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1. CBI raids places linked to Satya Pal Malik: What is the Kiru Hydel Project, focus of corruption allegations?

Why in news?
The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted raids recently at 30 locations on three places linked to former Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik. The agency is investigating alleged corruption in the award of a contract for the Kiru Hydel Project, in J&K's Kishtwar district.

What is the Kiru Hydel Power Project?
It is being constructed between the existing Kirthai II (upstream) and Kwar (downstream) hydel power projects, at an estimated cost of Rs 4,287 crore. It will be developed near the convergence point of river Chenab and the Singad and Bela streams, near the Patharnakki and Kiru villages in Kishtwar district. The deadline for initiating commercial operations is July 2025. It will have a 123-m tall dam from the Chenab's river bed level.

Who is developing the Kiru hydel project?
The Chenab Valley Power Projects Private Limited (CVPPPL) is a joint venture of the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation, the Jammu & Kashmir State Power Development Corporation and the Power Trading Corporation. Both the NHPC and JKSPDC have a stake of 49 per cent each and the remaining 2 per cent is with the PTC.

What are the corruption allegations in the Kiru project?
A construction company named Patel Engineering was awarded civil works worth more than Rs 2,200 crores for the construction of a diversion tunnel, concrete dam, pressure shafts, coffer dams, tailrace tunnels, and a powerhouse in 2019.

The award of civil works to Patel Engineering Ltd has been called into question. On its website, PEL calls itself a major infrastructure and construction company that was founded in 1949. Its areas of operation include dams, tunnels, bridges, refineries, real estate, and more.

The CBI has booked then CVPPPL chairman and IAS officer Naveen Choudhary, MD MS Babu, and Directors M K Mittal and Arun Mishra, along with Patel Engineering. The FIR says an investigation had been conducted by the J&K Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Power Department.

The FIR alleges that guidelines for e-tendering in the awarding of civil works in the project were not followed. A decision was taken in the 47th Board Meeting of CVPPPL for re-tender through reverse auction, where the bidder quoting the lowest price is to be awarded a contract. After the ongoing tendering process was cancelled, reverse auction through e-tendering was not implemented. The tender was finally awarded to M/s Patel Engineering, according to the

FIR. Further, allegations of substandard work and failure to provide jobs to local youth have been made against the hydel project.

2. CBSE's open book exam plan

Why in news?
The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has proposed a pilot study to check the feasibility of open book exams for Classes 9 to 12.

The pilot will be held in select schools in November-December for subjects like English, Mathematics and Science for Classes 9 and 10, and English, Mathematics and Biology for Classes 11 and 12. The CBSE has proposed this form of assessment based on the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) released last year.

Through this pilot, the Board aims to study the time taken by students to complete such tests and gather feedback from teachers and students. The pilot test will be designed and developed by June, for which the CBSE has sought Delhi University's help.

What is an open book exam?
In an open book exam (OBE), students are allowed to refer to their books and notes to answer questions.

OBEs can be either of a restricted type or a free type. In a restricted open book assessment, only the study material approved by the exam-conducting authority is allowed during the exam. In a free type, students can bring any material they find relevant.

Unlike a closed book exam, the test questions in OBEs are structured in a way that students have to apply concepts, instead of just copying information from the available material. They aim to test whether a student understands the big picture and can apply analytical skills on the concepts learnt.

Is this a new concept for Indian students?
Contrary to popular assumption, open-book exams are not a new idea. In 2014, CBSE had introduced an Open Text Based Assessment (OBTA) to relieve the students from the burden of mugging up, and acquiring skills of information processing.

Back then, OTBA was introduced in Class 9 for Hindi, English, Mathematics, Science and Social Science, and final examination of Class 11 in subjects such as Economics, Biology and Geography. Students were allowed to refer to learning material provided to them four months ahead of the exam.

The Board, however, discontinued the practice in the 2017-18 academic year, because of its inability to cultivate "critical abilities" among students.

In higher education, OBEs are fairly common. In 2019, the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) allowed open book exams in engineering colleges based on the recommendation of an advisory body.

During the pandemic, several Central universities like Delhi University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Aligarh Muslim University conducted an open book test to assess students. IIT Delhi, IIT Indore and IIT Bombay also conducted online OBEs.

More recently, Kerala's higher education exam reforms commission recommended the open book format, but only for internal or practical examinations.

Are open book exams easier?
Contrary to popular opinion, open book assessments are not easier than the traditional form of examination. They are designed to test learning beyond facts and definitions.

For teachers too, setting up questions for an open book exam can be a challenge, as, unlike a traditional exam, the questions cannot be direct.

Why has CBSE proposed the open book exam now?
The CBSE's proposal falls in line with the larger reforms planned in the school education system. While there is no mention of the open book examination per se in the National Education Policy 2020, one of the primary reforms it suggests is transition from rote memorisation to competency-based learning. For instance, a student should be able to not just learn the concept of photosynthesis but also demonstrate the process and the impact of sunlight on plants through a practical project.

Similarly, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education also highlights the need to reform the current assessment process, which is at its best "focused on measuring rote learning" and at its worst "creates fear". The National Curriculum Framework suggests assessments that can accommodate different learning styles of students, provide constructive feedback, and support learning outcomes.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Indian Society
Source: The Indian Express

3. Google introduces Gemma open source AI models

Gemma comes from the Latin word for 'gem'. (Google)

Why in news?
After OpenAI's text-to-video model Sora dominated news feeds last week, Google has now introduced Gemma, its latest open artificial intelligence (AI) offering.

Google has, in the past few months, introduced its Gemini models — large and mid-sized models meant for complex tasks. The newly unveiled Gemma, however, is a lightweight, smaller model aimed at helping developers worldwide build AI responsibly, in compliance with Google's AI principles

What is Google's Gemma?
Gemma is a family of lightweight state-of-the-art open models that has been built using the same research and technology used in Gemini models by Google DeepMind, and other teams across Google. Google said that its name is derived from the Latin word 'gemma,' which translates to precious stone.

Gemma is being offered in two model sizes, Gemma 2B and Gemma 7B, which have been released with pre-trained and instruction-tuned variants. Along with Gemma, Google has also released a new Responsible Generative AI toolkit that provides guidance and essential tools for creating safer AI applications with Gemma.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology
Source: Indian Express