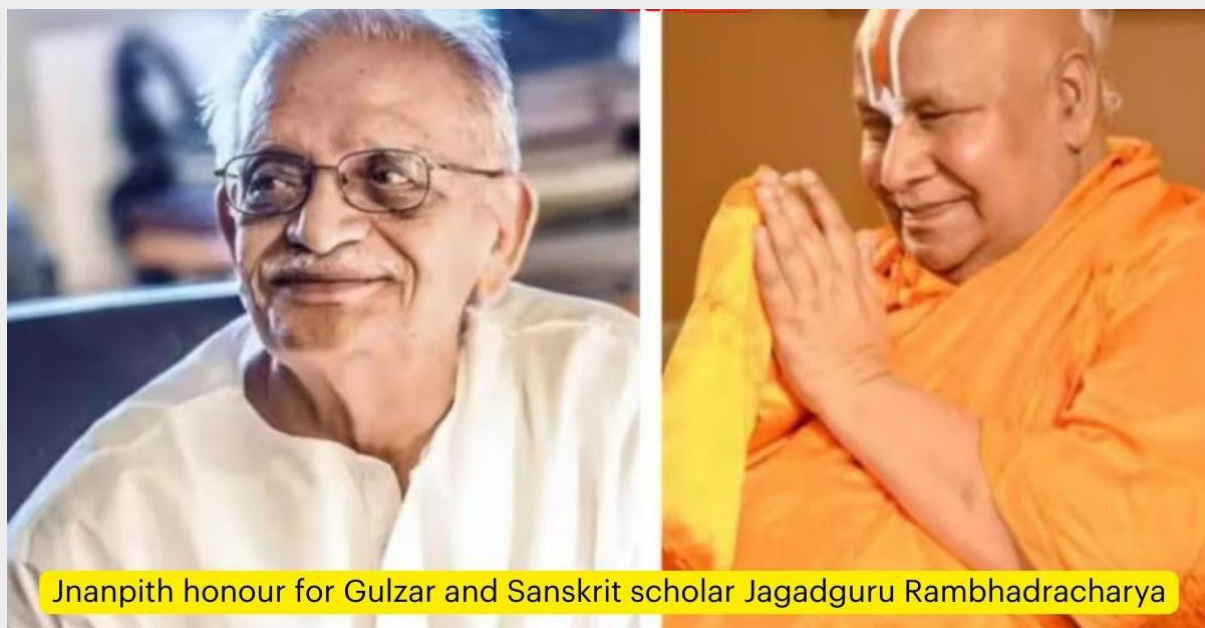


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### 1. Jnanpith for Gulzar, Sanskrit scholar Rambhadracharya



#### Why in news?

Celebrated Urdu poet Gulzar and Sanskrit scholar Jagadguru Rambhadracharya have been selected for the 58th Jnanpith Award, considered by many to be the country's highest literary honour.

#### Achievements of Gulzar

Sampooran Singh Kalra, popularly known as Gulzar, is considered one of the finest Urdu poets of his generation. He is also known for his work in Hindi cinema.

Gulzar, born in 1934, received the Sahitya Akademi Award for Urdu in 2002, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 2013, and the Padma Bhushan in 2004. He has also won five National Film Awards.

He penned the lyrics for the song Jai Ho from the film Slumdog Millionaire that received an Oscar in 2009 and a Grammy in 2010.

He is known for his work in Maachhis, Omkara, Dil Se, Guru, and Aandhi. Gulzar has also directed classics such as Koshish, Parichay, Mausam, and Ijaazat, as well as the television serial Mirza Ghalib.

#### Achievements of Rambhadracharya

Rambhadracharya, a polyglot who speaks 22 languages, is one of the four Jagadguru Ramanandacharyas of the Ramananda sect and has been holding this position since 1982. A poet and writer in several languages, he received the Padma Vibhushan in 2015.

Rambhadracharya is a renowned Hindu spiritual leader, educator and writer of more than 240 books and texts, including four epics. He is the founder and head of Tulsi Peeth at Chitrakoot in Madhya Pradesh.

### **About Jnanpith Award**

The Jnanpith Award is presented by the Bharatiya Jnanpith, which was established in 1944.

The award carries a cash component of ₹11 lakh, a statue of Vagdevi, and a citation. It is the second time that the award is being given for Sanskrit and the fifth time for Urdu.

Relevance: GS Prelims;

Source: The Indian Express

## **2. Why did the SC invalidate electoral bonds?**

### **Why in news?**

The Supreme Court has declared the Electoral Bonds Scheme as unconstitutional. Donor anonymity was the main feature of the scheme, which has been criticised for long by transparency activists. These bonds constituted an important means of funding political parties since 2018. The court found that the scheme violated the citizens' right to information about the sources of finances raised by political parties. It directed the full disclosure of all details of contributors, recipient parties and denominations.

### **What was the scheme?**

An electoral bond is in the nature of a promissory note which shall be a bearer banking instrument that does not carry the name of the buyer or payee. Any citizen or company could buy these bonds in denominations of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh, and ₹1 crore and donate it to a political party. It can be encashed only through a bank account with an authorised bank. The State Bank of India was the bank authorised to issue and encash these bonds.

### **What changes were made for the scheme?**

Section 13A of the Income Tax Act earlier said political parties must maintain a record of contributions above ₹20,000. The Finance Act 2017 amended this to make an exception for contributions through electoral bonds. As a result, parties were not required to maintain any record of what they received through the bonds.

Section 29C of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951, earlier said parties should prepare a report on contributions in excess of ₹20,000 from any person or company in a financial year. This was amended in 2017 to the effect that contributions through electoral bonds need not be included in the report. Under Section 182(3) of the Companies Act, companies were required to disclose details of contributions to a political party, including the

amount and the party's name, in its profit-and-loss account. However, after the amendment, it was only required to reveal the total amount given to parties in a financial year.

### **How did the government defend it in court?**

The government's main points in defence of the scheme was that it allowed any person to transfer funds to political parties of their choice through legitimate banking channels and helped prevent unregulated contributions through cash. The confidentiality assured to the donors is beneficial to them as it promotes contribution and clean money to political parties. The use of banking channels will curb the role of black money in election funding and anonymity ensures that the donors do not fear retribution or coercion from parties to which they have not contributed. In an interesting argument, the government claimed that citizens did not have a general right to know the funding of political parties. The right to know was not general in nature, but one evolved by courts for the specific purpose of enabling the voter's choice of electing clean candidates.

### **What did the SC rule?**

In past judgments, the apex court has held that voters have a right to information that is essential for them to exercise their freedom to vote. The court, therefore, held that information about funding to a political party is essential for a voter to express the freedom to vote in an effective manner. The Electoral Bond Scheme, to the extent that it infringes on this right to information by anonymising contributions through bonds, violates Article 19(1)(a), which pertains to freedom of expression.

As far as the purpose of curbing black money was concerned, the court applied a proportionality test, viz., whether the abridging of the voters' right to know through donor anonymity was achieved through the least restrictive means. It said alternatives such as funding through electronic transfer (for small contributions) and donations to an Electoral Trust (for larger amounts) were available. As the government was unable to establish that the scheme is the least restrictive means to balance the right of "informational privacy" to contributors and the right to information on political contributions, the amendments to IT Act and RPA were unconstitutional.

On the changes to the Companies Act, it ruled that the deletion of the disclosure requirement on details of contributions violated the voter's right to information. Also, the scheme allowed both profit-making and loss-making companies to make political contributions. Earlier, companies could only donate a percentage of their net profit. As the harm in the form of quid pro quo is much higher in the case of loss-making companies, the amendment was ruled manifestly arbitrary.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

## **3. La Nina impacted air quality in India: what a new study says**

### **Why in news?**

Monsoon rainfall over India is known to be strongly influenced by El Nino and La Nina events, the alternating warming and cooling of the eastern Pacific Ocean that impacts weather across

the world. A new study by Indian researchers has now suggested that even air quality in the country could be influenced by the two weather events.

The study, by researchers at the Bengaluru-based National Institute of Advanced Studies and Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, has argued that the unusual air quality in some Indian cities in the winter of 2022 could be attributed to the record-breaking spell of La Nina prevailing at that time.

This is the first time that air quality in Indian cities has been linked to a La Nina event — and indirectly to climate change, which is making El Nino and La Nina more severe.

### **What happened**

During October to January, northern Indian cities, particularly Delhi, experience very high concentrations of PM2.5. A variety of meteorological factors — temperature, moisture, heaviness in air, wind speed and direction — play a role in trapping pollutants in the lower levels of the atmosphere. These factors are also responsible for transporting pollutants from other regions, particularly those generated by agriculture waste burning in Punjab and Haryana, to Delhi and adjoining areas.

The western and southern parts of the country have always had relatively lower levels of pollution, because of their proximity to oceans.

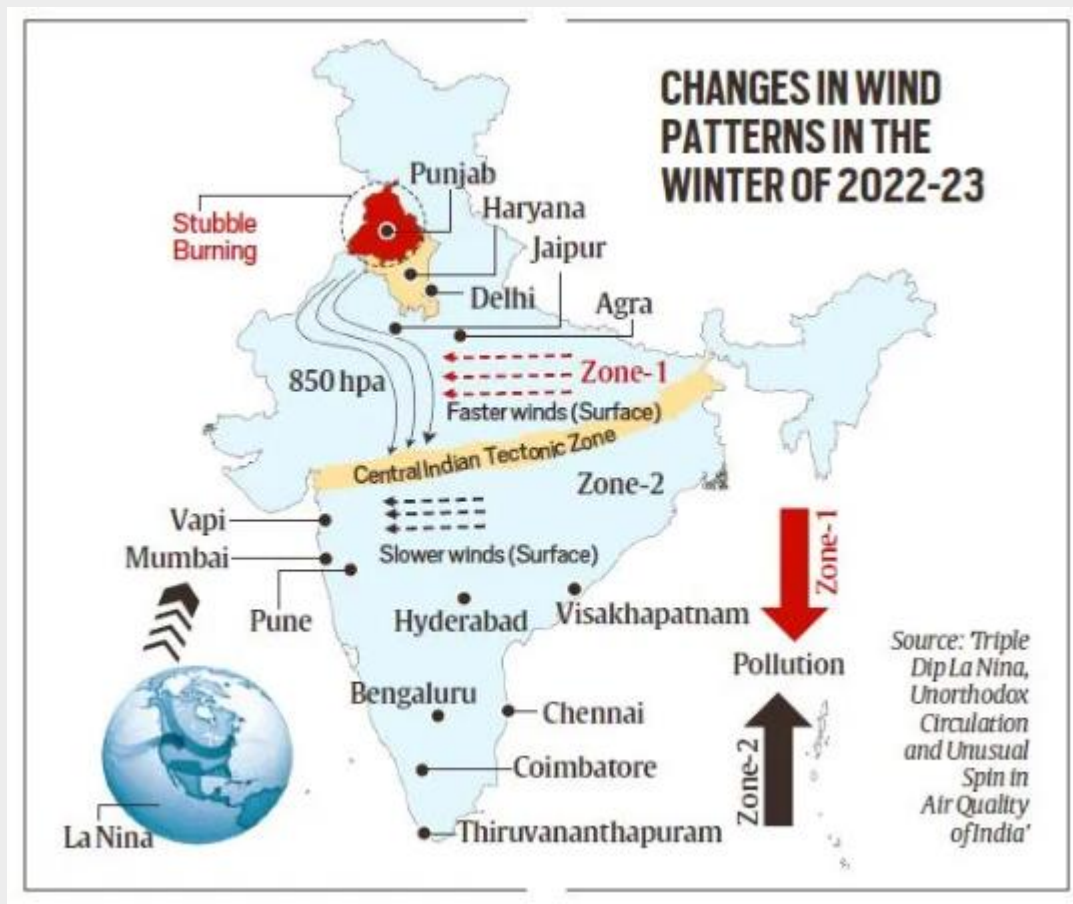
The winter of 2022, however, showed a significant deviation from this normal. Northern Indian cities, including Delhi, were cleaner than usual, while cities in the west and the south, like Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai, experienced worse-than-usual air quality.

It was this anomalous behaviour that the researchers had set out to study when they found themselves led to the possible effects of La Nina.

### **Wind direction**

The most crucial factor in explaining the anomaly of winter 2022 was a change in the normal wind direction. During this time, wind usually blows in the northwesterly direction: for example, from Punjab towards Delhi and further into the Gangetic plains. This is one of the main reasons why agricultural waste pollutants in Punjab and Haryana flow into Delhi.

In the winter of 2022, however, the wind circulation was in the north-south direction. The pollutants being carried from Punjab and Haryana bypassed Delhi and surrounding areas and flew over Rajasthan and Gujarat to southern regions (see map).



There was no change in the local sources of emissions in Delhi and Mumbai. But the additional pollutant load from the northern states, which usually lands in Delhi and surrounding areas, moved in a different trajectory and reached peninsular India, some landing in Mumbai as well. The local circulation of wind near Mumbai also had an anomalous behaviour that year. Wind currents alternate between blowing from the land to the sea every few days. When blowing from the land towards the sea, the winds carry pollutants out of the city. In 2022, however, instead of changing direction every four to five days, the winds persisted in one direction for more than a week or 10 days, leading to greater accumulation of pollutants in Mumbai.

### La Nina and climate change

According to experts, the wind behaviour in both cases had something to do with the extended La Nina which, by the winter of 2022, had been persisting for an unusually long three years.

The experts used the global air circulation data as a result of La Nina in our computer models, they found the emergence of wind patterns over the Indian region that were very similar to the observed changes. When they ran the models with data from previous years, when a strong La Nina was not present, these anomalous wind patterns disappeared.

The experts further said it was not yet entirely clear whether El Nino would produce an opposite effect for air quality over India.

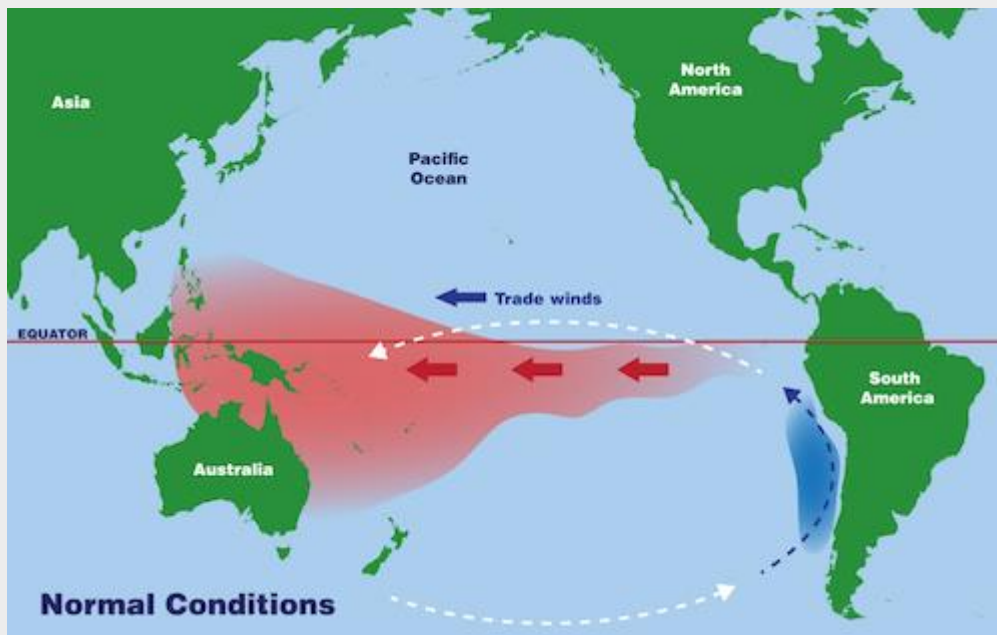
The study did add that changes in wind patterns were not the only reasons for the unusual trends in air quality that year. It mentioned local meteorological conditions, unrelated to La



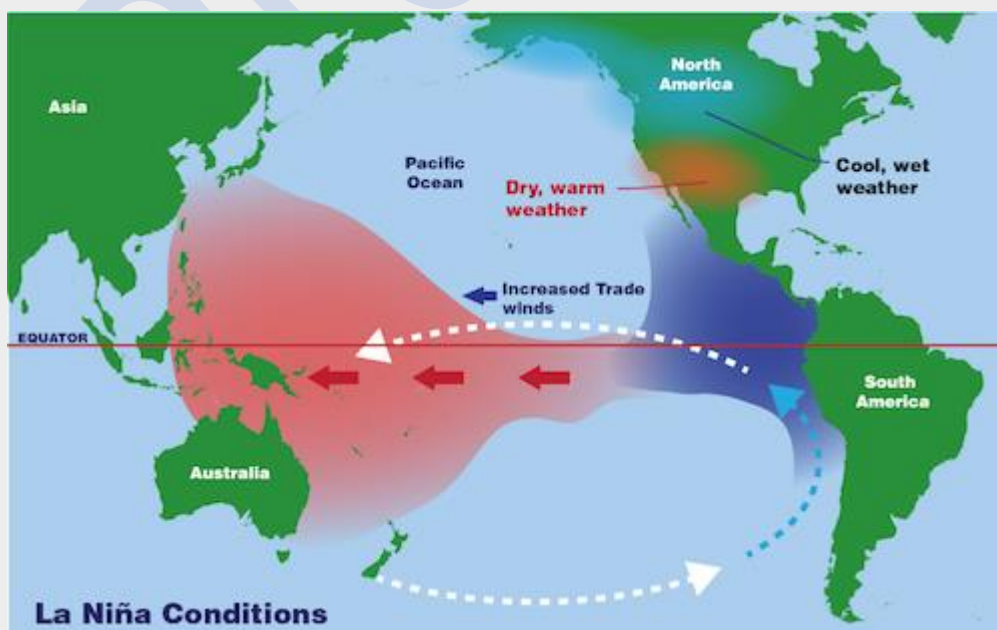
Nina, that could also have resulted in the reduction of pollutant concentrations over northern India.

### What is La Niña?

La Niña (the opposite weather phenomena of El Niño) is a weather pattern that can occur in the Pacific Ocean every few years. In a normal year, winds along the equator push warm water westward. Warm water at the surface of the ocean blows from South America to Indonesia. As the warm water moves west, cold water from the deep rises up to the surface. This cold water ends up on the coast of South America.



In the winter of a La Niña year, these winds are much stronger than usual. This makes the water in the Pacific Ocean near the equator a few degrees colder than it usually is. Even this small change in the ocean's temperature can affect weather all over the world.



Rain clouds normally form over warm ocean water. La Niña blows all of this warm water to the western Pacific. This means that places like Indonesia and Australia can get much more rain than usual. However, the cold water in the eastern Pacific causes less rain clouds to form there. So, places like the southwestern United States can be much drier than usual.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Indian Express

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