



Maratha Reservation Bill

For Prelims: Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC), [Maratha Reservation](#), [Articles 15](#)

For Mains: Constitutional provisions related to the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes, Reservation

Source: IE

Why in News?

The **Maharashtra Assembly** recently passed the **Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Bill 2024**, setting aside **10% reservation for the [Maratha community](#)** in jobs and education under socially and educationally backward categories.

What are the Highlights of the Maratha Reservation Bill?

- The Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Bill 2024, drafted based on a **Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission report**.
 - This report identified the **Marathas as socially and educationally backward**, justifying the need for reservation.
- The Bill specifies the **Maratha community as a Socially and Educationally Backward Class** under **Article 342A (3)** of the Indian Constitution. It provides reservation for this class under **Articles 15(4)**, 15(5), and 16(4) of the Constitution.
 - Article 342A (3) states that every state or union territory can prepare and maintain a **list of socially and educationally backward classes (SEBCs)**. These lists can be different from the Central List.
 - Article 15(4) empowers the state to make special provisions for the **advancement of any SEBCs of citizens** or the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
 - Article 15(5) enables the state to make provision for the **reservation of seats in admission to educational institutions** for the backward classes, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, **except for [minority educational institutions](#)**.
 - Article 16(4) authorizes the state to make provision for the reservation of **appointments or posts** in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the state, is not adequately represented in the services under the state.
- The Bill ensures that the principle of **creamy layer is applicable**, restricting reservation to those **Marathas who are not in the creamy layer category**, thereby targeting the **most marginalized within the community**.
- The commission's report highlighted "**exceptional circumstances and extraordinary situations**" justifying reservations to the Maratha community above the 50% ceiling set by the **[Supreme Court \(Indira Sawhney judgement\)\(1992\)](#)**.
 - Maharashtra currently has a reservation of **52%, including various categories such as SC, ST, OBC, Vimukt Jati, Nomadic Tribes, and others**. With the addition of 10% reservation for the **Marathas, the total reservation in the state will now reach 62%**.

Background of the Maratha Reservation

- **Narayan Rane Committee:**
 - In 2014, a Narayan Rane-led committee **recommended 16% reservation for Marathas** ahead of elections, later challenged and stayed by the Bombay High Court.
- **Gaikwad Commission:**
 - In 2018, the Maharashtra government enacted the **Socially and Educationally Backward Class (SEBC) Act** based on the **Gaikwad Commission's findings, granting 16% reservation.**
 - The Bombay High Court reduced this to **12% in education and 13% in jobs.**
 - Subsequently, the Supreme Court struck down the quota entirely in May 2021, citing insufficient **empirical data to justify exceeding the 50% quota ceiling.**
 - In the [Indira Sawhney judgment 1992](#), SC had categorically said **50% shall be the rule**, only in **certain exceptional and extraordinary situations** for bringing far-flung and remote areas' populations into mainstream said **50% rule can be relaxed.**
- **Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission:**
 - The Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission, led by Justice (retd) **Sunil B Shukre**, was established in December 2023 to reassess the Maratha reservation issue.
 - The Shukre commission notes that the population of Marathas in the state is 28%, while 84 % of them are not advanced, adding that such a large backward community **cannot be added into the OBC bracket.**
 - The Commission cites **extreme poverty, agricultural income decline, and land holding partitions** as reasons for the Maratha community's plight. Additionally, it highlights that **94% of farmer suicides in the state are from the Maratha community.**
 - The Commission notes **inadequate representation in public services**, attributing it to the community's backwardness.
 - It recommends **separate reservations to increase Maratha representation** in government jobs and developed sectors.

What are the Arguments in Favour and Against the Maratha Reservation Bill?

- **Arguments in Favour:**
 - **Socio-Economic Backwardness:**
 - The empirical data collected by the Shukre Commission underscores the socio-economic challenges faced by the Maratha community, justifying the need for a reservation to **uplift them from poverty and marginalisation.**
 - The high percentage of farmer suicides among Marathas highlights the severity of their economic distress and the urgent need for targeted interventions to uplift the community.
 - **Representation:**
 - Marathas have historically been excluded from mainstream opportunities due to their backwardness. Reservation in government jobs and education can **enhance their representation and participation** in various sectors, contributing to inclusive development.
- **Arguments Against Maratha Reservation:**
 - **Legal Viability:**
 - Given the history of previous Maratha reservation attempts **facing legal challenges** and eventual setbacks in higher courts, doubts persist about the new Bill's ability to withstand judicial scrutiny, especially in light of the **Supreme Court's previous ruling striking down Maratha reservations** due to insufficient empirical data justifying quota **extension beyond the 50% ceiling.**
 - **The Kunbi Certificate Controversy:**
 - A draft notification proposing recognition of "**sage soyare**" (**extended relatives of Marathas with Kunbi lineage**) as **Kunbi**, eligible for OBC reservation, stirred controversy.
 - Opposition parties have raised questions about the viability of the new

reservation and its potential impact on existing OBC reservations.

- **Dissent within the Maratha Community:**
 - Some activists and leaders within the Maratha community expressed dissatisfaction with the separate reservation, preferring inclusion within the OBC category.
- **Need for Comprehensive Approach:**
 - While reservation may address immediate concerns, it may not effectively address the root causes of Maratha's backwardness. A holistic approach addressing issues like education, skill development, and infrastructure is essential for sustainable development.

Way Forward

- Ensure that the Maratha Reservation Bill is **legally sound and withstands judicial scrutiny** by providing robust empirical data to justify the reservation beyond the 50% quota ceiling set by the Supreme Court.
- The government should adopt integrated policies that **combine reservation with targeted welfare programs, skill development initiatives, and infrastructure projects** to ensure holistic development for Marathas.
- Sustainable development initiatives addressing the **root causes of backwardness** should be prioritised over short-term considerations, aiming for **inclusive growth and social justice for all communities**.
- Promote social cohesion and inclusivity by fostering understanding and support for affirmative action measures aimed at addressing historical injustices and promoting equity.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. Whether the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) can enforce the implementation of constitutional reservation for the Scheduled Castes in the religious minority institutions? Examine. **(2018)**

SC's Use of Article 142 in Chandigarh Mayoral Election

For Prelims: [Supreme Court of India](#), [Article 142](#), [Judicial Activism](#), [Fundamental Rights](#), [Judicial Overreach](#).

For Mains: Significance of Article 142, Legitimacy of Judicial Activism in India

Source: [IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the Chandigarh mayoral election garnered attention as the [Supreme Court of India](#) invoked [Article 142 of the Constitution](#) to overturn the election results.

Why did the Supreme Court invoke Article 142?

- The Supreme Court invoked Article 142 to **ensure justice and uphold the sanctity of the electoral process** in the Chandigarh mayoral election.
 - The election was marred by **irregularities due to the illegal conduct of the presiding**

officer who had announced the winner by invalidating eight votes cast in favour of his opponent, leading to an incorrect declaration of the winner.

What is Article 142 of the Indian constitution?

- **Empowering the Supreme Court:**
 - Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to pass any decree or order necessary for doing **complete justice** in any case or matter pending before it.
 - These decrees or orders are enforceable across India's territory, making them significant tools for judicial intervention.
- **Transcending Legal Limitations:**
 - Article 142 allows the Supreme Court to go beyond the confines of existing laws or statutes to ensure justice for all parties involved.
 - It enables the Court to exercise functions beyond adjudication, including executive and legislative roles when required.
 - Article 142 is supported by several other provisions, including **Article 32 (which ensures the right to constitutional remedies)**, **Article 141** (mandating that all courts within India must abide by the Supreme Court's decisions), and **Article 136** (which allows for the Special Leave Petition).
 - This collective framework is known by the term "**judicial activism**". This concept has often led to the Supreme Court overriding parliamentary legislation to deliver "**complete justice**".
- **Intervening in Public Interest Matters:**
 - The provision empowers the Supreme Court to intervene in **cases involving public interest, human rights, constitutional values, or fundamental rights**.
 - This **reinforces the Court's role as a guardian of the constitution** and ensures protection against violations or infringements.
- **Judgments Clarifying the Scope of Powers under Article 142:**
 - **Union Carbide Corporation vs Union of India (1991):**
 - SC Ordered UCC to pay USD 470 million in **compensation for the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy**, highlighting the wide scope of Article 142(1) and clarifying that its powers are of a different quality and **not subject to express statutory prohibitions**.
 - **Supreme Court Bar Association vs Union of India (1998):**
 - The apex court emphasized that the powers under Article 142 **are supplementary and should not be used to override substantive laws**.
 - The court stated that these powers are curative in nature and should not be used to **ignore the rights of litigants or bypass statutory provisions**.
 - **A. Jideranath vs Jubilee Hills Co-op House Building Society (2006):**
 - The SC emphasized that while exercising its power under Article 142, no injustice should be inflicted upon a person who is not a party to the case.
 - **State of Karnataka vs Umadevi (2006):**
 - SC clarified that "complete justice" under Article 142 means **justice according to law and not sympathy**, and that the court will not grant relief that perpetuates illegality encroaching into the legislative domain.
- **Criticism:**
 - Risk of encroaching upon the **separation of powers**, **inviting criticism of judicial activism**.
 - Critics argue that Article 142 grants the judiciary broad powers without sufficient accountability, potentially leading to **judicial overreach**. However, these powers are reserved for exceptional cases **where existing laws are inadequate**.
 - Potential for disputes over the extent of the Court's authority and its **interference with legislative or executive domains**.

Judicial Activism	Judicial Overreach
Defined as the judiciary's active role in preserving the country's legal and constitutional system and upholding citizens'	When the judiciary exceeds its legal authority or jurisdiction and interferes with legislative or executive functions.

rights.	
Ensures laws comply with constitutional provision.	Undesirable in a democracy as it breaches the principle of separation of powers.
Promotes social change and protects vulnerable groups.	Can undermine democracy.
Legitimacy of Judicial Activism is often debated, depending on specific circumstances.	Generally considered illegitimate and harmful to democratic functioning.

UPSC Civil Services Exam, Previous Year Questions (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. With reference to the Constitution of India, prohibitions or limitations or provisions contained in ordinary laws cannot act as prohibitions or limitations on the constitutional powers under Article 142. It could mean which one of the following? (2019)

- (a) The decisions taken by the Election Commission of India while discharging its duties cannot be challenged in any court of law.
- (b) The Supreme Court of India is not constrained in the exercise of its powers by laws made by the Parliament.
- (c) In the event of grave financial crisis in the country, the President of India can declare Financial Emergency without the counsel from the Cabinet.
- (d) State Legislatures cannot make laws on certain matters without the concurrence of Union Legislature.

Ans: (b)

Standing Committee Calls for Legal Education Reforms

For Prelims: [Parliamentary Standing Committee](#), [Bar Council of India](#), National Council for Legal Education and Research (proposed), [Advocates \(Amendment\) Act, 2023](#)

For Mains: Major Recommendations of the Committee, Legal Education Landscape in India.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

The [Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law, and Justice](#) recently submitted a report on **legal education in India**, proposing significant recommendations.

What are the Major Recommendations of the Committee?

- **Restructuring Legal Education Regulation:** Proposed the creation of the **National Council for Legal Education and Research (NCLER)** to oversee non-litigation aspects of legal education, limiting the [Bar Council of India's](#) regulatory powers.

- **Enhancing Academic Resources:** Recruiting top researchers as faculty to bolster research capabilities within law schools.
 - Acknowledging the necessity for increased state funding to support law schools.
- **Integration of Global Curriculum:** Incorporating global curriculum into Indian law schools to foster international exchange programs for both students and faculty.
 - Exposing students to **diverse legal systems for a comprehensive legal education.**
- **Mandatory Inclusion of Interdisciplinary Subjects:** It suggests mandatory inclusion of subjects like **Law and Medicine, Sports Law, Energy Law, Tech Law/Cyber Law, Commercial & Investment arbitration**, Securities Law, Telecom laws, and banking laws in undergraduate courses.
 - Collaboration between governments, universities, and BCI is essential for comprehensive curriculum development.
- **Emphasising Practical Training Programs:** Universities should collaborate with BCI to integrate practical training programs like **moot court competitions** into the curriculum.
 - These programs offer students opportunities to apply legal theory in simulated courtroom settings, **enhancing oral advocacy and critical thinking skills.**
- **Quality Assurance in Legal Education:** The Committee stresses the importance of **prioritising quality over quantity** in the recognition of new law colleges.
 - Urgent measures are needed to curb the proliferation of substandard law colleges in India.

Note

The origin of Legal education in India revolves around the **Vedic era** whereby the concept of **Dharma** was the source of legal structure. The **Chola judicial system** was the forerunner of the present Indian judicial system. The principle of **“All are equal before law”** or the present **‘Rule of law’** was pursued in the Chola kingdom.

What is the Bar Council of India?

- **About:** The Bar Council of India is a **statutory body** created by Parliament under the **Advocates Act, 1961** to regulate and represent the Indian bar.
- **Regulatory Functions:**
 - Prescribing **standards of professional conduct** and etiquette for advocates.
 - Establishing procedures for disciplinary actions.
 - Setting standards for legal education in India and recognizing qualifying law degrees.
- **Other Responsibilities:**
 - Protecting the **rights, privileges, and interests of advocates.**
 - Organising **legal aid** for the underprivileged.
 - Conducting elections for Bar Council members.
 - To deal with and dispose of any matter which may be referred to it by a State Bar Council.
- **Recent Developments:**
 - In 2023, **BCI allowed foreign lawyers** and law firms to practice in India but limited them to non-litigious activities like **corporate law and intellectual property matters.**
 - They cannot handle property conveyancing or title investigations.
 - Indian lawyers in foreign firms face the same restrictions.

What is the Advocates Act, 1961?

- **About:** The **Advocates Act of 1961** was enacted to revise and unify laws concerning legal practitioners and to establish the **Bar Council and an All-India Bar.**
 - This legislation replaced most of the provisions of the Legal Practitioners Act of 1879.
- **Recent Amendment:** The **Advocates (Amendment) Act, 2023**, modifies the Advocates Act, 1961, by addressing the issue of touting.
 - Touts are individuals who seek payment in exchange for securing legal business for lawyers.
 - According to the amended provisions, High Courts, district judges, session judges, district

magistrates, and certain revenue officers are now **empowered to compile and publish lists of touts.**

- The Court or judge may exclude from the premises of the Court any person whose name is included in the list of touts.

What is the difference between a Lawyer and an Advocate?

- **Lawyer:** The lawyer is the person who is professionally qualified and holder of a degree in law from a reputed institution/college in India
 - Can include legal researchers, law firm associates, legal advisors, etc.
 - Does **not necessarily** have the **right to represent clients in court.**
- **Advocate:** Advocates are qualified legal professionals who have enrolled with a **State Bar Council** and passed the **All India Bar Examination (AIBE).**
 - Holds the **right to represent clients in court**, plead their case, and argue on their behalf.
 - Equivalent to "**barrister**" in some other legal systems.
- Every advocate is a lawyer, but not every lawyer is an advocate.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Prelims:

Q. With reference to India, consider the following statements:

1. Government law officers and legal firms are recognised as advocates, but corporate lawyers and patent attorneys are excluded from recognition as advocates.
2. Bar Councils have the power to lay down the rules relating to legal education and recognition of law colleges.

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

Ans: (b)

Regional Dialogue of Secretaries of Security Councils on Afghanistan

For Prelims: [Indian Council for Cultural Relations \(ICCR\)](#), Humanitarian Air Corridor, [Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan](#), [National Security Advisers](#), [UNSCR 2593](#), [Strategic Partnership Agreement](#)

For Mains: India-Afghanistan relation and its significance on regional security, peace and prosperity.

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the **6th Regional Dialogue of Secretaries of Security Councils/National Security Advisers (NSA)** on Afghanistan was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

- India reiterated its collective approach to combating terrorism as stated in the [United Nations Security Council Resolution \(UNSCR 2593\)](#).

What is the Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan?

- The [Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan](#) is a series of high-level meetings involving [National Security Advisers \(NSA\)](#) or **senior security officials** from countries in the region, including **Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, India**, and other **Central Asian states**.
- These dialogues are platforms for discussing and coordinating regional approaches to address security challenges and promote **stability in Afghanistan** and the broader region.
- Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan follows the objective of **UNSCR 2593**.
 - The resolution, passed by the **15-member organ (UNSC)**, calls for the prevention of **Afghan territory** from being used to pose threats or launch attacks against any nation.
 - The adoption of the resolution is a strong signal from the Security Council and the international community on its expectations in respect of Afghanistan.
- It underscores the critical necessity of combating terrorism within Afghanistan.

What are India's Efforts for the People of Afghanistan?

- The [Indian Council for Cultural Relations \(ICCR\)](#) has taken significant strides in promoting education, granting admission to over **3,000 students**, including **600 Afghan girls**, since August 2021.
- In a bid to provide essential support, a **Humanitarian Air Corridor** has been established between **Delhi** and **Kabul**.
 - This corridor facilitates **critical travel** and **aid delivery**, demonstrating India's proactive response to humanitarian needs.
- India has supplied several shipments of humanitarian assistance consisting of 50,000 MTs of wheat, 250 tons of medical aid and 28 tons of earthquake relief aid.
- India has partnered with the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Afghanistan** to provide assistance for the welfare of the Afghan drug user population, especially women.
 - Under this partnership, India has, since **2022**, supplied **11,000 units of hygiene kits, baby food, blankets, clothing, medical aid** and other miscellaneous items to **UNODC, Kabul**.
- Trade and commerce between **India** and **Afghanistan** is ongoing, including through the **Chabahar port**.

What are the Key Issues Affecting India-Afghanistan Relations?

- **Impact on Regional Stability:** The drug trade originating from Afghanistan ([golden crescent](#)) has been a major contributor to instability and violence in the region, posing challenges for both Afghanistan and neighbouring countries like India.
- **Indian Interests and Influence:** India's strategic interests and influence in the region faced a setback following the **Taliban's capture of Kabul in 1996**.
- **Economic and Infrastructure Hurdles:** The [fall of Afghanistan in the hands of the Taliban \(2021\)](#) presented formidable obstacles to India's endeavours to construct infrastructure like the **Salma Dam** and **Parliament Building** and to make investments in the country. These efforts have been impeded by **security concerns, corruption, and various other challenges**.
- **Attack on Indian Nationals:** The bombing of a Sikh gurdwara in Kabul claimed by **ISIS-K**, has

raised concerns for India.

- **Shift in Security Dynamics:** Until August 2021, India relied on a friendly government in Kabul and the security presence of the United States in Afghanistan for its security.
 - The US withdrawal from Afghanistan necessitated a careful reassessment of the security landscape by India.



How is India's Relations with Afghanistan?

- **History:**
 - India's policy towards Afghanistan is rooted in **historical and civilizational ties**, dating back centuries.
 - India has historically enjoyed relatively **good ties with Afghanistan**, which go back to the **Treaty of Friendship, 1950**.
 - As a contiguous neighbour, India has both legitimate **economic** and **security** interests in Afghanistan.
- **Economic Relations:**
 - Through nearly **500 projects** spanning all **34 provinces**, India has invested over **USD 3 billion** in critical areas such as **power, water supply, road connectivity, healthcare, education, agriculture, and capacity building**.
 - The **Indian Army's Border Roads Organisation** constructed a major road in 2009 in the remote Afghan province of **Nimroz**, connecting **Delaram to Zaranj**.
 - This has proved a viable alternative route for the **duty-free movement of goods** through the **Chabahar port** in **Iran to Afghanistan**.
 - Tariff concessions under **South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)** continue to be provided to Afghan traders.
 - **Salma Dam, Afghan-India Friendship Dam (AIFD)** is a **hydroelectric and irrigation dam** project located on the **Hari River** in **Herat Province of western Afghanistan**.
 - In **2006**, India made a commitment to funding the project for its completion.
- **Political Relations:**
 - India-Afghanistan relations have been strengthened by the **Strategic Partnership Agreement**, which was signed between the two countries in **October 2011**.
 - The **Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)** between the two sides, provides for assistance to help **rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure and institutions, education and technical assistance**.

- India has been a strong supporter of **Afghan democracy** and has consistently advocated for a **stable, peaceful, and prosperous Afghanistan**.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:**
 - To combat the global pandemic of **COVID-19** and related issues of food security, India is committed to delivering **75,000 MT** of Wheat to **Afghanistan** in **2020**.
 - India has also undertaken the supply of **the tablets of Hydroxy-chloroquine, Paracetamol** and **pairs** of surgical gloves to the Government of Afghanistan in **2020**.
 - Provision of food assistance of **11 lakh tonnes** of wheat, both as grains and biscuits, was distributed to approximately **1.5 million school children**.
 - To promote food security, particularly for children during times of drought, India distributed **2000 tonnes** of pulses to Afghanistan in 2018.
 - A Medical Diagnostic Centre in **Kabul** was set up in **2015**. The Centre provides the latest diagnostic facilities to children of Afghanistan thereby generating goodwill for India.

What is the Indian Council for Cultural Relations?

- The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), is an **autonomous organization** of the Government of India, involved in India's external cultural relations (cultural diplomacy), through cultural exchange with other countries and their peoples.
- It was founded in **1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**, independent India's first Education Minister.
- ICCR has been assigned the responsibility of facilitating the celebration of the **International Day of Yoga** by Indian Missions/Posts abroad since **2015**.

Conclusion

- India's deep-rooted historical, economic, and political ties with Afghanistan underscore its commitment to the nation's stability and prosperity.
- Through strategic partnerships, significant investments, and humanitarian assistance, India continues to play a pivotal role in supporting Afghanistan's development journey.
- By fostering goodwill and providing essential services, India strengthens its bonds with Afghanistan, contributing to regional peace and security.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following countries: (2022)

1. Azerbaijan
2. Kyrgyzstan
3. Tajikistan
4. Turkmenistan
5. Uzbekistan

Which of the above have borders with Afghanistan?

- (a) 1, 2 and 5 only
(b) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
(c) 3, 4 and 5 only
(d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. The proposed withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan in 2014 is fraught with major security implications for the countries of the region. Examine in light of the fact that India is faced with a plethora of challenges and needs to safeguard its own strategic interests. **(2013)**

Electronic Voting Machine

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

In recent years, there has been growing discussion and analysis surrounding the integrity and dependability of [Electronic Voting Machines \(EVMs\)](#) used during elections in India.

What is an Electronic Voting Machine?

- **About: EVM** is a device used to record votes electronically. They were first used in the **Paravur Assembly Constituency of Kerala** in the year 1982.
 - Since 1998, the Election Commission has increasingly used EVMs instead of ballot boxes.
 - In 2003, all state elections and by-elections were held using EVMs.
 - Encouraged by this, in **2004**, the Commission took a historic decision to **use only EVMs for the Lok Sabha elections.**
- **Development:** It has been devised and designed by the **Technical Experts Committee (TEC)** of the [Election Commission](#) in collaboration with two Public Sector undertakings: **Bharat Electronics Ltd**, Bangalore (under Ministry of Defence) and **Electronic Corporation of India Ltd**, Hyderabad (under Department of Atomic Energy).
- **Functionality:** It has two parts: a **Control Unit** and a **Balloting Unit** connected by a cable.
 - The Control Unit stays with the polling officer, while the Balloting Unit is in the voting booth.
 - The voter has to simply press the **blue button** on the Ballot Unit against the candidate and symbol of his choice and the vote is recorded.
- **Key Features:**
 - An EVM being used by ECI can record a maximum of **2,000 votes**.
 - They do not require electricity. They run on an ordinary battery assembled by
 - **Bharat Electronics Limited/Electronics Corporation of India Limited.**
 - The microchip used in EVMs is a **one-time programmable/masked chip**, which can neither be read nor overwritten.
 - Furthermore, the EVMs are stand-alone machines and there is **no operating system** used in these machines.
- **Benefits:**
 - **Accuracy:** EVMs eliminate the occurrence of '**Invalid Votes**' seen frequently with [paper ballots](#), ensuring a more accurate reflection of voter choice and reducing complaints and legal disputes.
 - **Efficiency:** EVMs streamline the voting process, **making it faster and more efficient.** They eliminate the need for manual counting, reducing the time required to declare election results.
 - **Transparency:** EVMs enhance transparency in the electoral process by providing a **clear and verifiable record of votes cast.** With features like VVPAT, voters can verify that their votes are recorded accurately.
 - **Cost-effectiveness:** EVMs offer cost savings in terms of **paper, printing, transportation, and storage**, as they eliminate the need for millions of printed ballot

papers for each election cycle.

▪ **Concerns:**

- **Lack of Transparency:** Some critics argue that the **inner workings of EVMs are not sufficiently transparent**, leading to doubts about the accuracy and fairness of the voting process.
- **Reliability:** Questions have been raised about the reliability of EVMs, including the possibility of **technical malfunctions** or errors that could affect the outcome of an election.
- **Trust Issues:** Despite security measures, there is still a lack of trust among some political parties and voters regarding the reliability and authenticity of EVMs, leading to calls for additional safeguards or alternative voting methods.

What is VVPAT?

- **About:** [Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail \(VVPAT\)](#) is an independent system attached with the EVM that allow the voters to verify that their votes are cast as intended.
 - It was introduced in the bye-election of the **Noksen Assembly Constituency** of Nagaland in 2013.
 - In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, VVPATs were used in all the constituencies.
- **Functionality:** When a vote is cast, a slip is printed containing the serial number, name and symbol of the candidate and **remains exposed through a transparent window for 7 seconds**.
 - Thereafter, the printed slip automatically gets cut and falls in the sealed drop box of the VVPAT.
 - The machines can be accessed by polling officers only.
- **Related Supreme Court Ruling:** In a 2013 **Subramanian Swamy V/s ECI** case, the [Supreme Court](#) emphasised the necessity of implementing VVPAT in elections conducted through EVMs.
 - Presently, the **M3 Model of ECI-EVM and VVPAT are used**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

Ans: (d)

African Union Banned Donkey Skin Trade

[Source: DTE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, during the **37th African Union Summit, 2024** in [Ethiopia](#), African heads of state unanimously agreed to a historic ban on the trade of **donkey skin**, thereby prohibiting the killing of donkeys across the continent for their hides.

- This is a **significant outcome** following the Dar es Salaam declaration adopted at the **first African Union-Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resource (AU-IBAR) Pan-African Donkey Conference** in December 2022.

What is the Dar es Salaam Declaration?

- **About:**
 - The [Dar es Salaam declaration](#) was signed in **Tanzania** during the **Pan African Donkey Skin Conference**, organised by the **AU-IBAR**, where government ministers gathered to understand the harmful effects of the donkey skin trade on animals and communities in Africa.
 - It underscores the **rapid decrease** in Africa's donkey population and advocates for increased investment in research, policies, and legislation to safeguard the species.
 - It advocates for an African Union Commission resolution proposing a **15-year halt** on the commercial slaughter of donkeys for their skins, alongside the creation of an **African donkey strategy** addressing **exploitation, production, and productivity**, to **integrate these concerns** into the global development agenda.

Why is Donkey Skin Traded?

- **About:**
 - The donkey skin trade, which is largely **unregulated**, involves cruel practices such as viciously slaughtering donkeys for their skins, which are then exported to China.
 - The trade is **illegal** in some countries and **legal in others** causing cruelty and suffering to donkeys globally.
- **Uses:**
 - The collagen from the donkey skins is used to create a product known as **ejiao (a traditional Chinese medicine)** which is then used in food, drink, and beauty products.
- **Negative Effect:**
 - **On Donkeys:** The treatment of donkeys throughout the skin trade, from **sourcing to slaughter**, has caused intense suffering, with hundreds of thousands slaughtered over the past decade.
 - **On Owners:** The global trade in donkey skin jeopardises efforts towards achieving **at least nine out of the 17** United Nations [sustainable development goals](#), including **ending poverty**, as donkeys are crucial to millions of people for whom equid ownership serves as the sole means to escape extreme poverty.
 - The donkey skin trade significantly **impacts women and children**, reducing economic and educational opportunities by depriving them of the support of these animals, which are crucial for completing tasks efficiently. **E.g. fetching water, and using as a draught animal.**

Key Facts about Indian Wild Ass

- Sub-species of Asian Wild Ass (*Equus hemionus*)
- Distinguished by **unique white markings** on the front of the rump and back of the shoulder, along with a stripe down the back outlined in white.
- **Distribution:** The World's last population of Indian Wild Ass is restricted to **Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat**.

- **Habitat:** Desert and grassland ecosystems.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN:** Near threatened
 - **CITES:** Appendix II
 - **Wildlife Protection Act (1972):** **Schedule-I**

SHOW OF STRENGTH

Donkey breeds found in India are primarily used to carry heavy loads

Breed	Native region; characteristics	Use
Kachchhi	Kutch region of Gujarat; grey, white, brown or black in colour	For weed removal in farms and as pack animal during pastoralist migration. It can carry 80-100 kg and pull 200-300 kg on carts.
Halari	Saurashtra region of Gujarat; white in colour, docile temperament	As pack animal during pastoralist migration and to pull carts. It can walk around 30-40 km in a day
Sindhi	Barmer and Jaisalmer districts of Rajasthan; brown in colour	As pack animal to transport water, soil, earthenware, construction material, fodder and to pull carts and for ploughing by small and marginal farmers. They can carry 1,000-1,500 kg.
Spiti	Cold desert areas of Himachal Pradesh; dark brown, brown or black in colour	For immediate transport of highly perishable cash crops and fruits, food grains and other items to far flung areas; to fetch wood, logs and other minor forest produce; and to bring dung or manure from pastures to villages or fields.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. According to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which of the following animals cannot be hunted by any person except under some provisions provided by law? (2017)

1. Gharial
2. Indian wild ass
3. Wild buffalo

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
 (b) 2 and 3 only
 (c) 1 and 3 only
 (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Exp:

- Gharial, Indian wild ass and Wild buffalo are all listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.
- The Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 prohibits hunting of any animal enlisted in Schedule I of the Act except under some provisions provided by law.

- Further, the section 11 of the Act states that the chief wild life warden may, if he is satisfied that any wild animal specified in Schedule I has become dangerous to human life or is so disabled or diseased as to be beyond recovery, by order in writing and stating the reasons therefore, permit any person to hunt such animal or cause such animal to be hunted.
- The killing or wounding in good faith of any wild animal in defence of oneself or of any other person shall not be an offence.
- **Therefore, option (d) is the correct answer.**

Q. Which one of the following groups of animals belongs to the category of endangered species? (2012)

- (a) Great Indian Bustard, Musk Deer, Red Panda and Asiatic Wild Ass
- (b) Kashmir Stag, Cheetal, Blue Bull and Great Indian Bustard
- (c) Snow Leopard, Swamp Deer, Rhesus Monkey and Saras (Crane)
- (d) Lion-tailed Macaque, Blue Bull, Hanuman Langur and Cheetal

Ans: (a)

Q. A sandy and saline area is the natural habitat of an Indian animal species. The animal has no predators in that area but its existence is threatened due to the destruction of its habitat. Which one of the following could be that animal? (2011)

- (a) Indian wild buffalo
- (b) Indian wild ass
- (c) Indian wild boar
- (d) Indian gazelle

Ans: (b)

Government's Sugarcane Price Hike

Source: DTE

Recently, the central government announced an 8% increase in the [fair and remunerative price \(FRP\) of sugarcane](#). The revised FRP of **Rs 340 per quintal** is slated to be effective from 1st October, 2024 for the 2024-25 sugar season.

- The Central Government announces FRP that is determined on the recommendation of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)** and announced by the [Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs \(CCEA\)](#).
 - **CCEA is chaired by the Prime Minister of India.**
 - FRP is based on the **Rangarajan Committee Report 2012** on reorganising the sugarcane industry.
- Sugarcane is a **tall, perennial grass native to tropical regions**. It is cultivated for its high sugar content, primarily used for sugar production. But it can also be processed into various other products such as ethanol and [biofuels](#).
 - **Heavy soils with good drainage** are preferred for sugarcane cultivation, though it grows well on medium & light-textured soils also with assured irrigation.

Read more: [Fair and Remunerative Price](#)

Initiative on Public Health of Tribal Students

Source: [PIB](#)

The [Ministry of Ayush](#), through the [Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences \(CCRAS\)](#) in collaboration with the [Ministry of Tribal Affairs](#) and [ICMR-National Institute of Research in Tribal Health \(NIRTH\)](#) Jabalpur, has initiated a joint **National Level Project of Health Screening and Management** through Ayurvedic Interventions benefiting over 20,000 Tribal Students.

- The joint initiative seeks to meet the health requirements of children in [Eklavya Model Residential Schools \(EMRS\)](#) in tribal regions, targeting students aged 10-18, in 55 identified EMRS across **14 states**.
 - It will focus on major areas like [malnutrition](#), [anemia](#), [sickle cell diseases](#), [hemoglobinopathies](#), and [tuberculosis](#) through Ayurvedic interventions.
 - Efforts will be made to instil **healthy lifestyle practices** among children based on Ayurvedic principles, aiming to improve their health, well-being, and disease prevention, while also adopting an **integrated approach** to disease management.
- [Ekalavya Model Residential Schools \(EMRSs\)](#) provide quality education to [Scheduled Tribes \(ST\)](#) children in remote areas. The schools focus on holistic development, including sports, [skill training](#), and [healthcare](#), to facilitate access to higher education and employment opportunities.

Read more: [Ekalavya Model Residential Schools \(EMRSs\)](#)

Umbrella Scheme on “Safety of Women”

Source: [PIB](#)

The [Union Cabinet](#) approved the proposal of the [Ministry of Home Affairs\(MHA\)](#) for the continuation of the implementation of the **Umbrella Scheme on ‘Safety of Women’** for the period from **2021-22 to 2025-26**.

- Of the overall project cost, a portion will be financed by the MHA from its budget, while the remaining will be sourced from the [Nirbhaya Fund](#).
- The Government of India has proposed to continue the following projects under the Umbrella Scheme for “Safety of Women”:
 - **112 Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) 2.0**
 - Upgradation of Central Forensic Sciences laboratories, including setting up of National Forensic Data Centre
 - Strengthening of DNA Analysis, Cyber Forensic capacities in State Forensic Science Laboratories (FSLs)
 - [Cyber Crime](#) Prevention Against Women and Children
 - Capacity building and training of investigators and prosecutors in handling [sexual assault cases against women and children](#)
 - [Women Help Desk](#) & [Anti-human Trafficking Units](#).
- According to the NCRB data, the rate of crime against women per one-lakh population stood at 66.4, while the chargesheeting in such cases was logged at 75.8.

Read more: [Mission Shakti](#)

Unexpected Lake Formation in Death Valley

[Source: DTE](#)

North America's driest region, **Badwater Basin**, nestled within [Death Valley](#) has experienced a significant increase in precipitation since **August 2023**, leading to the unexpected formation of **Manly Lake**.

- **Manly Lake** was formed after [Hurricane Hilary](#) in **August 2023**. While it initially got smaller as expected, it surprisingly stayed throughout the fall and winters.
 - It grew again in **February 2024** because a strong **atmospheric river** brought more water.
 - An **atmospheric river** is a narrow band of concentrated moisture in the atmosphere that carries water vapour from the tropics to higher latitudes.
 - Unlike a **visible water body**, an atmospheric river is an invisible, elongated corridor in the sky that carries large amounts of water vapour, influencing weather patterns and precipitation.
 - This disrupted the basin's usual pattern of rapid evaporation, allowing the unexpected formation and persistence of Manly Lake.



Read more: [Death Valley](#)

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