

## ● POLITY

## ● ECONOMICS

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## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## SC firm, tells SBI to share poll bond details today

**CONTEXT:** The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed State Bank of India's application seeking to extend the deadline to furnish details of electoral bonds including names of purchasers and political parties that encashed them, holding that the information was "readily available" with the bank.

### Summary

**Electoral bonds** are money instruments like promissory notes, which can be bought by companies and individuals in India from the State Bank of India (SBI) and donated to a political party, which can then encash these bonds.

- The bonds are only redeemable in the designated account of a **registered political party**.
- A person being an individual can buy bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- **Electoral Bond Scheme:**
  - Electoral Bonds Scheme was launched in 2018 to cleanse political funding in India.
  - The central idea behind the electoral bonds scheme was to bring about transparency in electoral funding in India.
  - The government had described the scheme as an "electoral reform" in a country moving towards a "cashless-digital economy".
- **Amendments Made to the Scheme in 2022:**
  - Additional Period of 15 Days:
    - Introduced a new para, stating that an additional period of fifteen days shall be specified by the Central Government in the year of general elections to the Legislative Assembly of States and Union territories with Legislature.
    - In 2018, when the Electoral Bond Scheme was introduced, these bonds were made available for a period of 10 days each in January, April, July and October, as may be specified by the central government.
    - An additional period of 30 days was to be specified by the Central Government in the year of the General election to the House of People (Lok Sabha).
  - **Validity:**
    - The Electoral Bonds shall be valid for fifteen calendar days from the date of issue and no payment shall be made to any payee Political Party if the Electoral Bond is deposited after expiry of the validity period.
    - The Electoral Bond deposited by an eligible Political Party in its account shall be credited on the same day.
  - **Eligibility:**
    - Only the political parties registered under Section 29A of the

**Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA, 1951)** which secured at least 1% of votes polled in the last General Election to the Lok Sabha or the State Legislative Assembly are eligible to receive Electoral Bonds.

### Why did SC Strike Down the Electoral Bonds Scheme?

- **Violation of the Right to Information:**
  - The court held that the scheme by permitting anonymous political donations infringed upon the fundamental right to information under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
    - It pointed out that such a right is not only restricted to fulfilling the freedom of speech and expression but plays a key role in furthering participatory democracy by holding the government accountable. Thus, it is not just a means to an end but an end in itself.
  - It highlighted that economic inequality leads to differing levels of political engagement because of the deep association between money and politics. As a result, there is a legitimate possibility that financial contribution to a political party would lead to quid pro quo arrangements.
- **Not Proportionally Justified to Curb Black Money:**
  - Relying on the **proportionality test** laid down in its 2017 verdict in the **KS Puttaswamy case** which upheld the right to privacy, it underscored that the government did not adopt the least restrictive method to achieve its objective.
    - As examples of such least restrictive methods, the **Chief Justice** cited the ₹20,000 cap on anonymous donations and the concept of Electoral Trusts which facilitate the collection of political contributions from donors.
    - The court also agreed with the contentions of the petitioners that since the purpose of curbing black money cannot be traced to any of the reasonable restrictions elucidated under **Article 19(2)**, it cannot be said to be a legitimate purpose for restricting the fundamental right to information.
- **Right to Donor Privacy Does Not Extend to Contributions Made:**
  - The court pointed out that financial contributions to political parties are usually made for two reasons - as an expression of support and two, as a quid pro quo measure.
    - However, it underscored that huge political contributions made by corporations and companies should not be treated at par with financial contributions made by another section of the population: a student, a daily wage worker, an artist, or a teacher.
    - Thus, the Chief Justice held that the right to privacy of political affiliation does not extend to those contributions, which may be made to influence policies. It only extends to contributions made as a genuine form of political support.

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## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## Centre notifies CAA rules ahead of polls

**CONTEXT:** Just days ahead of the announcement of general elections, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on March 11 notified the Citizenship Amendment Rules, 2024 that would enable the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed by the Parliament in 2019.

- **About CAA:**
  - The CAA provides citizenship on the basis of religion to six undocumented non-Muslim communities (**Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians**) from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who entered India on or before 31st December, 2014.
  - It exempts the members of the six communities from any criminal case under the **Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Passport Act, 1920**.
  - The two Acts specify punishment for entering the country illegally and staying here on expired visas and permits.
- **Associated Concerns with CAA:**
  - **Targeting a Particular Community:** There are apprehensions that the CAA, followed by a country-wide compilation of the **National Register of Citizens (NRC)**, will benefit non-Muslims excluded from the proposed citizens' register, while excluded Muslims will have to prove their citizenship.
  - **Issues in the North-East:** It contradicts the **Assam Accord of 1985**, which states that illegal migrants, irrespective of religion, heading in from Bangladesh after 25th March, 1971, would be deported.
    - There are an estimated 20 million illegal Bangladeshi migrants in Assam and they have inalienably altered the demography of the state, besides putting a severe strain on the state's resources and economy.
  - **Against Fundamental Rights:** Critics argue that it is **violative of Article 14** of the Constitution (which guarantees the right to equality and is applicable to both the citizens and foreigners) and the **principle of secularism enshrined in the preamble of the constitution**.
  - **Discriminatory in Nature:** India has several other refugees that include Tamils from Sri Lanka and Hindu **Rohingya from Myanmar**. They are not covered under the Act.
  - **Difficulty in Administration:** It will be difficult for the government to differentiate between illegal migrants and those persecuted.
  - **Hampering Bilateral Ties:** The Act throws the light on the religious oppression that has happened and is happening in these three countries and thus, may worsen our bilateral ties with them.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## Centre signs 200-cr pact for anti-drone systems

**CONTEXT:** The Ministry of Defence has signed a ₹200 crore contract for anti-drone systems for the Indian Army and Indian Air Force (IAF) with Big Bang Boom Solutions Private Limited (BBBS). This is the largest contract signed by the MoD under the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) initiative, according to the company.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has recently finalized a groundbreaking Rs 200 crore contract for anti-drone systems, catering to the needs of both the Indian Army and Indian Air Force (IAF).

The deal, signed with Big Bang Boom Solutions Private Limited (BBBS), marks the largest contract under the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) initiative.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has **initiated plans to counter the increasing threat posed by unmanned aerial systems (UAS) by issuing Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for various counter-drone systems**.

These systems are designed to address different operational scenarios, particularly the challenge presented by multiple swarm drones.

### Counter Unmanned Aircraft Systems (C-UAS)

- The C-UAS systems are intended to offer a comprehensive solution for detecting, tracking, identifying, designating, jamming, and neutralizing multiple threats simultaneously.
- Key features include:
  - **Multi-sensor Capability:** Providing a comprehensive air situation picture using various sensors.
  - **Vehicle-Mounted System:** Offering mobility for deployment in different operational areas.
  - **No-Fly Zone Enforcement:** Intercepting identified threats and preventing unauthorized UAS intrusion.
  - **Recognition of Unknown UAS:** Generating alerts based on user-defined parameters.

### Micro Munitions Systems (MMS)

- These systems are designed to combat swarm drones attacking IAF bases from multiple directions.
- Key attributes of the MMS include:
  - **Guided Munition System:** Capable of deploying multiple guided munitions laterally to counter swarms.
  - **Mobile Delivery Vehicle:** Equipped with radar-controlled platforms launching 128 guided missiles per launch.
  - **Multi-Directional Engagement:** Ability to launch missiles in various directions simultaneously.

### Kamikaze Drone Systems (KDS)

- The KDS, also mounted on vehicles, aims to counter multiple swarm drones by utilizing satellite navigation-based flight and communication links.
- Notable features include:
  - **Satellite Navigation-Based System:** Utilizing flight and communication links for drone control.
  - **Explosive-Laden Kamikaze Drones:** Directing drones



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towards detected swarm drones to neutralize them by crashing into them.

- Comprehensive Air Situation Picture: Using radar and radio frequency detectors for detection, tracking, and neutralization.

#### Common Requirements for all Systems

- Integration with existing air defense and communication networks, anti-drone measures, and close-in weapon systems of the IAF.
- Deployment flexibility on rooftops or unprepared locations.
- All-weather capability and functionality at altitudes of up to 16,000 feet, ensuring nationwide deployment.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### NATO raises Swedish flag at office sealing its membership

**CONTEXT:** Sweden has officially become the **32nd member of NATO**, joining the military alliance two years after applying following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Sweden's NATO membership was **delayed due to objections from Turkey and Hungary**, but eventually received approval.

NATO stands for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which is also called the North Atlantic Alliance. It is an intergovernmental military alliance based on the North Atlantic Treaty which was signed on 4 April 1949. The organization constitutes a system of collective defence whereby its member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by a non-member external party. NATO's headquarters are located at Boulevard Leopold III in the city of Brussels, Belgium, where the Supreme Allied Commander resides.

The organisation was formed as a means to ensure collective security in western Europe. Even though World War 2 had come to an end, the deteriorating relations between two former allies, the United States and the USSR would eventually lead to the Cold War. The USSR sought to expand its influence in Europe through the spread of communism, while the US saw the ideology of the USSR as a threat to its way of life. Hence it saw the need to form NATO.

The Treaty of Brussels, signed on 17 March 1948 by Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, and the United Kingdom, is considered the precursor to the NATO agreement. This treaty established a military alliance, later to become the Western European Union

North Atlantic Treaty, which was signed in Washington, DC on 4 April 1949, was a result of the talks for the military alliance. It included the five Treaty of Brussels states, United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland

Three years later, on 18 February 1952, Greece and Turkey also joined

The incorporation of West Germany into the organisation on 9 May 1955 was described as "a decisive turning point in the history of our continent" by Halvard Lange, Foreign Minister of Norway at the time

## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

### Agni-5 missile test flight successful, says Modi

**CONTEXT:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi today announced the development of "Mission Divyastra" -- an indigenously developed, landmark weapons system that alters the country's geopolitic and strategic position and significantly changes the situation in southeast Asia. The Agni-5 MIRV missile, developed by defence research centre DRDO for over a decade, took its first flight today.

#### Summary

- Agni-5 is an **ingeniously built advanced surface-to-surface ballistic missile** developed under the **Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP)**.
- It is a **fire-and-forget missile**, which cannot be stopped without an interceptor missile.
- The missile has the capability of hitting targets beyond the range of 5000 km and is crucial for India's self-defense systems.

The Agni missile class is the backbone of India's nuclear launch capability, as are **Prithvi** short-range ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and fighter aircraft.

Agni-1 to 5 missiles are designed & developed by **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.



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## ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

## SIDBI gets GCF nod for \$120 million green project

**CONTEXT:** SIDBI, the principal financial institution for MSME development, on Monday, announced a new fund to enable investment into early-stage startups and MSMEs harnessing technology-led innovation to spur climate solutions and sustainability in India. The \$120 million Avaana Sustainability Fund (ASF) anchored by SIDBI as an accredited entity was approved by the world's largest climate fund Green Climate Fund (GCF). The latter contributed \$24.5 million to the ASF.

### Summary

SIDBI is a statutory body, established through an Act of Parliament in 1990. SIDBI is the primary financial institution in charge of promoting, financing, and developing the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector and coordinating the actions of other institutions involved in related activities.

The Bank is the Nodal Agency for bringing the Government's MSME-oriented Schemes into action. The Government of India has selected SIDBI as the trustworthy institution for directing financial assistance and economic aid to the

pandemic-affected MSME sector.

Loan amounts can range from Rs. 10 lakhs to Rs. 25 crores, and loan repayment terms can be up to 10 years. These loans, which come with attractive interest rates, aid MSMEs with the funds they need to expand and develop.

**The Green Climate Fund (GCF)** – a critical element of the historic Paris Agreement - is the world's largest climate fund, mandated to support developing countries raise and realize their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) ambitions towards low-emissions, climate-resilient pathways.

A core GCF principle is to follow a country-driven approach, which means that developing countries lead GCF programming and implementation. Country ownership of GCF financing decisions enables developing countries to turn NDC ambitions into climate action. GCF's country-driven approach is underpinned by capacity-building support through its Readiness Programme that is available to all developing countries.



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