

Current Affairs Update (Sep 1-7)

National

Simultaneous elections

The Government has formed a committee, headed by former **President Ram Nath Kovind**, to explore the possibility of **“one nation, one election,”** which refers to holding simultaneous Lok Sabha (Parliament) and state assembly elections. The concept of **“one nation, one election”** refers to holding elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously, once in five years.

Background: Simultaneous elections were held in the country **during the first two decades after Independence up to 1967**. The dissolution of certain Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 followed by the dissolution of the Lok Sabha led to the disruption of the conduct of simultaneous elections.

Advantages:

- Conducting all elections simultaneously **minimizes expenses** on logistics, security, and campaigning.
- Simultaneous elections allow elected governments to **focus on governance** rather than preparing for the next election. It will help in **streamlining the election cycle to avoid policy disruptions** due to the **Model Code of Conduct**
- Ensures voters are **not subjected to multiple rounds of voting**, leading to **better turnout** and voter convenience.
- Conducting elections together **reduces overall security concerns** and enhances security setup across the country.
- Provides a **level playing field for all parties and candidates**, promoting fairness and transparency in elections.
- Simultaneous elections **reduce the impact on the education sector**, as fewer teachers are involved in the electoral process.

Challenges:

- Requires **constitutional amendments**, necessitating consensus among political parties and states, a complex and lengthy process.
- Assembly elections focus on **local issues**, and combining them with general elections may **overshadow regional narratives**.
- Conducting all elections simultaneously **involves logistical arrangements**, security deployment, voter rolls, and polling booth management, leading to administrative difficulties.

- Simultaneous **elections may favour national parties** with more resources, potentially marginalizing regional parties and issues.
- Voters may struggle to **engage with all issues simultaneously**, potentially leading to uninformed choices and undermining the democratic process.

Indian Railway Board Chairman

- **Jaya Verma Sinha** has become the **first woman to lead the Railway Board** (in the Railway Board's **118-year history**), the **top decision-making body** for India's Ministry of Railways.
- The Ministry of Railways (founded 1905; HQ: Rail Bhawan, New Delhi) functions as the **statutory authority for the Indian Railways**, a monopoly in rail transport. The **Chairman and CEO of the Railway Board** leads this organization.

R Ravi Kannan (Ramon Magsaysay Award for 2023)

- Dr R Ravi Kannan, a **surgical oncologist from Assam**, has been honoured with the Ramon Magsaysay Award for 2023.
- He received this **prestigious award for his remarkable contributions** to transforming **cancer treatment in Assam**, particularly through programs that prioritize the welfare of the people and those with limited means.
- **Ramon Magsaysay Award** was **established in 1957** and is **Asia's prestigious honor** named after **Ramon Magsaysay**, the Philippines' **third president**.

Kokborok language

- Kokborok is a **Sino-Tibetan language** spoken by about **1 million people in the state of Tripura** in northeast India.
- Kokborok is **one of the official languages of Tripura, along with Bengali**.
- Kokborok is a **relatively homogenous language with several dialects spoken in Tripura**. It is the lingua franca of most of **the 19 tribal communities of Tripura**.

International

9 Dashed Line

- Several Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Taiwan, have joined India in rejecting **China's new national map and 9 Dashed Line in the South China Sea**.
- India specifically protested **China's claims over Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin**

What is a Nine-dash line?

- The nine-dash line is a **historical demarcation line on a map used by China** to assert territorial claims in the **South China Sea**.
- China asserts a claim to **90% of the South China Sea**, primarily based on the **historical U-shaped nine-dash line drawn on a map** in the 1940s and encompassing several islands, notably the **Paracels and Spratlys**.
- However, the **Permanent Court of Arbitration under UNCLOS** (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) has determined that **China's claim in this region lacks a legal foundation**

World Heritage sites

World Heritage sites are **landmarks or areas of cultural, historical, scientific, or natural significance** that are recognized and designated by the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**. These sites are considered to be of outstanding value to humanity, and their preservation is of global importance.

There are two main types of World Heritage sites:

Cultural Heritage Sites: These include historical buildings, cities, monuments, archaeological sites, and cultural landscapes that hold cultural and historical significance. Examples include the Pyramids of Egypt, the Historic Centre of Rome, and the Great Wall of China.

Natural Heritage Sites: These encompass natural areas, ecosystems, and geological formations that are of exceptional natural beauty or scientific importance. Examples include the **Galápagos Islands**, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, and Yellowstone National Park in the United States.

Significance of World Heritage sites: They are protected and preserved to ensure that they are passed down to future generations.

Examples of leaders of Indian origin

- Rishi Sunak (PM of UK)
- Tharman Shanmugaratnam (Recently, Singapore President)
- Christine Kangaloo President of Trinidad and Tobago
- Leo Varadkar (Head of Government, Ireland)
- Prithvirajsing Roopun (President of Mauritius)
- Wavel Ramkalawan (President of Seychelles)

Export control of Dual-Use Items

The Director General of Foreign Trade emphasized the **government's commitment to enhanced export control of dual-use items** to prevent them from falling into the hands of **non-state actors and terrorists**.

What are Dual-use items?

They are **products, technologies, materials, or equipment** that can have both civilian and military or non-military applications. These items are designed or intended primarily for civilian purposes **but can also be used for military or other prohibited purposes**. Examples: precursor chemicals like sarin gas; Components like centrifuges

Currently, **the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** prepares a specialized **SCOMET** (speciality chemicals, organisms, materials, equipment, and technologies) list of dual-use items and these items are regulated as per **India's Foreign Trade Policy**.

The new foreign trade policy emphasizes expediting the **SCOMET licensing process** to ensure that **sensitive and dual-use goods** are traded in **compliance with international regimes**, including the **Missile Technology Control Regime**.

What is MECR (Missile and Dual-Use Export Control Regimes)?

They are voluntary agreements among **major supplier countries aimed** at preventing the proliferation of certain military and **dual-use technologies**, particularly those related to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). These agreements are **independent of the United Nations** and apply only to their member countries, with **no obligation for others to join**.

India is a member of three out of the four MECRs, excluding the **Nuclear Suppliers Group**.

The four MECRs include:

- **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)** for nuclear technology control
- **Australia Group (AG)** for chemical and biological technology control
- **Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)** for rockets and aerial vehicles related to WMD delivery,
- **Wassenaar Arrangement** for conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies.

French laïcité

- The French government announced that the **practice of wearing abaya** would be banned in **state-run schools as it violated the principle of Laïcité**.
- **Laïcité, the French principle of secularism**, involves the complete separation of religious values from the public sphere, **emphasizing the promotion of secular values like liberty, equality, and fraternity**.
- Its aim is to **encourage tolerance and assimilation**, with religion reserved for the private sphere. The state plays a **crucial role in enforcing Laïcité principles**.

History of Laïcité:

- **Laïcité emerged following the French Revolution in 1789** but became more concrete with the **Law of 1905** during the **Third Republic**, establishing **state-run secular schools**.
- **Laïcité was not a major issue for much of the 20th century** when France was relatively homogenous. However, **demographic changes in the 1950s and 1960s due to decolonization led to tensions as immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries arrived**.

Science-Tech & Environment

Largest indigenously developed N-plant unit begins operations

- The third unit of the **indigenously developed 700-megawatt electric (MWe) nuclear power reactor** at the **Kakrapar Atomic Power Project (KAPP3) in Gujarat, India**, has started operations at full capacity.
- This marks a **significant achievement in India's civilian nuclear program**, as it is the country's first 700 MWe unit and represents a scale-up in technology.
- The reactor uses **Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR) technology** and is seen as a **milestone in India's effort to expand its nuclear power capacity to 22,480 MWe by 2031**.
- The reactor design also incorporates **enhanced safety features, including a Passive Decay Heat Removal System**.

New species of leaf insects

- An international research team, has **identified seven previously unknown species of leaf insects, also known as walking leaves**.
- These insects belong to **the stick and leaf insect order**, which are known for their **remarkable camouflage that makes them appear like parts of plants such as twigs, bark, or leaves**. This disguise offers **protection from predators and poses challenges for researchers**.
- Genetic analysis played a key role in **identifying these "cryptic species" that cannot be differentiated based solely on their external appearance**.
- Leaf insects are **tropical insects that resemble leaves to avoid predators**. They are closely related to stick insects and are known for their remarkable camouflage. Leaf insects are found in **the forests of Asia, Papua New Guinea, Australia, and the islands of the Indian Ocean**.

Red Sand Boa

- The **red sand boa (Eryx johnii)** is a **non-venomous snake** that lives in the **dry parts of the Indian subcontinent**.

- It's also known as the **Indian sand boa**. The red sand boa is a **thick-set snake that's usually reddish-brown, known** for its **blunt tail**, which it uses to **mimic its head when it senses a threat**.
- Classified as '**Near Threatened**' by the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** with a **declining population trend**.
- The red sand boa is highly sought after in the illegal wildlife trade due to its **demand in the pet trade and its use in black magic**.
- A report by the **Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)-India** has highlighted **172 incidents of seizures involving the red sand boa (Eryx johnii)** between 2016 and 2021 in India.
- The report aims to shed light on the **illegal trade of red sand boas**, particularly online, to **raise awareness and prevent further illegal collection and sale of the species**.

Kākāpō

- The kākāpō, also known as the **owl parrot**, is a **large, flightless parrot that is native to New Zealand**. Kākāpō are known for their **unique appearance**, which includes a facial disc, owl-like eyes, and a large, gray beak.
- IUCN Status: **critically endangered**.
- They only breed every few years, triggered by the availability of certain forest foods. **Rimu fruit, which is part of the kākāpō diet, is thought to trigger breeding**.

What are Flex Fuel Vehicles (FFVs) and Electrified Flex Fuel Vehicles?

Flex Fuel Vehicles (FFVs): It is designed to **run on a flexible combination of fuels**, typically **gasoline and ethanol**. These vehicles are equipped with engines that can adjust **their fuel mixture based** on the available fuel blend E.g., E20 (20% ethanol and 80% gasoline) or even higher percentages.

Electrified Flex Fuel Vehicles: They are a **more advanced version of FFVs** that offer the advantage of **being able to operate on both ethanol-based fuels and electricity**, providing increased fuel efficiency and potentially reducing emissions compared to traditional gasoline-only vehicles.

Significance:

- These vehicles offer higher ethanol use and better fuel efficiency similar to **Strong Hybrid Electric Vehicles (SHEVs)**
- **Electrified Flex Fuel Vehicles** use minimal advanced chemistry batteries to reduce dependence on imports.

Challenges:

- **Higher cost of ownership and running cost for customers**, which may affect their acceptance unless retail fuel prices are competitive.
- **Developing FFVs requires significant effort** and calibration with multiple fuel blends, making them less viable without widespread fuel availability.

LIGO-India

LIGO-India, part of the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory, is set to **become a prominent astronomical observatory** in the world, aiming to detect and study gravitational waves, offering a new way to observe the universe. It will be developed in Hingoli district, Maharashtra.

Gravitational waves are **ripples in the fabric of space and time** that travel at the speed of light. They are **created by the motion of massive objects**, such as black holes or neutron stars, which **generate gravitational waves** when they orbit or collide with each other.

The science behind Gravitational waves: According to **Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity (1916)**, any object with mass warps the space-time around it. When two massive objects orbit each other or collide, they produce **ripples or waves in space-time** that propagate outward at the speed of light.

Gravitational waves are **extremely weak and difficult to detect**. They were first directly detected by the **Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) in 2015**, a century after they were predicted by Einstein's theory.

Challenges for LIGO India:

- **Funding:** Securing adequate financial resources for construction, maintenance, and research.
- **Site Preparation:** Dealing with environmental and logistical issues at the chosen site.
- **Technology Transfer:** Acquiring and adapting cutting-edge technology for Indian needs.
- **International Collaboration:** Coordinating with global partners for seamless operations.
- **Technical Challenges:** Overcoming technical obstacles in precise measurements and data analysis.

Sand Mining: Irreversible damage to Ocean benthic life

- Approximately **six billion tonnes of sand are extracted** annually from the world's oceans, causing irreversible damage to benthic life, according to a new global data platform called **Marine Sand Watch**.
- Benthic life refers to **organisms that live on or near the bottom of aquatic environments**, such as oceans, seas, lakes, and rivers. These organisms are adapted to life on the seabed or riverbed and play crucial roles in the ecosystem, including decomposing organic matter and providing food for other aquatic species.
- Some countries — including **Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Cambodia** — have banned marine sand export in the last 20 years, while others lack any legislation and /or effective monitoring programmes.

Invasive Alien species

- Invasive alien species are animals, plants, and microbes introduced by humans to new regions, with negative impacts on nature and often on human quality of life.
- **Examples:** IAS spread diseases like malaria, Zika, and West Nile Fever through **invasive mosquito species**.
- **Water hyacinth in Lake Victoria** has harmed fish populations and livelihoods.
- **There are 37,000 alien species** introduced to various regions and biomes worldwide due to human activities. **Among these, over 3,500 are invasive alien species**, responsible for 60% of global plant and animal extinctions.
- **Target 6 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework aims** to reduce the rate of invasive alien species introduction by at **least 50% by 2030**. While many countries have **targets related to managing invasive species**, only 17% have specific legislation addressing the issue.

Economics

Status of Rice production and export

- India is the **second-largest producer of rice** in the world, after China.
- India is the **world's largest exporter of rice**, with a **45% share**.
- **Non-Basmati rice exports** have been on a consistent upward trend over the past three years.
- **Decreased production:** The latest rice production estimate in India for the Rabi season 2022-2023 indicates a decrease of about 14% compared to the previous year.
- The government has increased the **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** for rice.

Recent government restrictions on Rice exports:

- In May 2022, the government **banned wheat exports**.
- In June 2023, restrictions on **stock holdings were imposed**.
- In September 2022, the **export of broken rice was prohibited**, and a 20% tariff was imposed on non-parboiled white grain shipments.
- In July 2023, **non-basmati white rice exports were entirely prohibited**, with only parboiled non-basmati and basmati rice allowed.
- Recently, a **20% duty was introduced on all parboiled non-basmati rice exports**.

Why is the Indian government imposing restrictions on rice and wheat exports?

- **Enhancing Domestic Supply:** The government's goal is to reduce exports to ensure an adequate supply of grains within the country. There are concerns about depleting rice stocks, especially in

light of the free-foodgrains scheme's continuation pressure (**Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana**)

- **Impact of monsoon/El Nino:** It includes potential declines in rice production in several Indian states. El Nino may affect new crop arrivals.
- **Tackling Inflation:** Retail food inflation was at **1.5% in July**, and the government is taking measures to control rising food prices.
- **Preventing Illicit Exports:** The minimum export price rule is meant to prevent illegal exports of **non-basmati white rice** from being misrepresented as basmati rice.

PM-DAKSH

The **Pradhan Mantri Dakshata Aur Kushalata Sampanna Hitgrahi (PM-DAKSH) Yojana** is a **Central Sector Scheme** launched in **2020-21** with the goal of **enhancing the competency levels of specific target groups to make them employable**, whether for self-employment or wage-employment, thereby **contributing to their socio-economic development**.

The scheme is primarily aimed at **Scheduled Castes (SCs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Economically Backward Classes (EBCs), De-notified Tribes (DNTs), Safai Karamcharis (including waste pickers), and others**.

The eligibility criteria for the scheme are as follows:

- **Age:** Between **18 to 45 years**.
- **Income:** No income limit for SCs, Safai Karamcharis (**including waste pickers**), and DNTs. For **OBCs and EBCs, the annual family income should be below Rs. 3 lakh and Rs. 1 lakh, respectively**.

The scheme offers **various types of training programs with different durations and costs per candidate:**

- Up-skilling/Reskilling
- Short Term Training
- Entrepreneurship Development Programme
- Long Term Training

Centre asks states to formulate a logistics policy

- The central government has urged states to **create logistics policies to enhance ease of doing business and align** with the **PM GatiShakti initiative**, which aids in infrastructure project planning.
- **India has ranked 38 out of 139** countries in **World Bank's Logistics Performance Index 2023** (2018 rank of India was 44)
- **Gujarat** has topped the Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) 2021 index

- **The unorganized sector** amounts to over **90% of the logistics sector**.

Need for Logistics policy in States:

- **The logistics cost in India (about 13-14 %)** is high as compared to other developed economies (8%)
- **India's logistics sector is highly defragmented** and very complex esp. of states
- This sector provides **employment to more than 22 million** people and is expected to grow at the rate of over **10% over the next 5 years**
- Logistics is the **backbone of India's international trade** and will help in the diversification of not only India's export basket but also of products and countries.

Ethics & Society

Issues because of under representation of Persons with Disabilities

- **Lack of Accurate Data:** Without including questions related to disabilities, it becomes challenging to gather accurate and up-to-date data on the disabled population in India.
- **Invisibility of Invisible Disabilities:** Many disabilities, particularly "**invisible disabilities**" like **mental health conditions**, often go unnoticed or unreported. The omission of questions related to such **conditions exacerbates the invisibility of these disabilities**.
- **Limited Policy Insights:** Policies and programs designed to support people with disabilities may not be comprehensive or targeted effectively **without a clear understanding of the disability landscape**.
- **Exclusion from Development Goals:** The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities.
- **Barriers to Accessing Services:** People with disabilities **often face barriers in accessing healthcare, education, employment, and social services**.
- **Underreporting of Disabilities:** When individuals do not see their specific disabilities reflected in data collection efforts, **they may be less inclined to self-identify or seek support**.
- **Stigmatization and Discrimination:** When disabilities are not recognized or understood, individuals with **disabilities may face exclusion, bias, or negative stereotypes**.
- **Missed Opportunities:** Comprehensive data on disabilities can provide valuable insights into the diverse needs and experiences of people with disabilities.

Offspring of Void/voidable Marriages Entitled to Ancestral Property

- The Supreme Court has ruled that **children born from void or voidable marriages** have the **right to claim a share of their parents' ancestral property**.

- However, this right is **limited to their parents' share within the Hindu Undivided Family (HUF)** governed by **Mitakshara Law** and **does not extend to the entire HUF's property**.
- It emphasized that **these children would be considered legitimate and related by legitimate kinship under the Hindu Succession Act (HSA), 1956**.
- **Section 16(3) of the HMA, 1955** explicitly states that the conferment of legitimacy does not grant any rights to the property of anyone other than the parents.

About Mitakshara Law:

The **Mitakshara school of Hindu law** is a well-known school of thought that specifies procedures for **succession and inheritance**. The Mitakshara school of thought **states that a son, grandson, and great-grandson have a right to family property through birth**.

The Mitakshara School of Law is followed in every state in India, **except for West Bengal and Assam**. **The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 governs Hindu family law**.

Before the **2005 amendment of the Hindu Succession Act**, a female could not be a coparcener and was **not entitled to partition**.

Hunger

- **As per FAO, hunger** is the condition characterized by habitual or chronic consumption of too few calories to meet the minimum dietary energy requirements for a healthy and productive life.
- **Despite being a major food producer with extensive food security programs**, India faces **significant food insecurity**, hunger, and child malnutrition.
- **In the 2022 Global Hunger Index (GHI)**, India ranked **107th out of 121** countries, behind Nigeria and Pakistan.

Types of Hunger:

Acute hunger: This type of hunger occurs over a defined period and is often associated with crises like droughts, wars, or other emergencies. It represents a severe and immediate lack of food.

Chronic hunger: Chronic hunger refers to a **long-term state of undernourishment where the body consistently receives less food than it requires**. It is commonly linked to persistent poverty and is a pervasive issue.

Hidden hunger: Hidden hunger is a form of **chronic hunger resulting from an imbalanced diet** that lacks essential nutrients such as iron, iodine, zinc, or vitamin A. Even if caloric intake is sufficient, the absence of **critical nutrients can lead to health problems**.