Mauritius, among others.
- These were: the Metro Express Project, Supreme Court Building, New ENT Hospital, Supply of Digital Tablets to Primary School Children, and the Social Housing Project.
- With the inauguration of the Social Housing Project, all the high profile projects under the SEP have been implemented.

Foundation Stone for Two Other Projects:

- **Construction of a State-of-the-Art Civil Service College:**
 1. It is being financed through a grant support of USD 4.74 million, under an MoU signed in 2017 during the visit of Prime Minister of Mauritius to India.
 2. Once constructed, this will provide a fully equipped and functional facility for the civil servants of Mauritius to undertake various training and skill development programmes.
 3. It will further strengthen institutional linkages with India. The Prime Minister of India also acknowledged the importance of the Civil Service College project in nation building and offered to share learnings of Mission Karmayogi.
- **8 MW Solar PV Farm.**
 1. It involves the installation of 25,000 PV cells to generate approximately 14 GWh of green energy annually, to electrify approximately 10,000 Mauritian households.
 2. It will help mitigate the climate challenges that Mauritius faces through avoidance of 13,000 tons of CO2 emissions. The idea for the One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG) initiative was put forth by the Indian Prime Minister at the First Assembly of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) in October 2018.
- **Exchange of Two Key Bilateral Pacts:**
 1. Agreement for the extension of USD 190 million Line of Credit from India to Mauritius for the Metro Express and other infrastructure projects.
 2. MoU on the Implementation of Small Development Projects.

India-Mauritius Relations**About:**

- Connections between India and Mauritius date back to 1730 and diplomatic relations were established in 1948 before Mauritius became an independent state (1968).
- India has viewed Mauritius through the prism of the diaspora. This was, perhaps, natural since communities of Indian origin constitute a significant majority in the island.
- Indian-origin people constitute nearly 70% of the population of Mauritius.
- It is a significant partner of India in celebrating Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas which is a forum for issues concerning the Indian Diaspora.

Significance for India:

- **Geo-strategic:** India has begun to see the strategic significance of Mauritius to the renewed great power contestation in the Indian Ocean.
 1. In 2015, India unveiled its strategic vision for the Indian Ocean called the SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region).
 2. In 2015, India and Mauritius signed an agreement that allows India to develop infrastructure in terms of establishing military bases on the Mauritian islands.
- **Geo-Economic:**
 1. As a "central geographic point" Mauritius holds importance for commerce and connectivity in the Indian Ocean.
 2. As a member of the African Union, Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Indian Ocean Commission, Mauritius is a stepping stone to multiple geographies.
 3. As a founding-member of the 'Small Island Developing States' (SIDS) it has been seen as a significant neighbour.
 4. India is Mauritius's largest trading partner and has been the largest exporter of goods and services to the Indian Ocean island nation since 2007.

- **Regional Hub:** As new investments pour into Mauritius from Africa, Mauritius can be the fulcrum for India's own African economic outreach.
 1. India could also contribute to the evolution of Mauritius as a regional centre for technological innovation.
 2. Mauritius could also become a valuable place for regional and international maritime scientific research.
- **Pivot of Island Policy:** Until now India has tended to deal with the so-called Vanilla islands of the south western Indian Ocean — Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte, Reunion and Seychelles — on a bilateral basis.
 1. If the Indian establishment thinks of them as a collective, it could make Mauritius the pivot of Delhi's island policy.
 2. It can facilitate a number of Indian commercial activities in the south western Indian ocean — as a banking gateway and hub for tourism.
- **Keeping Pace with China:** In its “string of pearls” policy, China has built significant relations across the Indian Ocean, from Gwadar (Pakistan) to Hambantota (Sri Lanka) to Kyaukpyu (Myanmar). Therefore, India should help Indian Ocean littoral states like Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Seychelles as part of capacity and capability enhancement in strengthening their maritime domain awareness capabilities.

Important Developments:

- In 2021, India approved signing of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) between India and Mauritius.
- India has signed a contract with Mauritius for the export of an Advanced Light Helicopter Mk III. The helicopter will be used by the Mauritius Police Force.

Way Forward

- While India and Mauritius share cultural contiguity dating back to colonial times and a special partnership in recent years, India cannot take its influence in Mauritius for granted and should continue to enhance its engagement with this important island country.
- As India takes an integrated view of its security cooperation in the south western Indian Ocean, Mauritius is the natural node for it. Therefore, it is important to take course-corrections in India's Neighbourhood First policy.

GOVERNANCE

Electoral Bonds

The 19th tranche of electoral bonds, which have been pitched as an alternative to cash donations, were on sale, ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections in five States. In the past, the Supreme Court has raised the possibility of misuse of money received by political parties through electoral bonds.

This may defeat the original idea of the introduction of these bonds to bring transparency in electoral funding and keep a check on the criminalization of politics.

Key Points

About Electoral Bonds:

- These bonds are issued in multiples of Rs. 1,000, Rs. 10,000, Rs. 1 lakh, Rs. 10 lakh and Rs. 1 crore without any maximum limit.
- State Bank of India is authorised to issue and encash these bonds, which are valid for fifteen days from the date of issuance.
- These bonds are only redeemable in the designated account of a registered political party.
- The bonds are available for purchase by any citizen of India for a period of ten days each in the months of January, April, July and October as may be specified by the Central Government.
- A person being an individual can buy bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- The donor's name is not mentioned on the bond.

Associated Issues:

- **A Blow to Democracy:** Through an amendment to the Finance Act 2017, the Union government has exempted political parties from disclosing donations received through electoral bonds.
 1. This means the voters will not know which individual, company, or organization has funded which party, and to what extent.
 2. However, in a representative democracy, citizens cast their votes for the people who will represent them in Parliament.
- **Compromising Right To Know:** The Indian Supreme Court has long held that the “right to know”, especially in the context of elections, is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression (Article 19) under the Indian Constitution.

- **Against Free & Fair Elections:** While electoral bonds provide no details to the citizens.
 1. The said anonymity does not apply to the government of the day, which can always access the donor details by demanding the data from the State Bank of India (SBI).
 2. This implies that the government in power can leverage this information and disrupt free and fair elections.
- **Crony Capitalism:** The electoral bonds scheme removes all pre-existing limits on political donations and effectively allows well-resourced corporations to fund elections subsequently paving the way for crony capitalism.

Way Forward

- **Transparency in Elections Funding:** In many advanced countries, elections are funded publicly. This ensures principles of parity and there is not too great a resource gap between the ruling party and the opposition.
 1. 2nd ARC, Dinesh Goswami committee, and several others have also recommended state funding of elections.
 2. Further, until the elections do not get publicly funded, there can be caps or limits on financial contributions to political parties.
- **Judiciary Acting as an Umpire:** One of the most critical functions of an independent judiciary in a functioning democracy is to referee the fundamentals of the democratic process.
 1. Electoral bonds have raised questions on the electoral legitimacy of the government and thus the whole electoral process has become questionable.
 2. In this context, the courts should act as an umpire and enforce the ground rules of democracy.
- **Transition Towards Civic Culture:** India has been working well as a democracy for nearly 75 years.
 1. Now in order to make the government more accountable, the voters should become self-aware and reject candidates and parties that violate the principle of free and fair elections.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Ranking of States on Faster Green Nods

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has decided to rank states, specifically State Environment Impact Assessment Authorities (SEIAAs), on the speed with which they accord Environmental Clearances (EC) to development projects. The issue of action taken to enable “ease of doing business”, especially in the context of “ranking of states based on the time taken in accordance with clearances” was raised in November 2021.

The average time to grant environmental clearances in all sectors has reduced significantly from over 150 days in 2019 to less than 90 days in 2021.

Key Points

About:

- It has been decided to incentivise the states through a star-rating system, based on efficiency and timeliness in grant of EC.
- This is intended as a mode of recognition and encouragement as well as for prompting improvements where needed.
- The SEIAA, which clears projects in the shortest period of time, has a high rate of clearance, and seeks fewer “essential details”, will be ranked the highest.

Parameters for the Rating System:

- SEIAAs will be graded between 0 and 1 on five parameters, and 0 and 2 on one (for granting EC).
- The parameters are:
 1. The average number of days taken by an SEIAA to accept proposals seeking either EC or Terms of Reference (ToR) for projects.
 2. The number of complaints addressed by the Authority.
 3. The percentage of cases for which site visits are carried out by either SEIAAs or State Expert Appraisal Committees (SEACs).
 4. The percentage of cases in which the Authority seeks additional information from project proponents more than once.
 5. The disposal percentage of proposals seeking fresh or amended ToRs that are older than 30 days.
 6. The disposal percentage of proposals seeking fresh or amended EC that are older than 120 days.

Criticism of the Move:

- **Reduce the SEIAA to a ‘Rubber Stamps Authority’:** Such a rating system stands to reduce the SEIAA to a ‘rubber stamps authority’ where their performance will be judged by the speed with which they facilitate environmental degradation and jeopardising of community livelihoods.

- **Against Article 21:** The rating system is also against the environmental rule of law, violates article 21 of the Constitution (Protection of Life and Personal Liberty) and is an arbitrary exercise of power to benefit only business at the cost of the environment and people.
- **Constrain the Mandate of the SEIAAs:**
 1. The move will severely constrain the mandate of the SEIAAs under the Environment Protection Act, 1986 and the Environment Impact Assessment notification.
 2. This ratings system could lead to a further dilution in the quality of environment impact assessments and it only demonises the regulatory process, whereas it is the state of the economy at large which has arrested the growth of business.
 - ✓ To assess the performance of SEIAAs, the criteria for the same should step from this environmental protection mandate, which is drawn from Section 3(3) of the Environment Protection Act.
 - ✓ The Act empowers the Central Government to establish authorities (under section 3(3)) charged with the mandate of preventing environmental pollution in all its forms and to tackle specific environmental problems that are peculiar to different parts of the country.

Environmental Clearance In India

- In India Environmental clearance of a project has to be obtained either from the State Government and /or from the Central Government.
- The basic objective behind the environmental clearance is to ensure the least damage to the natural resources and incorporate suitable remedial measures right at the stage of project formulation.
- The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) notification issued by the Ministry of Environment & Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) includes the details of the procedure for obtaining Environmental Clearance and public hearing for decision making.
- This EIA notification is valid for both Government as well as the Public sector/Private sector for mega projects undertaken by them.
- The potential impacts of proposed projects, plan programs, or legislative actions relative to the physical-chemical, biological, cultural, and socio-economic components of the total environment.

Way Forward

Though the philosophy of the Environmental Impact Assessment is most essential to protect the environment and keep a balance between the ecology and the economy, development, and pollution, it is necessary to revamp the time taking stages as it has become a major obstacle in starting a business in India. In the last couple of years administrative and bureaucratic issues that have come up have made it difficult for the local investors to invest.

PRELIMS FACT

Rural Area Development Plan Formulation and Implementation

Recently, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has revised Rural Area Development Plan Formulation and Implementation (RADPFI) guidelines, 2017 in a view to transforming rural India and ensuring rural prosperity.

Key Points

About:

- RADPFI 2021 guidelines is a continuation to the Ministry's efforts towards promotion of Spatial rural planning and would create pathways for rural transformation by developing a perspective for long term planning in villages.
- It will enable effective land use planning in rural areas and in improving the quality of life in rural areas.

Features:

- It includes Village Planning Scheme (VPS) on the lines of Town Planning Schemes in urban areas.
- Provisions linking Gram Panchayat Development Programme (GPDP) with Spatial Land Use Planning,
- Spatial standards for Gram Panchayat development.

Objectives:

- It is aimed at ensuring ease of living in villages and help minimizing migration to big cities by providing all necessary infrastructure and facilities and also resources and opportunities for livelihood in rural areas.

Significance:

- It will augment development of vibrant economic clusters in rural areas, which would contribute to the socio-economic development of rural areas.

- It will also supplement the efforts of the Central Government such as the SVAMITVA Scheme of Ministry of Panchayati Raj and RURBAN Mission of Ministry of Rural Development and facilitate better utilization of Geospatial information.

Schemes Related to Rural Development

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005.
2. Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).
3. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY).
4. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin.
5. National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. To bring in a balance between individual and societal rights, the Fundamental Rights in India have been rendered qualified, and not absolute. Analyse. (250 Words)

Ans:

Introduction

Fundamental rights are the basic human rights that are guaranteed to the citizens of India by the Indian Constitution. They act as a limitation to the power of the State. These rights are highly revered and any law that is found to be in contravention of them can be challenged in the Supreme Court by the virtue of article 32 of the Constitution, and subsequently struck down to the extent of the inconsistency. The Supreme court can also pass any appropriate order, direction, or writ for the enforcement of these rights. Similar powers are present with the High Courts under article 226 as well.

Body

While the Fundamental Rights are an integral part of the Constitution, it would be incorrect to term them as unconditional. These rights, by the Constitution itself, are restricted by conditions which aim to balance the individual freedom and rights to the necessity of public good and welfare.

- The Fundamental Rights though justiciable are not absolute.
- The fundamental rights can be controlled and are subject to reasonable restrictions for the protection of general welfare.
- The Constitution empowers the government to impose certain restrictions on the enjoyment of our rights in the interest of public good
- Further, the Supreme Court has ruled that all provisions of the Constitution, including fundamental rights can be amended.
- Some of the fundamental rights and the extent of their enjoyment can be restricted or even abrogated by Parliament under Art. 33. Thus the rights of the citizens in the armed forces or the forces in charge with the maintenance of public order can be restricted or abrogated

Are restrictions justified?

- The restrictions imposed on fundamental rights are justified in the interest of safety and integrity of the country. It is totally acceptable.
- The prescribed limitations are in the interest of public good, social reforms, public order, morality and the safety of the state.
- Under social contract theory, every “right” that you have under that social contract has corresponding responsibilities. For example, your right to freedom of speech is not absolute. One cannot say anything you want about anybody, it is limited by the other person’s right to not be slandered.
- The constitution allows the state to impose ‘reasonable restrictions’ on certain rights, but the ‘reasonableness’ of the restrictions is a justiciable matter.
- It is the responsibility of the government to protect its citizens from internal as well as external disturbance. If we are not safe then there are no reasons to have rights.
- In case of violation of these rights individual can approach the court for the protection and duty of the court is to protect and safeguard them if someone’s rights are violated.
- If a government enacts a law that restricts or violates any of these rights, it will be declared invalid by courts.
- Further, these are social concepts which change with time and social environment. What is a right today may turn out to be a social liability or even a crime tomorrow. For instance, triple talaq and rights of women
- Absolute grant of rights could be prone to misuse. The fundamental rights are only limited to the degree that you cannot reduce another individual’s human rights by your actions. (Harm principle).
- Different persons have different conditions and they cannot be treated equally, which could further enhance socio-economic injustice in the society.

- absolute fundamental rights would have rendered hindrances in governance and too much of baseless writ litigations
- A qualified rights aims at striking a balance between rights of an individual liberty and social control. E.g. free speech (Ar.19) is robust but not absolute. Can be suspended on in emergency due to external aggression.

Conclusion

Thus, fundamental rights are not absolute rights and will be subjected to reasonable restrictions. The state can impose reasonable restrictions to protect the legitimate interest of the state. Any law passed by the state or action that result in an infringement of the rights will be subjected to judicial review.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Consider the following statements about Collective Security Treaty Organisation:

1. It is an intergovernmental military alliance that came into effect in 2012.
2. Its origin can be traced to the Tashkent Treaty.
3. In the CSTO, aggression against one signatory is perceived as aggression against all.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only**
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Q2. Consider the following statements about domestic systemically important bank (D-SIB).

1. RBI declares only Public Sector Banks as domestic systemically important bank.
2. Banks become systemically important due to their size, cross-jurisdictional activities and interconnection.
3. Banks whose assets exceed 2% of GDP are considered part of this group.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 only
- c. 2 and 3 only**
- d. 1, 2 and 3**

Q3. Recently, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) discovered remains of an ancient temple dating back to the Gupta period (5th century) in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Etah district. As per the ASI, the inscription on the stairs of the temple possibly reads 'Sri Mahendraditya', which was the title of Kumaragupta I and the stairs led to a structural temple built during the Gupta period.

Which one of the following inscriptions is being referred in the above paragraph?

- a. Mahrauli Inscription
- b. Nanaghat Inscription
- c. Mandsaur Inscription
- d. Shankhalipi Inscription**

Q4. With reference to the period of Gupta dynasty in ancient India, the towns Ghantasala, kadura and Chaul were well known as

- a. ports handling foreign trade.**
- b. capitals of powerful kingdoms.
- c. places of exquisite stone art and architecture.
- d. important Buddhist pilgrimage centres.

Q5. Consider the following statements:

1. Food fortification is the process by which plant breeder's breed in traits of improved nutrition to crops.
2. In India, the regulation of all activities related to Food fortification is governed by Food Safety and Standards (Fortification of Foods) Regulations, 2018.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only**
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2