

Electoral Reforms in India

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

With India's ongoing **General Elections 2024**, there's a spotlight on **past electoral reforms**, from the founding of the [Election Commission](#) to the introduction of [Electronic Voting Machines](#) and recent changes in the procedure for appointment of election commissioners.

- These reforms reflect the continuous evolution and enhancement of India's electoral system, capturing the essence of democratic progress.

What are the Key Electoral Reforms Enacted in India?

- **Foundation of Election Commission and First General Election:** The Election Commission of India was founded on **25th January 1950**, under the leadership of **Sukumar Sen** (originally the commission had only a Chief Election Commissioner).
Inaugural General Election held from **October 1951 to February 1952**, marking the participation of 17.5 crore voters amidst logistical hurdles.
Despite an illiterate electorate and refugee populations, India embraced [universal suffrage for citizens above 21 years](#).
- **Lowering of Voting Age:** The [61st Constitutional Amendment Act of 1984](#) reduced the **voting age from 21 years to 18 years** for the Lok Sabha as well as the assembly elections.
This was done to provide the unrepresented youth of the country an opportunity to express their feelings and help them become a part of the political process.
- **Deputation to Election Commission:** In 1985, a provision was made that the officers and the staff engaged in the preparation, revision and correction of electoral rolls for elections are **deemed to be on deputation to the Election Commission** for the period of such employment.
These personnel, during that period, would be under the control, superintendence and discipline of the Election Commission.

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- **ECI as Multi-Member Commission:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) became a Multi-Member Commission for the first time in **1989**.
 On 1st January 1990, the positions of these additional election commissioners were abolished.
 However, the ECJ became a three-member body again on 1st **October 1993** (with one Chief Election Commissioner and two election commissioners), which remains the structure today.
- **Transition to Ballot Papers from Coloured Ballot Box:** In the early years of Indian elections, **individual coloured ballot boxes were used for each candidate**.
 Voters would cast their votes by dropping paper ballots into the respective boxes, a method that required meticulous counting and posed challenges in preventing fraud and manipulation.
 The **introduction of ballot papers marked a crucial step towards streamlining the voting process**.
 - ♦ Voters would mark their preferences on paper ballots, which were then collected and counted manually.
 - ♦ While this **method improved vote counting accuracy**, it still had limitations such as potential errors and delays in announcing results.
- **Electronic Voting Machines:** In 1989, a provision was made to facilitate the use of **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)** in elections.
 The EVMs were used for the first time in 1998 on experimental basis in selected constituencies in the elections to the Assemblies of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. The EVMs were used for the first time in the **general elections (entire state) to the Assembly of Goa in 1999**.
 They are indigenously designed, developed and manufactured by **Bharat Electronic Ltd. and Electronics Corporation of India Ltd.** under technical guidance of the Election Commission's Technical Expert Committee.
- **Provision Against Booth Capturing:** In 1989, a provision was made for adjournment of poll or countermanding of elections in case of booth capturing. **Booth capturing** includes:
 - seizure of a polling station and making polling authorities surrender ballot papers or voting machines
 - taking possession of polling station and allowing only one's own supporters to exercise their franchise
 - threatening and preventing any elector from going to polling station
 - seizure of the place being used for counting of votes.
- **Model Code of Conduct (MCC):** T.N. Seshan's tenure as CEC was one the most influential periods for the ECI, marked by his efforts to enforce the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** with greater efficacy.
 Originating in Kerala in 1960, the MCC initially comprised basic 'Dos and Don'ts.'
 By **1979**, the ECI, in collaboration with political parties, expanded the code, including measures to curb the misuse of power by the ruling party for unfair advantages in elections.
 It was also during his tenure that **electors' photo identity cards (EPICs)** were introduced in 1993.
- **Allocation of Time on Electronic Media:** Under a 2003 provision, the Election Commission should **allocate equitable sharing of time on the cable television network** and other electronic media during elections to display or propagate any matter or to address the public.
- **Restrictions Imposed on Exit Polls:** According to a **2009 provision**, conducting exit polls and publishing results of exit polls would be prohibited during the election to **Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies**.
 "Exit-poll" is an opinion survey regarding how electors have voted at an election or how all the electors have performed with regard to the identification of a political party or candidate in an election.
- **Online Enrolment in the Electoral Roll:** In 2013, a provision was made for online filing of applications for enrolment in the electoral roll. For this purpose, the Central Government, after consulting the Election Commission, made the rules known as the **Registration of the Electors**

(Amendment) Rules, 2013.

- **None of the Above Option:** The Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to include the [None of the Above \(NOTA\) option](#) in ballot papers and EVMs, allowing voters to abstain from voting for any candidate while maintaining ballot secrecy.
NOTA was introduced in elections in **2013**, ensuring voters' right to abstain from voting discreetly.
- **Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail System:** ECI started exploring the possibility of introducing a [Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail \(VVPAT\) system](#) to increase transparency and verifiability in the poll process.
In 2011, a prototype was developed and demonstrated before the ECI and its expert committee.
In August 2013, the Central government notified the amended **Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961**, enabling the ECI to use VVPAT with EVMs.
The VVPAT was used with EVMs for the first time in a **bye-election** from the 51-Noksen Assembly Constituency of **Nagaland**.

Note

As per Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) calculations, even counting slips from **479** randomly [selected VVPATs across the country would guarantee](#) over **99%** accuracy.

- **Appointment of Election Commissioners:** Previously, the chief election commissioner and election commissioners were appointed by the President on the recommendation of the central government.
However, in March 2023, the Supreme Court in [Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India Case](#) highlighted the recommendations from the **Dinesh Goswami Committee on Electoral Reforms (1990)** and the **Law Commission's 255th report on Electoral Reforms (2015)**.
 - ♦ Both committees suggested a committee comprising the **Prime Minister, Chief Justice of India (CJI), and the Leader of the Opposition** for appointing the CEC and ECs.The recent [CEC and Other ECs \(Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office\) 2023](#) supersedes the Election Commission Act, 1991 covering the appointment, salaries, and dismissal procedures for the CEC and ECs.
 - ♦ Under the new law, the President appoints them based on recommendations from a **Selection Committee** comprising the **Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition** or the leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha.

What are the Key Committees Related to Electoral Reforms?

- **Dinesh Goswami Committee on Electoral Reforms (1990)**
- **Vohra Committee on Crime-Politics Nexus (1993)**
- **Indrajit Gupta Committee on State Funding of Elections (1998)**
- **Second Administrative Reforms Commission Report on Ethics in Governance (2007)** headed by **Veerappa Moily**
- **Tankha Committee (Core Committee) on Election Laws and Reforms (2010)**

Indelible Ink- Symbol of Indian Elections

- The **indelible ink**, a symbol of Indian elections, is used to prevent multiple voting. It contains **silver nitrate** and remains visible even after exposure to soap or liquids for up to **72** hours.
- The ink, initially made by the [Council of Scientific & Industrial Research \(CSIR\)](#) and patented by the National Research Development Corporation, is now solely produced by **Mysore Paints & Varnish Ltd.**, a **prominent undertaking of Govt. of Karnataka** and exported to over **25** countries.

Note

- EVMs and VVPATs are designed and manufactured indigenously by **Bharat Electronic Limited (BEL)**, a PSU under the Defence Ministry, and the **Electronic Corporation of India Limited (ECIL)**, another PSU under the Department of Atomic Energy.

Drishti Mains Question:

Examine the influence of electoral reforms in India, encompassing technological advancements, voting age changes, and measures to enforce ethical conduct.

Why in News?

Recently, the [Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India \(IRDAI\)](#) has lifted the age ceiling for buying a [medical insurance policy](#), a move that widens the insurance net and provides huge relief to senior Indians.

- Also, the **Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bengaluru** has introduced 'Longevity India,' aimed at studying [aging-related health issues](#) and creating interventions for better health among the elderly.

What are the IRDAI's Recent Directions Related to Health Insurance?

- IRDAI has dissolved the barrier to applying for health insurance in India that allowed only individuals aged 65 and lower to purchase health covers.
It has instructed insurers to create specialised products for different demographics such as **senior citizens, students, children, and maternity**.
- It has also emphasised that insurers should strive to provide coverage for individuals with all types of pre-existing medical conditions, as outlined in the "**Specific provisions applicable to health insurance products**" published in the Government of India Gazette.
Coverage for individuals with pre-existing medical conditions, such as [cancer](#) or [heart failure](#), is now available without refusal.
It may increase insurance density and insurance penetration in India.
- Insurers are also required to offer premium payment in installments for policyholder convenience, and travel policies can only be provided by general and health insurers.
Furthermore, there is no cap on coverage for [AYUSH](#) treatments, including Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy.

What are the Areas of Uncertainty in IRDAI's Recent Health Insurance Directives?

- **Affordability for Senior Citizens:** One major concern is whether the **health insurance premiums for senior citizens will be affordable**.
As people age, the risk of medical issues increases, which could lead insurers to price their products quite high for the elderly population.
The government may need to **consider subsidies or other measures to make these policies accessible** and affordable for seniors with limited income and savings.
- **Waiting Period for Pre-existing Conditions:** Typically, insurance companies impose a waiting period (e.g., 2-4 years) before covering pre-existing medical conditions.
More detailed regulations will be key in assessing their **consumer-friendliness**, particularly regarding waiting periods and immediate coverage conditions.
- **Impact on Out-of-Pocket Medical Expenditure:** While increasing health insurance penetration is a positive step, it may not directly translate to a significant reduction in out-of-pocket medical expenses for Indians.
This will depend on factors like the **extent of coverage offered, co-pay rates, sub-limits, and overall affordability** of the policies.
Comprehensive coverage with reasonable co-pays and limits will be required to make a substantial dent in the high out-of-pocket expenditure.

Note:

- **Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE)** is the money paid directly by households, at the point of receiving health care.
- It **excludes the individuals covered under any public or private insurance or social protection scheme**.

What is the Current Status of Insurance Sector in India?

- **About:** The Indian Insurance market is expected to reach **USD 200 billion by 2027** and **6th** largest insurance market by 2032.
India is currently the **9th** largest life insurance market and **14th** largest non-life insurance market globally.
Both life and non-life insurance sectors have witnessed double-digit growth rates in recent years.
- **Insurance Penetration and Density:** In India, insurance penetration which was 2.7% in 2001, steadily increased to 4.2% in 2020 and remained the same in 2021.
Also, there has been a sharp increase in insurance density in India. Whole life insurance density went up from USD 9.1 in 2001-02 to **USD 69 in 2021-22**.
Insurance penetration and density are two metrics often used to assess the level of development of the insurance sector in a country.
 - ♦ While insurance penetration is measured as the **percentage of insurance premiums to a country's GDP**, insurance density is calculated **GDP as the ratio of premium to population** (per capita premium).
- **Key Drivers of Growth:**
 - Rising Disposable Income:** As the Indian economy expands, so does disposable income, allowing people to allocate more towards financial security products like insurance.
 - ♦ Gross national disposable income is expected to expand by **8.9%** in FY24.
 - ♦ Also, by 2030, India will add 140 Million middle-income and 21 Million high-income households which will drive the demand and growth of the Indian insurance sector.
 - Government Initiatives:** Schemes like [Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana \(PMJJBY\)](#) and [Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana \(PMSBY\)](#) are boosting insurance penetration in rural areas.
 - ♦ The FDI policy permits **74% foreign investment** in Indian insurance companies.
 - ♦ Also, [Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY](#) is the largest health assurance scheme in the world and is funded by the Government.
 - Pandemic-related Shift in Demand Patterns:** [Covid-19](#) pandemic has increased the insurance penetration rate and triggered **awareness on insurance and demand for protection products**, especially health insurance.

What are the Key Challenges Faced by Elderly Population in India?

- **Status of Elderly Population in India:** Recently, India became the world's most populous country surpassing China.
More importantly, a [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#) study has projected that by 2050, the country would be home to over **31 crore people above the age of 60**.
- **Challenges:**
 - Lack of Healthcare Access:** Affordability is a major barrier to proper healthcare for the elderly in India.
 - ♦ Chronic diseases are common, but **limited access to geriatric specialists** and specialists trained in managing age-related health issues worsen their condition.
 - Elder Abuse and Neglect:** Unfortunately, elder abuse is a growing concern. They are vulnerable to financial exploitation, physical or emotional abuse, and neglect.
 - ♦ At least 5% of India's elderly population (aged 60 years and above) stated they experienced ill-treatment in 2020, according to the **Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI)**.
 - Digital Divide:** Many government programs and services are shifting online, leaving some **tech-unsavvy elderly citizens** struggling to access them.
 - Financial Insecurity:** A large portion of the elderly population lives below the poverty line, lacking a pension or savings for their healthcare and daily needs.
 - Social Isolation and Loneliness:** The breakdown of joint families and migration of younger generations to cities lead to social isolation for the elderly.
 - ♦ This lack of social connection contributes to mental health issues like depression and anxiety.
- **Measures Need to be Taken:**
 - Age-Friendly Infrastructure:** Developing age-friendly infrastructure and public spaces

with features like **ramps, handrails, accessible transportation, and senior-friendly housing designs** can enhance mobility and independence for the elderly.

Strengthening Elder Abuse Laws: Implement stricter laws against elder abuse and create accessible reporting mechanisms for victims.

Silver Preneurship Hubs: Establish co-working spaces specifically designed for seniors with expertise and entrepreneurial spirit who can offer mentorship, business development support to new age startups to help them launch or scale their own businesses.

Senior Influencer Network: Identifying tech-savvy seniors in social media with strong communication skills and creating a network of "**senior influencers.**"

- ♦ These individuals can **promote healthy ageing, debunk myths about elderly care, and advocate for policies** that benefit their generation on social media platforms.

What Measures can be Taken to Rejuvenate India's Insurance Sector?

- **Parametric Insurance:** Leverage **data analytics and IoT** to create parametric insurance products that pay out based on **pre-defined triggers/parameters** (e.g., rainfall levels for crop insurance).
This could simplify claims processes and improve transparency.
- **Employer-driven Group Insurance:** Incentivise and promote employer-driven group insurance schemes, especially for sectors with a high **proportion of informal workers** (e.g., **construction, manufacturing**).
This can help achieve scale and improve insurance penetration.
In this regard, India can learn from Germany's **Bismarck Model**.
 - ♦ The **Bismarck model** is characterised by the **mandatory participation of individuals in a social insurance program**, which is funded through contributions from **both employers and employees**.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Fostering more public-private partnerships (PPPs) between insurers and government agencies/bodies.
PPPs can help design and distribute need-based, affordable insurance solutions, especially in underserved areas and segments.
- **Insurance Awareness Campaigns:** Undertake large-scale, multimedia awareness campaigns in partnership with the regulator and industry bodies.
These campaigns should focus on increasing insurance literacy, highlighting the benefits of being insured, and addressing common myths and misconceptions to achieve Insurance for All by 2047.
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What is IRDAI?

- IRDAI is a statutory body formed under the **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999 (IRDA Act, 1999)** for overall supervision and development of the Insurance sector in India.
The powers and functions of the Authority are laid down in the IRDA Act, 1999 and Insurance Act, 1938.
- The **Insurance Act, 1938** is the principal Act governing the Insurance sector in India. It provides the powers to IRDAI to frame regulations which lay down the regulatory framework for supervision of the entities operating in the Insurance sector.

Global Forest Watch (GFW)

Why in News?

Recently, the latest data from the **Global Forest Watch (GFW)** monitoring project has revealed that India has lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since the year 2000.

- This loss amounts to a 6% decrease in tree cover during this period.

What are the Key Findings of Global Forest Watch (GFW)?

- **Total Loss:** The GFW data reveals that India lost a staggering 4,14,000 hectares of humid **primary forest** (approximately 4.1% of the total tree cover) between 2002 and 2023.
A **primary forest** is a forest that **hasn't been damaged by human activity**.
- **Carbon Impact:** Over the same period (from 2001 to 2022), Indian forests emitted 51 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent annually while simultaneously removing 141 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent each year.
This **net carbon balance** represents a carbon sink of approximately 89.9 million tons annually.
- **Natural Forests:** A striking 95% of the tree cover loss in India between 2013 and 2023 occurred within natural forests.
- **Peak Years:** Notably, the maximum tree cover loss of 189,000 hectares occurred in 2017, followed by 175,000 hectares in 2016, and 144,000 hectares in 2023—the highest in the last six years.
- **State-Level Impact:** Five states accounted for 60% of all tree cover loss between 2001 and 2023. **Assam** experienced the highest tree cover loss at 324,000 hectares (compared to an average of 66,600 hectares).
Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Manipur also faced significant losses.
- **Impact of Forest Fire:** Fires were **responsible for 1.6% of tree cover loss in India** between

2001 and 2022.

The year **2008** recorded the maximum tree cover loss due to fires, amounting to 3,000 hectares.

From 2001 to 2022, **Odisha** had the highest rate of tree cover loss due to fires with an average of 238 hectares lost per year.

- **Tree Cover Loss and Climate Change:** Forests play a dual role, **acting as a sink by absorbing carbon dioxide when standing or regrowing**, and as a source when cleared or degraded.

The loss of forests accelerates climate change by releasing stored carbon into the atmosphere.

Status of Forest at the Global Level

- From 2002 to 2023, there was a total of 76.3 Mha (million hectares acre) **humid primary forest lost globally**, making up 16% of its total tree cover loss in the same time.
- From 2001 to 2023, there was a total of 488 Mha of **tree cover loss globally**, equivalent to a 12% decrease in tree cover since 2000.
- Globally from 2001 to 2022, 23% of tree cover loss occurred in areas where the dominant drivers of loss resulted in **deforestation**.
- Globally as of 2010, the **top 5 countries** represent 55% of all tree cover.
Russia had the most tree cover at 755 Mha compared to an average of 16.9 Mha followed by **Brazil, Canada, the US, Democratic Republic of Congo**.
- From 2001 to 2022, there was a total of 126 Mha of **tree cover lost from fires globally** and 333 Mha from all other drivers of loss.
- **Initial Tree Cover:**
In 2010, the world's tree cover spanned approximately 3.92 billion hectares (Gha), which translates to **roughly 30% of the Earth's land area**.
This extensive tree cover included various types of forests, woodlands, and other vegetated areas with trees.
- **Tree Cover Loss:**
Between 2010 and 2023, the world witnessed a significant loss of tree cover.
The total global tree cover loss during this period amounted to 28.3 million hectares (Mha).
This loss occurred **due to various factors**, including deforestation, land-use changes, and

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natural disturbances.

What are the Major Forest Conservation Initiatives in India?

▪ Forest Cover in India:

The Forest Survey of India (FSI) has been conducting biennial (once every two years) assessments of forest cover since 1987, and the findings are published in the [India State of Forest Report \(ISFR\)](#).

As per the latest assessment in [ISFR 2021](#), India's total forest and tree cover stands at 8,09,537 square kilometres, which accounts for 24.62% of the country's geographical area.

Notably, this represents an increase of 2261 square kilometres compared to the [ISFR 2019](#) assessment, indicating positive strides in forest conservation efforts.

▪ Government Initiatives to Boost Forest Cover:

[National Action Plan on Climate Change \(NAPCC\)](#): It was launched in 2008 and aimed at creating awareness among the representatives of the public, different agencies of government, scientists, industry, and communities on the threat posed by climate change and the steps to counter it.

- ♦ [National Mission for Green India](#): It is one of the eight Missions outlined under the NAPCC.

- ♦ It aims at protecting; restoring and enhancing India's diminishing forest cover and responding to climate change by a combination of adaptation and mitigation measures.

[Nagar Van Yojana \(NVY\)](#): Launched in 2020, NVY aims to create 600 Nagar Vans and 400 Nagar Vatika in urban and peri-urban areas by 2024-25.

- ♦ The initiative intends to enhance the green cover, preserve biological diversity, and improve the quality of life for urban dwellers.

[Compensatory Afforestation Fund \(CAMPA\)](#): Utilised by States/UTs for compensatory afforestation to offset forest land diversion for developmental projects.

- ♦ 90% of the CAF money is to be given to the states while 10% is to be retained by the Centre.

[Multi-Departmental Efforts](#): Apart from the central initiatives, afforestation activities are taken up under various programs and schemes of line Ministries, State Governments/UT Administrations, Non-Government Organizations, Civil Society, and Corporate bodies.

- ♦ Some notable efforts include participation in the [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme](#), [National Bamboo Mission](#), and [Sub-Mission on Agroforestry](#).

[Draft National Forest Policy](#): A draft National Forest Policy was released in 2019.

- ♦ The basic thrust of the draft is the conservation, protection and management of forests along with safeguarding the interest of tribals and forest-dependent people.

Note

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change defines 'forest cover' in India as "all lands, more than one hectare in an area with a tree canopy density of more than 10%", and 'tree cover' as "tree patches outside recorded forest areas exclusive of forest cover and less than the minimum mappable area of one hectare".
- However, the [Supreme Court](#) recently has directed governments to follow the "broad and all-encompassing" definition of forest as laid down in its 1996 judgment in the [T N Godavarman](#) case until a consolidated record of all kinds of forests across the country is prepared.

What is the Status of Forests in India?

- According to the [India State of Forest Report 2021](#), the total forest and tree cover in India is 24.62% of the geographical area of the country. The total forest cover is 21.71% and the total tree cover is 2.91%.

- Area-wise **Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover** in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra.
- In terms of forest cover as % of total geographical area, the top five States are Mizoram (84.53%), Arunachal Pradesh (79.33%), Meghalaya (76.00%), Manipur (74.34%) and Nagaland (73.90%).



[Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#), there were 6.26M people employed in India's Forestry sector in 2010.

- According to the FAO, the **forestry sector** contributed a net -690 million USD to the economy in 2010, which is approximately -0.037% of India's [GDP](#).
- In India, **wood fibre or timber** represents the **largest plantation area** by type, spanning 5.92 Mha and 1.9% of land area.

[Lakshadweep](#) has the **largest relative plantation area** in India at 76%, most of which is in fruit plantations.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

[Source: TP](#)

Why in News?

Recently, [NHRC](#) convened a meeting of all seven **national commissions** to discuss protecting the rights of [vulnerable sections](#), aiming to share best practices and collaborate on implementation strategies.

- The seven bodies include [National Commission for Women \(NCW\)](#), [National Commission for Scheduled Castes \(NCSC\)](#), [National Commission for Scheduled Tribes \(NCST\)](#), [National Commission for Protection of Child Rights \(NCPCR\)](#), [National Commission for Minorities \(NCM\)](#), [National Commission for Backward Classes \(NCBC\)](#), [Office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities](#).

What are the Outcomes of the Joint Sitting of Human Rights Bodies?

- **Joint Strategies for Effective Implementation:**

NHRC emphasised the need for **collaboration** among all seven national commissions to frame **joint strategies** for **effectively implementing** existing legislations and schemes to protect human rights.

NHRC highlighted the importance of learning from each other's experiences to ensure equality and dignity for [SC-ST communities](#), [women](#), and marginalised sections of society.
- **Mechanical Cleaning of Septic Tanks:**

NHRC also stressed the importance of mechanically cleaning [septic tanks](#) and urged states and local bodies to follow the **NHRC's advisory** on this matter.
- **Collaboration for Research:**

There should be collaboration among all commissions for research to **avoid duplication of efforts**.

The common subjects of research between **NHRC** and the [National Commission for Women \(NCW\)](#) were highlighted and it was emphasised the need for compatibility of state statutory provisions to ensure uniformity in property rights for women.
- **Challenges in Education and Technology:**

The Chairperson of the [National Commission for Scheduled Caste](#) discussed the challenge of ensuring the equitable benefits of the [new education policy](#) and emerging technology reach the people.

He emphasised that change in mindset cannot be brought by laws alone but also requires **compassion and sensitivity**.

Delays in compensation under the [SC and ST Act](#) were highlighted, along with the need to review victim compensation schemes in all states.
- **Rights of Children:**

The Chairperson of the [National Commission for Protection of Child Rights \(NCPCR\)](#) highlighted the proactive work of the commission in ensuring the rights of children.

 - ♦ The commission has been monitoring eight portals and has ensured the rehabilitation of over one lakh **orphan children**.
 - ♦ It has also issued guidelines and SOPs for the protection of child rights.

Enhanced compensation under [National Legal Services Authority \(NALSA\)](#) and the

state obligation to intervene in child rights violations in private schools were also emphasised.

▪ **Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities:**

[Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities](#) said over the years with the increase in rights consciousness among 'divyangjan', so have the related challenges.

- ♦ E.g: The visually-impaired have been facing the problem of captcha codes while accessing online services.

▪ **Scope for Cooperation and Structured Approach:**

It was agreed upon that there is a need to advocate for **enhanced cooperation** among **commissions** and a **structured approach** to safeguarding societal rights, emphasising the value of institutional interactions, **collaborative advisories**, and utilising the 'HRCNet portal' for **synergy and efficiency**.

- ♦ HRCNet is a **web based online portal**, provides a **centralised approach to handle complaints**, received from aggrieved citizens.

ational Commissions for Protection of Vulnerable Sections

▪ **National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC):**

The [NCSC](#) was established by **Article 338**.

It consists of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and three other members **appointed by the President**.

▪ **[National Commission for Scheduled Tribes \(NCST\):](#)**

The [NCST](#) was established under **Article 338 A**.

It consists of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and three other members appointed by the [President](#).

▪ **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC):**

The **102nd Amendment Act of 2018** elevated the Commission from a **statutory body to a constitutional body** by inserting **Article 338 B**.

The Commission consists of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and three other members.

Note: The aforementioned trio of Commissions (NCSC, NCST, NCBC) possesses the authority **equivalent to that of a civil court**.

▪ **National Commission for Women (NCW):**

The NCW was set up as a **statutory body** in 1992 under the [National Commission for Women Act, 1990](#) to review the Constitutional and Legal safeguards for women.

The Commission shall consist of a Chairperson, five Members, at least one Member from SC and ST and a Member-Secretary nominated by the Central Government.

▪ **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR):**

The NCPCR has been constituted under the [Commission for Protection of Child Rights \(CPCR\) Act, 2005](#).

The commission includes a chairperson and six members, at least two of whom are women.

▪ **National Commission for Minorities (NCM):**

The Minorities Commission was renamed and became a **statutory body** under the [National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992](#).

Section 2 (c) of NCM Act, 1992 stipulates that 'Minority' for the purposes of the Act, means a community notified as such by the Central Government.

- ♦ Government recognized Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians and Jains as minority communities.

Commission consists of a Chairperson, a Vice- Chairperson, five Members.

Each Member holds office for a period of three years.

▪ **Office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities:**

Section 74 of [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016](#) provides for appointment of a **Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities** and **two Commissioners** to assist the Chief Commissioner at the Centre.

What is the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)?

- **About:**

It ensures the protection of [rights related to life, liberty](#), equality, and dignity of individuals.
Rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution and international covenants enforceable by Indian courts.
- **Establishment:**

Established on 12th October 1993, under the [Protection of Human Rights Act \(PHRA\), 1993](#).
Amended by the Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2006, and Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2019.
Established in conformity with the Paris Principles, adopted for promoting and protecting human rights.
- **Composition:**

The Commission consists of a **chairperson**, five full-time Members and seven deemed Members.
Chairman is a former **Chief Justice of India** or a [Supreme Court judge](#).
- **Appointment and Tenure:**

Chairman and members appointed by the [President](#) on the recommendations of a six-member committee.
The committee consists of the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the [Lok Sabha](#), the Deputy Chairman of the [Rajya Sabha](#), leaders of the Opposition in both Houses of Parliament, and the Union Home Minister.
The chairman and members hold office for a term of **three years** or until they reach the age of 70.
- **Role and Function:**

Possesses powers of a civil court with judicial proceedings.
Empowered to utilise the services of central or state government officers or investigation agencies for investigating human rights violations.
Can investigate matters within one year of their occurrence.
Functions are primarily recommendatory in nature.

What are the Shortcomings in Functioning of NHRC?

- **Non-Binding Nature of Recommendations:**

Although the NHRC investigates human rights violations and provides recommendations, it **cannot compel authorities** to take specific actions. Its influence remains largely moral rather than legal.
- **Inability to Punish Violators:**

The NHRC lacks the authority to punish violators. Despite identifying perpetrators of human rights abuses, the NHRC **cannot directly impose** penalties or award relief to victims. This limitation undermines its effectiveness.
- **Limited Role in Armed Forces Cases:**

The NHRC's jurisdiction over human rights violations by armed forces is restricted. Cases involving military personnel often **fall outside the NHRC's purview**, hindering comprehensive accountability.
- **Time Limitations in Case of Historical Human Rights Violations:**

The NHRC cannot consider violations reported after one year. This limitation prevents the NHRC from addressing historical or delayed human rights grievances effectively.
- **Resource Constraints:**

The NHRC faces **resource shortages**. With a high caseload and limited resources, the NHRC struggles to handle investigations, inquiries, and public awareness campaigns efficiently.
Several state human rights commissions are working without their chief, and like the NHRC they are also going through shortage of staff.
- **Lack of Independence:**

The NHRC's composition relies on government appointments. Ensuring complete independence from political influence remains a challenge, affecting its credibility.

- **Need for Proactive Interventions:**

The NHRC often responds reactively to complaints. A more **proactive approach**, including preventive measures and early intervention, could enhance its impact.

What are the Steps Need to be Taken to Strengthen Working of NHRC?

- **Improve the Scope and Effectiveness:**

Broaden the NHRC's **mandate** to address emerging human rights challenges effectively. For example **Artificial Intelligence, Deep Fake, Climate Change etc.**

- **Granting Enforcement Powers:**

Empower the NHRC with **punitive powers** to enforce its recommendations. This would enhance accountability and compliance.

- **Composition Reforms:**

The current composition **lacks diversity**. Appoint members from civil society, activists, and experts to ensure a holistic perspective.

- **Developing an Independent Cadre:**

The NHRC faces **resource constraints**. Establish an independent cadre of staff with relevant expertise in human rights issues.

- **Strengthening State Human Rights Commissions:**

State Human Rights Commissions need support. Facilitate collaboration, capacity building, and knowledge sharing among state commissions.

- **Advocacy and Public Awareness:**

Reactive responses may limit the impact. Engage in **proactive advocacy**, awareness campaigns, and education to empower citizens about their rights.

- **International Cooperation:**

India can benefit from international experiences. Collaborate with **international human rights bodies**, learn from their practices, and adopt relevant strategies.

Colossal Snake Fossil Unearthed in Gujarat

[Source: DTE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, palaeontologists (experts concerned with fossil animals and plants) in India have discovered the fossilised remains of a **colossal snake** that roamed the swamps of Gujarat approximately 47 million years ago.

- Researchers suggest *Vasuki indicus* rivalled the infamous **Titanoboa**, being one of the largest known predators.

What are the Key Findings About Vasuki Indicus?

- **About:**

- *Vasuki Indicus*: The newly identified species, *Vasuki indicus*, belongs to the now-extinct **Madtsoiidae** [snake family](#).
 - ♦ It is a **Gondwanan terrestrial snake**, that lived during the warm Middle Eocene period, spanning from the [Upper Cretaceous](#) (100.5 to 66 mya (million years ago)) to the Late Pleistocene epochs (0.126 to 0.012 mya).

Size Estimates: The fossilised remains suggest lengths between **10.9 and 15.2 metres**, surpassing even the largest modern snakes.

- ♦ This discovery sheds light on the evolution of **large body sizes**, possibly influenced by high temperatures in the [tropical zones](#) of that era.
- ♦ The warm Middle Eocene climate likely played a role in the evolution of large body sizes among ancient snakes.
 - ♦ *Vasuki indicus* thrived during this period, adapting to the tropical conditions.

Biogeography Implications: The presence of this giant **Eocene snake** has significant implications for **madtsoiid biogeography**.

- ♦ It provides insights into how organisms were geographically distributed during that

time and the factors driving their evolution.

***Vasuki indicus* Named After Mythical Serpent:**

- ♦ The species is named after Vasuki, a serpent associated with [Lord Shiva](#) in Hindu mythology.
- ♦ This connection adds **cultural significance** to the discovery.

▪ **Other Large Snake:**

Titanoboa (*Titanoboa cerrejonensis*):

- ♦ Titanoboa is an extinct snake that lived during the **Paleocene Epoch** (66 to 56 mya), considered to be the **largest known member** of the **suborder Serpentes**.
- ♦ From extrapolations of body size made from excavated vertebrae (individual sections of the backbone), palaeontologists have estimated that the body length of the average adult Titanoboa was roughly 13 metres and the average weight about 1.25 tons.

Anaconda (genus *Eunectes*):

- ♦ Anaconda classified in the **family Boidae**, are large, constricting, water-loving snakes found in **tropical South America**, with three to five species.
- ♦ Green anacondas are among the largest snakes in the world, growing up to 9 meters long and weighing up to 250 kg.

What are the Key Facts About the Madtsoiidae Family of Snakes?

- The Madtsoiidae family of snakes, now extinct, once roamed the ancient lands of [Gondwana](#).
- Their fossil record spans from the **early Cenomanian period** (during the Upper Cretaceous) to the late Pleistocene.
These fascinating serpents left their traces in various regions **across the globe, including South America, Africa, India, Australia, and Southern Europe.**
- **Genera and Diversity:**
Vasuki: Known for its impressive length, measuring at least 11-12 meters (approximately 36-39 feet).
Wonambi and Yurlunggur: These Australian snakes also belong to the Madtsoiidae family.
 - ♦ These ancient snakes probably used a hunting strategy akin to modern boas and pythons by constricting their prey.
- **Evolutionary Significance:**
Madtsoiids persisted in **Australia** until the Pleistocene, but their existence elsewhere declined during the Eocene epoch.
While some species survived in South America and India through the Oligocene, their overall presence waned.

Patient Safety Rights Charter

[Source: WHO](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) launched a first-ever **Patient Safety Rights Charter** at the **Global Ministerial Summit on Patient Safety**.

- It is the **first Charter to outline patients' rights** in the context of safety.
- It will help governments and hospitals in **formulating the legislation, policies and guidelines** needed to ensure patient safety.

What are the Key Features of the Patient Safety Rights Charter?

- The charter outlines **the core rights of all patients in the context of the safety of health care** and seeks to assist governments and other stakeholders to ensure that the voices of patients are heard and their right to safe health care is protected.
- The Charter covers **10 [patient safety](#) rights** crucial to **mitigate risks** and prevent unintentional harm, which includes the
 - Timely, effective and appropriate care
 - Safe health care processes and practices
 - Qualified and competent health workers
 - Safe medical products and their safe and rational use
 - Safe and secure health care facilities
 - Dignity, respect, non-discrimination, privacy and confidentiality
 - Information, education and supported decision making
 - Access medical records

To be heard and fair resolution
Patient and family engagement.

What is Patient Safety? °

- **About:**
Patient safety encompasses efforts to prevent unintended harm during healthcare provision, a critical aspect of global healthcare.
- **Factors Contributing to Patient Harm:**
Identified Sources of Harm: Medication errors, surgical errors, healthcare-associated infections, sepsis, diagnostic errors, and patient falls as frequent causes of patient harm.
Varied Factors: Patient harm arises from **system and organisational failures**, technological limitations, human factors, and patient-related circumstances, illustrating the multi-dimensional nature of patient safety incidents.

What is the Need of Patient Safety Charter?

- **Ensuring Safety of Patients:**
Approximately **1 in 10 patients** encounter harm during healthcare procedures, resulting in over 3 million annual deaths attributed to unsafe care, as reported by the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#).
According to the OECD, **investing in patient safety positively impacts** health outcomes, reduces costs related to patient harm, improves system efficiency, and helps in reassuring communities and restoring their trust in health care systems.
- **Preventing Avoidable Harm:**
The **majority of patient harm is avoidable**, underscoring the vital role of engaging patients, families, and caregivers in minimising harm.
Patient harm often results from **poorly designed healthcare systems**, not isolated incidents.
- **Implementation of the Global Patient Safety Action Plan 2021-2030:**
A **2023 survey of WHO Member States** revealed gaps in implementing the **Global Patient Safety Action Plan 2021-2030**, emphasising the need for patient representation and addressing income-based disparities in implementation.
Interim results of the survey showed **only 13% of responding countries have a patient representative** on the governing board or an equivalent mechanism in the majority of their hospitals.
- **Targeting SDG:**
Patient safety is a **critical global priority** and essential for achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\)-3](#): "Good Health and well-being".

Why in News?

Recently, the famous **Hazratbal Dargah** in **Srinagar** is attracting locals for a rare spectacle of the washing and clipping of the **largest carpet** woven in Kashmir so far.

What is Kashmir's Magic Carpet?

▪ About:

- **Kashmir's magic carpet made in Kashan Style is an intricate marvel**, 72 feet in length and 40 feet in width, weighing 1,685 kg, and **featuring over three crore knots**. It has taken **eight years** to weave, with artisans returning to the traditional trade and overcoming several challenges including the 2014 floods, the [abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir](#) in 2019, and the waves of the [Covid-19 pandemic](#).
 - ♦ At least 30 people are required to unroll this mammoth carpet.
 - ♦ A dedicated team of 30-35 professional washers diligently tends to it on a daily basis.
 - ♦ It is likely to embellish a palace in the [Middle East](#).

Kashmiri artisans are competing for the first time against their long-standing **Iranian competitor**, who have crafted a carpet the size of a soccer field at 60,468 square feet.

▪ Kashan Style:

The carpet follows the **Kashan style**, a historic design borrowed from the **Iranian city of Kashan**.

The **Kashan style of ceramic art**, originating from the historic city of **Kashan in Persia** (modern-day Iran), has captivated art enthusiasts for centuries.

Known for its **exquisite execution and intricate patterns**, Kashan ware represents a harmonious blend of tradition, innovation, and artistic finesse.

▪ Historical Context:

Legacy of Zain-ul-Abidin: The carpet craft traces its roots back to the **15th century** when **Badshah Zain-ul-Abidin** invited artisans from Persia and Central Asia to settle in Kashmir.

From Shawls to Carpets: Initially, the focus was on weaving exquisite [pashmina shawls](#). However, with the decline of demand due to **jacquard looms in Europe**, artisans shifted their skills to **carpet weaving**.

British Recognition: Kashmiri carpets gained global acclaim after being exhibited at the Great London Exhibition of 1851.

Prizes and Distinction: These carpets continued to shine at exhibitions in Chicago, Paris, and London during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Weaving Secrets: The secret blueprints, known as **talim**, guide artisans across generations, preserving the ancient techniques.

Ans: (c)

Archaeological Sites Discovered in Telangana

[Source: TH](#)

Recently, three new archaeological sites were discovered in Telangana by a team of archaeologists led by Prof. K.P. Rao.

- A unique **Iron Age megalithic site** having **over 200 monuments** with a new type of megalithic monument known as '**Dolmenoid Cists**', not found elsewhere in India.
It was found at place called Ooragutta near Bandala village, **Telangana**.
- These "Dolmenoid **cists**" have **capstones** that **determine the shape of the monument**, unlike the usual square or rectangular forms.
The monuments are estimated to be around 1,000 BCE.
- It was suggested that these might be an **earlier form of the more common square/rectangular megaliths** seen in India and similar to **European Passage Chambers**.
- The team also discovered **two new rock art sites** at Damaratogu village.
- It includes the site, "**Devarlabanda Mula**" featuring **animal depictions without humans or weapons/domestic animals**.
This suggests the paintings might be from the **Mesolithic Age (8000-3000 BCE)**.

Read more: [Mesolithic Age](#), [Megalithic site](#)

Geofencing

[Source: TH](#)

The [Election Commission of India \(ECI\)](#)'s website has been blocked outside India for months for security reasons.

- The geofenced sites include the ECI's Home Page, its Voter registration portal, and its Right to Information portal.
- But, the results portal, which reports the outcome of all polls the ECI administers, remains accessible.

Geofencing:

- **Geofencing** means "**security by obscurity**" measure, which allows those running websites to **evade the most direct forms of cyber attacks from abroad** by being fully inaccessible.
- Geofencing makes search engines less effective at indexing searched pages and turning them up in results.
- On the other side, good-faith security researchers are also prevented from flagging vulnerabilities while probing sites from abroad.

[Read more...](#)

India Delivers BrahMos Missiles to Philippines

Source: [BT](#)

Recently, India delivered **BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles** to the **Philippines**. India is looking at further **expanding defense ties** with the Philippines against the backdrop of growing global concerns over **China's increasing military assertiveness** in the [South China Sea](#).

Brahmos Missiles:

- The [BrahMos missile](#), an **Indo-Russian joint venture**, has a range of **290 km** and is the **fastest cruise missile** in the world with a top speed of Mach 2.8 (nearly three times the speed of sound).
BrahMos is named for the rivers [Brahmaputra](#) (India) and [Moskva](#) (Russia).
- It is a **two-stage missile** (solid propellant engine in the first stage and liquid ramjet in the second stage).
- It is a **multiplatform missile** i.e., it can be launched from **land, air, and sea** and **multi-capability missile** with pinpoint accuracy that works **both day and night** irrespective of the weather conditions.
- It operates on the **"Fire and Forgets"** principle i.e. it does not require further guidance after launch.
- **Vietnam, UAE, and Indonesia** are among other potential customers of Brahmos missile.

Read more: [BrahMos Missiles](#), [South China Sea](#)

Women Navy Officers on Transoceanic Expeditions

Source: [TH](#)

Recently, the Indian Naval Sailing Vessel **INSV Tarini** returned to her **base port at Goa** after a **historic transoceanic expedition** of nearly two months by **two women officers** of the [Indian Navy](#).

- The journey included interactions with Mauritian officials and a **training sortie** with the **Mauritius Coast Guard**, strengthening ties between the two nations.
- This accomplishment signifies the Indian Navy's dedication to **gender equality** and empowering women in maritime roles.
- The officers are now preparing for their next adventure - a **global circumnavigation expedition** called [Sagar Parikrama-IV](#), scheduled for September 2024 aboard INSV Tarini.

INSV Tarini:

- It is the **second sailboat of the Indian Navy** after INSV Mhedi.
- It is known for **circumnavigating the globe** with an all-women officer crew in the historic expedition titled ['Navika Sagar Parikrama'](#) in 2017.

[Read more...](#)

