

GOVERNANCE**Parvatmala Scheme**

Recently, the Union Finance Minister in the Union Budget for 2022-23 announced National Ropeways Development Programme – “Parvatmala” to improve connectivity in hilly areas.

What is the Scheme?

- The scheme will be taken up on PPP (Public Private Partnership) mode, which will be a preferred ecologically sustainable alternative in place of conventional roads in difficult hilly areas.
- The idea is to improve connectivity and convenience for commuters, besides promoting tourism.
- This may also cover congested urban areas, where conventional mass transit systems are not feasible.
- The scheme is being presently started in regions like Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Jammu & Kashmir and the other North Eastern states.
- The Finance Minister announced that contracts for 8 ropeway projects for a length of 60 km would be awarded in 2022-23.

Who is the Nodal Ministry?

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MORTH) will have responsibility for development of ropeway and alternative mobility solutions technology, as well as construction, research, and policy in this area.
- In February 2021, the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules 1961 was amended, which enabled the MORTH to also look after the development of Ropeways and Alternate Mobility Solutions.
 1. The move will give a boost to the sector by setting up a regulatory regime.
 2. The MORTH has so far been responsible for development of Highways and regulating the road transport sector across the country.

What is the Significance?

- **Economical mode of transportation:** Given that ropeway projects are built in a straight line over a hilly terrain, it also results in lower land acquisition costs. Hence, despite having a higher cost of construction per km than roadways, ropeway projects' construction cost may happen to be more economical than roadways.
- **Faster mode of transportation:** Owing to the aerial mode of transportation, ropeways have an advantage over roadway projects where ropeways can be built in a straight line, over a hilly terrain.
- **Environmentally friendly:** Low dust emissions. Material containers can be designed so as to rule out any soiling of the environment.
- **Last mile connectivity:** Ropeway projects adopting 3S (a kind of cable car system) or equivalent technologies can transport 6000-8000 passengers per hour.

What are the Benefits of Ropeways?

- **Ideal for difficult / challenging / sensitive terrain:**
 1. Long rope spans: The system crosses obstacles like rivers, buildings, ravines, or roads without a problem.
 2. Ropes guided over towers: Low space requirements on the ground, and no barrier for humans or animals.
- **Economy:**
 1. Ropeway having multiple cars propelled by a single power-plant and drive mechanism.
 2. This reduces both construction and maintenance costs.
 3. The use of a single operator for an entire ropeway is a further saving, in labor cost.
 4. On level ground, the cost of ropeways is competitive with narrow-gauge railroads, in the mountains the ropeway is far superior.
- **Flexible:** Transport of different materials - A ropeway allows for the simultaneous transport of different types of material.
- **Ability to handle large slopes:**
 1. Ropeways and cableways (cable cranes) can handle large slopes and large differences in elevation.
 2. Where a road or railroad needs switchbacks or tunnels, a ropeway travels straight up and down the fall line. The old cliff railways in England and ski resort ropeways in the mountains take advantage of this feature.
- **Low footprint:** The fact that only narrow-based vertical supports are needed at intervals, leaving the rest of the ground free, makes it possible for ropeways to be constructed in built-up areas and in places where there is intense competition for land use.

INTERNETIONAL RELATION**Restoration of JCPOA**

Recently, the US has restored sanctions waivers to Iran to allow international nuclear cooperation projects, as indirect American-Iranian talks on reviving the 2015 international nuclear deal with Iran enter the final stretch.

- The waiver allows other countries and companies to participate in Iran's civilian nuclear programme without triggering US sanctions on them, in the name of promoting safety and non-proliferation.
- The waivers were revoked by the United States in 2019 and 2020 under former President Donald Trump, who pulled out of the nuclear agreement. The agreement is formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

What is the Timeline & Background of JCPOA?

- The JCPOA was the result of prolonged negotiations from 2013 and 2015 between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States).
- It happened due to the backchannel talks between the US (President Barack Obama) and Iran, quietly brokered by Oman, in an attempt to repair the accumulated mistrust since the 1979 Islamic revolution. Islamic Revolution, also called Iranian Revolution, popular uprising in Iran in 1978–79 that resulted in the toppling of the monarchy on 11th February, 1979, and led to the establishment of an Islamic republic.
- The JCPOA obliged Iran to accept constraints on its uranium enrichment program verified by an intrusive inspection regime in return for a partial lifting of economic sanctions. However, faced with a hostile Republican Senate, President Obama was unable to get the nuclear deal ratified but implemented it on the basis of periodic Executive Orders to keep sanction waivers going.
- When Donald Trump became president, he withdrew from the deal and called it a "horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made".
- The US decision was criticized by all other parties to the JCPOA (including the European allies) because Iran was in compliance with its obligations, as certified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- Tensions rose as the US pushed ahead with its unilateral sanctions, widening its scope to cover nearly all Iranian banks connected to the global financial system, industries related to metallurgy, energy, and shipping, individuals related to the defence, intelligence, and nuclear establishments.
- For the first year after the US withdrawal, Iran's response was muted as the E-3 (France, Germany, the U.K.) and the European Union (EU) promised to find ways to mitigate the US decision. The E-3's promised relief Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), created in 2019 to facilitate limited trade with Iran.
- However, by May 2019, Iran's strategic patience ran out as the anticipated economic relief from the E-3/EU failed to materialize. As the sanctions began to hurt, Iran shifted to a strategy of 'maximum resistance'.

What will be the Impacts on India of Restoration of JCPOA?

- Restoration of JCPOA may ease many restrictions over the Iranian regime, which may directly or indirectly help India. This can be reflected in the following examples:
- **Boost to Regional Connectivity:** Removing sanctions may revive India's interest in the Chabahar Project, Bandar Abbas port, and other plans for regional connectivity.
 1. This would further help India to neutralize the Chinese presence in Gwadar port, Pakistan.
 2. Apart from Chabahar, India's interest in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC), which runs through Iran, which will improve connectivity with five Central Asian republics, may also get a boost.
- **Energy Security:** Due to the pressure linked to the US' Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), India has to bring down oil imports to zero. Restoration of ties between the US and Iran will help India to procure cheap Iranian oil and aid in energy security.

ENVIRONMENT**Sovereign Green Bonds**

Recently, the Finance Minister in the Budget 2022 announced that the government proposes to issue sovereign green bonds to mobilise resources for green infrastructure. The proceeds will be deployed in public sector projects which help in reducing the carbon intensity of the economy.

The announcement is in sync with India's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2070.

What are Green Bonds?

- Green bonds are issued by companies, countries and multilateral organisations to exclusively fund projects that have positive environmental or climate benefits and provide investors with fixed income payments.
- The projects can include renewable energy, clean transportation and green buildings, among others.
- Proceeds from these bonds are earmarked for green projects. This is unlike standard bonds, the proceeds of which can be utilised for various purposes at the discretion of the issuer.
- The international green bond market has seen cumulative issuance worth more than USD 1 trillion since market inception in 2007.
- By the end of 2020, 24 national governments had issued Sovereign Green, Social and Sustainability bonds totalling a cumulative USD 111 billion dollars, according to the London-based Climate Bonds Initiative.

What is the Significance of Sovereign Guarantee to Green Bonds?

- Sovereign green issuance sends a powerful signal of intent around climate action and sustainable development to governments and regulators.
- It will catalyze domestic market development and provides impetus to institutional investors.
- It will provide benchmark pricing, liquidity and a demonstration effect for local issuers, helping to support the growth of a local market.
- With the IEA's World Energy Outlook 2021, estimating that 70% of the additional USD 4 trillion spending to reach net-zero is required in emerging/developing economies, sovereign issuance can help kickstart these large inflows of capital.

What are Other Measures on Climate Action announced in the Budget?

- **The budget included several measures on climate action such as:**
 1. Battery swapping policy.
 2. Additional allocation under the PLI scheme for manufacturing high efficiency solar modules.
 3. The government is introducing a new bill that aims to provide a regulatory framework for Carbon Trading in India to encourage penetration of renewables in the energy mix.

Way Forward

- **Following the French Model:** India can follow the example of France which as part of the budgeting process, assigns a green coefficient to each budget line according to how green the expenditure is relative to the six environmental priorities of the European Union (climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, water management, circular economy, pollution, and biodiversity).
- **Harmonising Standards:** One of the foremost requirements is to harmonise international and domestic guidelines and standards for green bonds to develop a robust green bond market. Homogeneity is also required in terms of what constitutes green investments, as varied taxonomies would be antithetical to a cross-border green bond market.
- **Leveraging Private Sector:** Appropriate capacity building efforts for issuers in emerging markets to spread knowledge on the benefits and related processes and procedures pertaining to green bonds would help in addressing the institutional barriers to entry into this market.

PRELIMS FACT

Powerthon-2022

Recently, the Ministry of Power has launched Powerthon-2022.

What is Powerthon-2022?

- It is a hackathon competition under RDSS (Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme) to find technology driven solutions to solve the complex problems in power distribution.
- The hackathon will see participation from startups, Technology Solution Providers (TSPs), educational and research institutions, equipment manufacturers and state power utilities and other power entities.
- The nine themes for the hackathon are -- demand/load forecasting, AT&C (Aggregate Technical and Commercial) loss reduction, energy theft detection, prediction of DT (Distribution Transformer) failure, asset inspection, vegetation management, consumer experience enhancement, renewable energy integration and power purchase optimisation.

What is RDSS?

- It was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs in July 2021 to improve the operational efficiencies and financial sustainability of discoms (excluding Private Sector DISCOMs).
- It provides conditional financial assistance to strengthen the supply infrastructure of discoms (power distribution companies).

- All the existing power sector reforms schemes such as Integrated Power Development Scheme, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana will be merged into this umbrella program.
- The scheme will be available till 2025-26.
- RDSS is a Reform-based and Result-linked Scheme and the key objectives of RDSS are Reducing AT&C losses to 12-15%, eliminating the cost-revenue gap by 2024-25 and improving the quality & reliability of the power supply.

What are the other Schemes related to the Power Sector?

1. Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya).
2. Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS).
3. Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY).
4. GARV (Grameen Vidyutikaran) App.
5. Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY).
6. '4 Es' in the Revised Tariff Policy.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE
Qns. Examine the significance of 'Neutrality Doctrine' in case of Constitutional Bodies. (150 Words)
Introduction

The Doctrine of Political Neutrality is a bedrock of a constitutional democracy. Neutrality is about being 'a third' vis-à-vis a conflict between others. The claim of neutrality is a claim addressed to the belligerent parties to show respect for the choice of the neutral and not to become involved in their conflict.

Body
Background

- The Supreme court has highlighted the need for authorities like the Speaker and the Governor to be faithful to constitutional morality and not vacillate under "prevailing political pressures".
- The court has made it clear that as "the sentinel on the qui vive of the Constitution, it is under obligation to see that the democracy prevails and not gets hollowed by individuals".

Significance of 'Neutrality Doctrine' in case of Constitutional Bodies
Upholding constitutional trust:

- A constitution vests the trust in the office of Speaker, Governor, EC etc. which needs to ensure their neutrality in their actions.
 1. **Ensuring political fairness:** The exercise of the wide constitutional powers by the constitutional office such as Governor's, speaker's, CAG's and Election Commission's is supposed to be in line with the "sacred" conventions of political neutrality and fairness. However, we see erosion of such conventions in case of Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh, the Speakers in both assemblies had helped ruling parties keep their flocks together by using their powers to disqualify MLAs under the Tenth Schedule.
 2. **Upholding federalism:** In India, the balance of power is tilted towards the Union. The importance of the constitutional posts such as Governor's arises from, he being the crucial link within this federal structure in maintaining effective communication between the Centre and a State.
 3. **For continuity in governance and keeping a check on the executives:** Constitutional posts such of Speakers and Governors, acting independently of each other or in concert, can navigate the destiny of State governments. As a figurehead who ensures the continuance of governance in the State, even in times of constitutional crises, Governor's role is often that of a neutral arbiter in disputes settled informally within the various strata of government, and as the conscience keeper of the community.

For a fair system of election and thus strengthening democracy:

- Elections are pivotal to the quality of a country's governance and can either greatly advance or set back a country's long-term democratic development. Therefore here EC's neutrality is of utmost significance and value.

To maintain the health of the economy:

- The independence, powers and responsibilities of the constitutional offices like CAG's place high ethical demands on the auditor and the staff he employs or engages for auditing and accounting work. The general standards for the CAG include independence from the legislature and from the executive so that any economic misconduct by the government or siphoning of the public exchequer can be pointed out.

Conclusion

The principle of political neutrality, which requires the state to remain neutral on disputed questions is an extension of traditional liberal principles of toleration and independence of opinion. Thus, political neutrality

casts duties not only on constitutional offices but also on government of the day. The political leaders must protect independent constitutional offices from political interference and must not involve them in political activities or debates.

DAILY QUIZ

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The Representation of the People Act, 1951 empowers the Election Commission of India to allot party symbols.
2. The Supreme Court of India is the only authority to decide issues on a dispute or a merger of political parties.

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**

Q2. Consider the following statements about the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY):

1. It is a financial inclusion program of the Government of India.
2. It provides RuPay Debit card having inbuilt life insurance cover of ₹ 1 lakh.

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

Q3. Consider the following statements about NISAR (satellite) mission:

1. It is a joint project between NASA and ISRO.
2. The satellite will be the first radar imaging satellite to use dual frequencies.
3. It will be used for remote sensing, to observe and understand natural processes on Earth.

Which of the given above statements is/are correct?

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

Q4. Chala Reserve Forest was in news recently, is located in:

- a. **Assam**
- b. Sikkim
- c. Odisha
- d. Madhya Pradesh

Q5. In India, 'extended producer responsibility' was introduced as an important feature in which of the following?

- a. The Bio-medical Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1998
- b. The Recycled plastic (Manufacturing and Usage) Rules, 1999
- c. **The e-Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2011**
- d. The Food Safety and Standard Regulations, 2011