

## ● POLITY

## ● ECONOMICS

## ● TECHNOLOGY

## ● ECOLOGY

## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## Govt. To Record Parents' Religion To Register Births

**CONTEXT:** The Union Ministry of Home Affairs mandates recording parents' individual religions in birth registrations, facilitating a national database update for various services, amid State governments' pending adoption of the new rules.

### National database

All reported births and deaths are to be digitally registered through the Centre's portal for the Civil Registration System

- The database may be made available to other authorities preparing or maintaining other databases such as electoral rolls or ration cards

- Information from digital certificate can be used for purposes such as admission to an educational institution or appointment to government posts



- Data is used by the govt. for socio-economic planning and to evaluate the effectiveness of social sector programmes

**BACKGROUND:** The Indian government is changing birth registration to record both parents' religions. This data will be included in a national database linked to Aadhaar, voter rolls, and other IDs. The purpose is for statistical information, but the database may be used for various services. States still need to adopt the new rules.

#### New Requirements for Birth Registrations:

- Union Ministry of Home Affairs mandates recording parents' individual religions in birth registrations.
- Previously, only the family's religion was recorded, but now the religion of both the father and mother must be separately noted.
- Similar changes apply to parents of adopted children.

#### Implications of the Amendment Act:

- The Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023, necessitates maintaining a national birth and death database.
- This database may be utilized to update various services, including the National Population Register (NPR), electoral rolls, Aadhaar number, ration card, passport, driving licence, property registration, etc.

#### Digitization and Standardization:

- All births and deaths in the country must be digitally registered through the Centre's portal for the Civil Registration System (CRS).
- Digital birth certificates issued under this system serve as a

single document for proof of date of birth for accessing various services, including educational institutions.

#### Changes in Birth Registration Forms:

- Proposed substitution of existing forms related to birth registration, adoption, and Medical Certificate of Cause of Death.
- Birth registration forms now include sections for recording Aadhaar numbers, mobile and e-mail IDs of parents, and detailed address information.

#### Role of the Registrar General of India (RGI):

- RGI is tasked with maintaining the national database of registered births and deaths.
- Chief Registrars and Registrars appointed by State governments are obligated to share data with this central database.

#### Legal and Statistical Information:

- Birth register forms include sections for both legal and statistical information.
- Information on parents' religion is recorded for statistical purposes.

#### Empowerment of RGI:

- The RGI is empowered to coordinate and unify the activities of Chief Registrars appointed by State governments.
- Civil Registration System (CRS) functionaries are appointed up to the panchayat level for effective implementation.

**CONCLUSION:** The new birth registration system in India aims to create a centralized database linked to various IDs. While the stated purpose of recording parents' religions is for statistics, the potential uses of this data remain to be seen. With digital registration becoming mandatory, concerns about privacy and data security exist. The success of this system hinges on state governments adopting the new rules and effective implementation at the local level.

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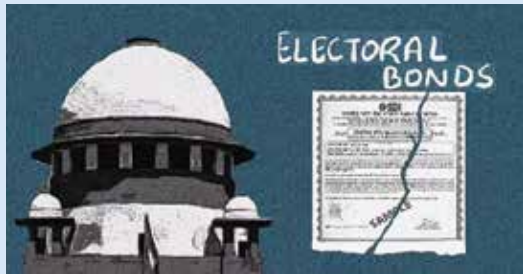
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**POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

# 55 Companies' Electoral Bond Donations Topped The 7.5% Cap In 2022-24

**CONTEXT:** The analysis reveals that 55 companies exceeded the 7.5% cap on electoral bond donations in 2022-24, prompting concerns about potential money laundering and the exploitation of shell companies, as warnings regarding such practices were previously disregarded by the Union Finance Ministry.



**BACKGROUND:** The Supreme Court recently upheld a limit on corporate donations to political parties in India. This limit, previously 7.5% of net profits, was removed in 2017. An analysis of data from electoral bonds which were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court shows companies exceeded this limit by over ₹1,377 crore in the past two years, raising concerns about potential misuse and money laundering. This comes after the Election Commission warned about such possibilities in 2017, but its warnings were disregarded.

## Electoral Bond Donations Exceed Removed Cap

- **Limited Corporate Donations Removed:** The Supreme Court upheld a limit on corporate donations to political parties in India. This limit, previously 7.5% of net profits, was removed in 2017.
- **Companies Exceeded Previous Cap:** An analysis of electoral bond data shows that 55 companies exceeded the previous 7.5% cap on donations in 2022-24. This raises concerns about potential misuse of the system.
- **Large Sums Above the Cap:** The total amount donated above the limit was ₹1,377.9 crore, which is more than 69% of the companies' total donations during that period.
- **Ruling Party Received Most Donations:** The BJP received the majority of the donations that exceeded the cap, with ₹1,414 crore.

## Going the whole hog

The tables show the 55 companies which were found to have made donations more than the original 7.5% cap in the two years, 2022-23 and 2023-24

**Key | A: Net profits (FY21-FY23) in ₹Cr. | B: 7.5% of A in ₹Cr. | C: Total EBs bought in ₹Cr. | D: % of total EBs donated to BJP | E: Donations above 7.5% cap (C-B) in ₹Cr.**

FY24						FY23					
Name	A	B	C	D	E	Name	A	B	C	D	E
Western UP Power Trans. Co.	167.9	12.6	220	36.4	207.4	Qwik Supply Chain	25	1.9	125	100	123.1
MEIL	2576.5	193.2	375	70.7	181.8	Haldia Energy	337.5	25.3	95	31.6	69.7
Bharti Airtel	-9717	0	143	100	143	Dhariwal Infrastructures	77.5	5.8	50	50	44.2
M K J Enterprises	53.4	4	111.1	11.3	107.1	D L F Commercial Developers	-40.8	0	40	100	40
Qwik Supply Chain	26.5	2	50	100	48	Birla Carbon India	310	23.3	55	100	31.7
S E P C Power	-33.1	0	40	12.5	40	Bharti Airtel	-21716.5	0	20	100	20
Laxmi Civil Engg. Services	116.8	8.8	40	100	31.2	D L F Garden City Indore	5.3	0.4	15	100	14.6
L C C Projects	37.6	2.8	31.5	100	28.7	Nexg Devices	5.4	0.4	15	100	14.6
Genus Power Infrastructures	37.3	2.8	28	89.3	25.2	N C C	377.9	28.3	40	100	11.7
Birla Carbon India	348.8	26.2	50	100	23.8	A B N L Investment	1.7	0.1	10	100	9.9
W P I L	88.9	6.7	22	68.2	15.3	D L F Luxury Homes	13.7	1	10	100	9
Aksentt Tech Services	4.4	0.3	15	100	14.7	Greenko Energy Projects	-24.8	0	8	100	8
J W I L Infra	33.9	2.5	10.5	99	8	Mohit Minerals	55.4	4.2	12	100	7.8
WCB Tollroad*	8.1	0.6	7	100	6.4	Best Agrolife	44.1	3.3	10	100	6.7
Force Motors	-11.5	0	5.6	100	5.6	Authum Investment & Infra	262.9	19.7	25	100	5.3
Goodluck India	64	4.8	10	75	5.2	MEIL	2503	187.7	193	52	5.3
Village De Nandi	-15.8	0	5	100	5	Michigan Engineers	16.8	1.3	6	100	4.7
Enviro Control	69.4	5.2	10	100	4.8	Ranjit Buildcon	43.1	3.2	7	100	3.8
Ashoka G V R MN Roads^	15.7	1.2	5	100	3.8	Pragati Enterprises	0	0	3.5	100	3.5
Viva Highways	17.4	1.3	5	100	3.7	Arvind Beauty Brands Retail	-24.4	0	3	100	3
Capacit'E Infraprojects	48.2	3.6	7	100	3.4	Patel Engineering	-15.2	0	2	100	2
Ashoka HT Road#	15.8	1.2	4.5	100	3.3	Ranjit Toll Road	1.3	0.1	1.5	100	1.4
Som Distilleries	-0.7	0	3	100	3	Panacea Biotech	-87	0	1	100	1
Augmont Enterprises	30.4	2.3	5	100	2.7	Welspun Enterprises	120.1	9	10	100	1
Ashoka BS Road@	17.7	1.3	4	100	2.7	Arvind Ltd.	107.8	8.1	9	100	0.9
Prasad & Co.	10.1	0.8	3	100	2.2	Chowgule & Co.	-71.4	0	0.5	100	0.5
Patel Engineering	24.2	1.8	4	100	2.2	R M C Switchgears	0.4	0	0.5	100	0.5
Maral Overseas	21.2	1.6	3	100	1.4	Angel Fibers	0.6	0	0.3	100	0.2
Michigan Engineers	24.4	1.8	3	100	1.2	<b>TOTAL FOR FY23</b>	...	...	<b>767.3</b>	<b>76.2</b>	<b>444.1</b>
Mount Everest Breweries	14.3	1.1	2	100	0.9						
Sundaram Industries	8.1	0.6	1.5	100	0.9						
Ashoka Developers & Builders	3.3	0.3	1	100	0.7						
Associated Auto Parts	8.4	0.6	1	100	0.4						
<b>TOTAL FOR FY24</b>	...	...	<b>1225.7</b>	<b>67.7</b>	<b>933.8</b>						



\*Warora-Chandrapur-Ballarpur Tollroad  
 ^Ashoka G V R Mudhol Nipani Roads  
 #Ashoka Hungund Talikot Road  
 @Ashoka Bagewadi Saundatti Road Ltd.

## Analysis of Donations

- **Data Analyzed:** The Hindu and an independent research team studied bond data and financial information for 221 companies.
- **Donations Compared to Profits:** Five companies in 2023-24 and eight in 2022-23 that donated beyond the cap had negative or zero net profits. This suggests potential money laundering.

- **Incomplete Financial Data:** Six companies that exceeded the cap did not report full financial information for the previous three years.
- **Concerns Raised Before Implementation:** The Election Commission of India warned in 2017 that removing the cap could be exploited by shell companies. These warnings were ignored when the electoral bond scheme was launched in 2018.

**CONCLUSION:** The revelation that 55 companies exceeded the previous 7.5% cap on electoral bond donations in 2022-24, with a total amount exceeding ₹1,377 crore, underscores serious concerns regarding potential misuse of the system and the exploitation of shell companies for money laundering. Despite warnings from the Election Commission in 2017, these issues were overlooked when the electoral bond scheme was introduced in 2018. This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to ensure transparency and integrity in political funding, safeguarding the democratic process in India.

amid calls for increased transparency and concerns over potential vulnerabilities. Despite the absence of concrete evidence of tampering, critics argue for greater transparency through machine audit trails or a 100% recount of all VVPATs, while others advocate for reworking safeguards to address potential vulnerabilities.

**Debate Over EVM Use and VVPAT Verification:**

- Ongoing discussion on Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in Indian elections.
- Focus on verification needs for Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs).
- Calls for increased transparency and concerns over potential vulnerabilities.

**Introduction of VVPAT and Controversy:**

- Introduction of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) as an adjunct system to EVMs.
- Provision for counting VVPAT tallies from five random polling booths in each Assembly constituency.
- Lack of assurance for critics regarding EVM usage.

**Suggestions for Enhanced Transparency:**

- Proposal for maintaining a machine audit trail of all executed commands.
- Advocacy for addressing potential vulnerabilities introduced by VVPAT usage.
- Criticism from political parties, including Congress, for only accepting a 100% recount of all VVPATs.

**Absence of Concrete Evidence of Tampering:**

- Lack of proof regarding actual tampering of EVMs.
- Occasional glitches addressed promptly.
- Sample counting of VVPATs showing minimal mismatches with EVM count.

**Proposed Solutions and Responses:**

- Suggestions for increasing recount samples to enhance statistical significance.
- Potential solutions include making the recount specific to each State/Union Territory or increasing recount sample in seats with narrow victory margins.
- Critique of insisting on a full recount as unnecessary and indicative of distrust in EVMs.

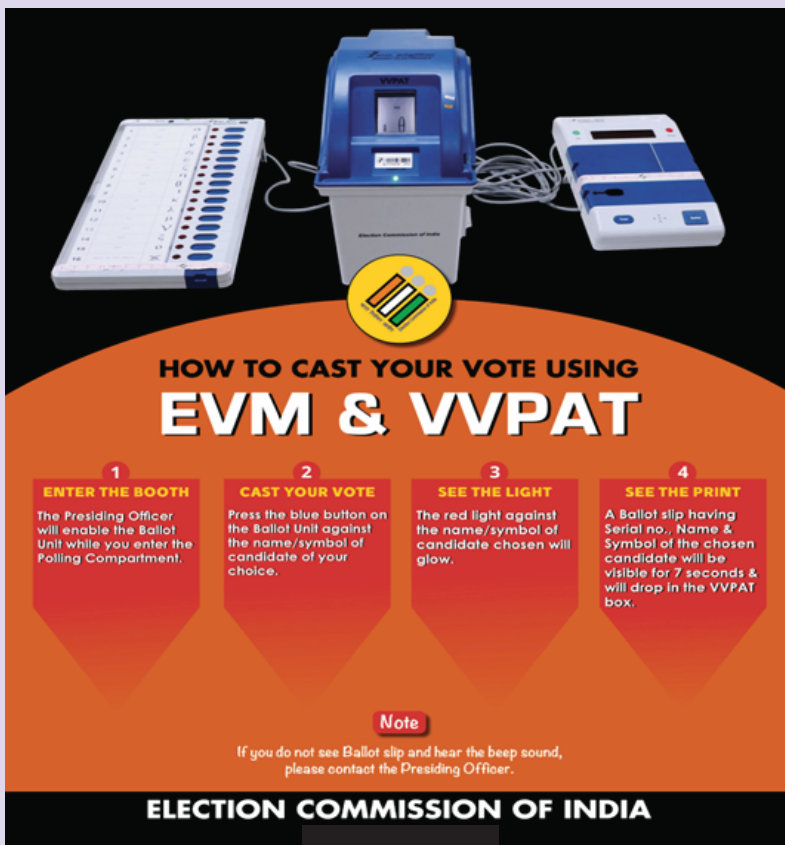
**CONCLUSION:** The ongoing debate surrounding Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) in Indian elections underscores the importance of transparency and security in the electoral process. Despite persistent calls for increased verification and safeguards, the lack of concrete evidence of tampering casts doubt on the need for drastic measures like a full recount. As we move forward, it is crucial to adopt a balanced approach that addresses concerns while upholding trust in the electoral system to safeguard the integrity of democratic elections in India.

**POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

**Overkill**

**CONTEXT:** The ongoing debate over the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in Indian elections, particularly regarding the extent of verification required for Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs), continues amidst calls for increased transparency and concerns over potential vulnerabilities, despite the absence of concrete evidence of tampering.

**BACKGROUND:** The ongoing debate in India over the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) centers on the extent of verification needed for Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs),





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## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## Revisit These Sections Of The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita

**CONTEXT:** The Central government's notification of the implementation of three criminal laws, including Section 106(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, prompts call for reconsideration of various provisions due to concerns over disproportionate sentencing, potential conflicts with constitutional rights, and legal ambiguities.

### REFORMING INDIA'S LEGAL SYSTEM



#### Reconsideration of Criminal Laws in Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023:

Some experts have commented that several sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), India's new criminal code, warrant reconsideration due to potential legal and practical issues.

##### Section 106(2) - Reporting of Fatal Accidents:

- Maximum 10 years of imprisonment for failure to report a fatal accident.
- Disproportionate sentencing compared to other offences.
- Potential conflict with the constitutional right against self-incrimination (Article 20(3)).
- Inconsistency with Supreme Court rulings on compelled testimony.

##### Introduction of "Petty Organised Crime" (Section 112):

- Introduction of a new offence termed "petty organised crime".
- Offences include theft, snatching, cheating, unauthorised selling of tickets, gambling, etc.
- Lack of specificity in defining "petty organised crime" raises concerns.
- Sentences for offences within this category vary, creating ambiguity.

##### Proviso to Sub-section (2) of Section 303 - Property Theft:

- Proviso states theft of property valued less than ₹5,000 as non-cognizable offence.
- Raises legal and practical complications regarding reporting and prosecution.
- Impact on individuals, especially those from economically weaker sections.
- Interplay between sub-sections creates legal ambiguity.

##### Sections 6 and 7 of Section 143 - Human Trafficking:

- Both sections mandate life imprisonment without judicial discretion.
- Similarity to Section 303 of IPC, which was struck down for lack of judicial discretion.
- Raises concerns over legality and constitutionality.
- Need for judicial discretion in sentencing.



**Conclusion:** The identified sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, exhibit flaws ranging from disproportionate sentencing to potential conflicts with constitutional rights and legal ambiguities. Addressing these concerns through revisiting and potential amendments is crucial to ensure the effectiveness and constitutionality of the criminal laws before their implementation.



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## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

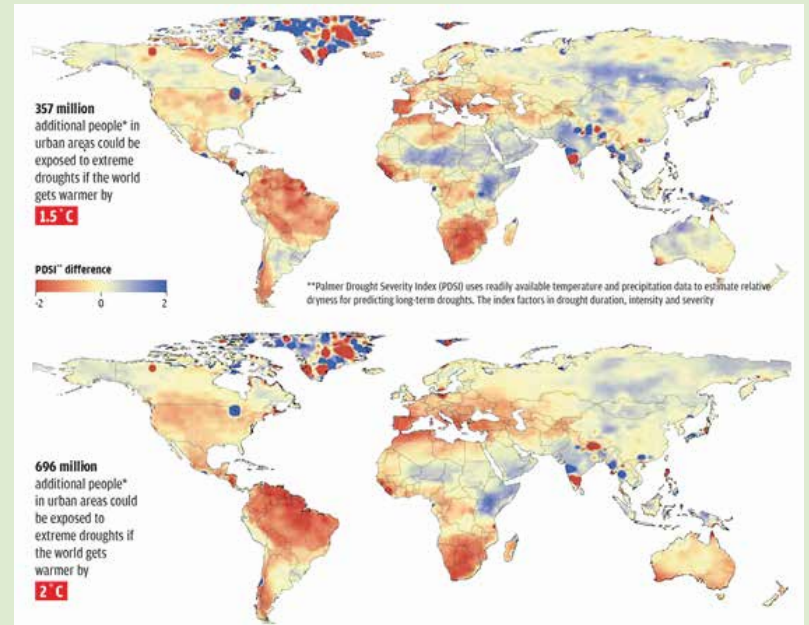
## Is The Urban Water System Breaking?

**CONTEXT:** Amidst a severe water crisis affecting urban centers like Bengaluru and other southern states due to mismanagement, fragmented governance, and environmental degradation, experts discuss the urgent need for holistic water management, sustainable infrastructure, and long-term planning to ensure the livability and resilience of cities.



- **Urban Water Crisis in Bengaluru:**
- **Mismanagement of Water Resources:**
  - Unplanned urbanization leading to loss of green cover and increased paved surfaces.
  - Over Reliance on groundwater sources due to dwindling surface water bodies.
  - Decline in forest cover and environmental degradation in the Cauvery watershed exacerbating water scarcity.
- **Fragmented Governance and Lack of Coordination:**
  - Multiple agencies responsible for water management leading to fragmented governance.
  - Inadequate competence among agency heads contributing to ineffective water management.
  - Lack of coordination between agencies overseeing piped water supply, surface water bodies, groundwater, and wastewater management.
- **Infrastructure Challenges and Urban Development:**
  - Concretization of surfaces hindering groundwater recharge and exacerbating floods.
  - Poor construction of roads impeding hydrological flows and exacerbating flooding.
  - Rapid urbanisation and population growth surpassing the city's carrying capacity.
- **Proposed Solutions and Policy Implications:**
  - Adoption of cluster-based development to alleviate pressure on urban centres.
  - Focus on reverse migration and decentralisation of industries to promote regional development.

- Importance of protecting ecosystems along river basins to ensure water security for urban centres.
- Need for robust governance frameworks to address environmental concerns and long-term water management strategies.
- Emphasis on accountability, anti-corruption measures, and election of competent officials to ensure effective planning and implementation.



### Role of Institutions and Public Awareness:

- Establishment of well-rounded institutions capable of framing sustainable solutions.
- Importance of public awareness and citizen engagement in advocating for environmental protection and sustainable water management.
- Addressing knee-jerk reactions with long-term, holistic approaches to urban water crisis mitigation.

**Conclusion:** Urgent need for coordinated governance, infrastructure improvements, and policy interventions to address the urban water crisis in Bengaluru and other urban centers across India.

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## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## On Global Indices Measuring Democracy

**CONTEXT:** Amidst concerns over India's democracy ranking on global indices like V-Dem's recent assessment labeling it as "one of the worst autocratisers," debates ensue over the methodologies, subjectivity, and implications of such assessments, prompting India to consider creating its own democracy index to counter perceived biases and inaccuracies.

### THE GIST

- The V-Dem Institute's recent democracy index termed India as "one of the worst autocratisers".
- While all agree that democracy is a political system in which citizens get to participate in free and fair elections (electoral democracy), indices like V-Dem's, Economist Intelligence Unit and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index assess other dimensions as well: is the democracy 'participatory', are citizen groups and civil society organisations functional? Are decisions made deliberately, in the best interest of all people, rather than through coercion or minority group interests?
- A major criticism is that there is a degree of subjectivity that tugs at the indices' credibility and precision.



### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEMOCRACY INDICES

#### Global Criticism and Indian Response:

- Recent democracy indices label India as "one of the worst autocratisers," prompting government response.
- India aims to release its own democracy index to counter international criticisms and downgrades.

#### Motivation Behind India's Concern:

- Indices threaten India's sovereign ratings and rankings on global governance indicators.
- Indian officials criticize methodology flaws, inadequate sample sizes, and cultural biases in existing indices.

#### Data Sources and Methodologies:

#### Types of Data Used:

- Observational data (OD) based on observable facts like voter turnout rates.

- 'In-house' coding utilizing academic material and news sources.
- Expert surveys providing subjective evaluations.
- Representative surveys gathering judgments from selected citizens.

#### Evaluation Criteria and Approaches:

- Indices assess various dimensions of democracy beyond electoral participation.
- Criteria include participatory democracy, deliberative decision-making, and egalitarian resource distribution.
- Differing approaches lead to varying indicator numbers, weightage, and aggregation models.

#### Limitations of Democracy Indices:

##### Subjectivity and Credibility:

- Criticism of subjectivity affecting credibility and precision of evaluations.
- Concerns over the judgement-based nature of assessments, such as V-Dem's "egalitarian" indicator.

##### Scope and Ideological Discrepancies:

- Critique of limited scope, with some indices excluding non-independent and microstates.
- Perceived ideological discrepancies due to ambiguous democracy definitions, leading to inconsistencies in country rankings.

#### CONCLUSION:

- Absence of a singular, perfect democracy index due to the diverse nature of democracy definitions and evaluation methodologies.
- Indices offer valuable insights into broad democratic trends and dynamics, allowing for comparisons across time and geography.

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## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## How Are Symbols Allotted To Political Parties?

**CONTEXT:** The denial of a common symbol to the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in Tamil Nadu, despite its electoral presence and representation, prompts scrutiny of the allotment process and rules governing symbols for registered unrecognised political parties.

### THE GIST

- The Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) that secured 1.09% and 0.99% votes in 2019 and 2021 has been denied a common symbol (Pot).
- The VCK was declined allotment of a common symbol as it had failed to secure 1% of votes polled in the elections to the State Legislative Assembly in 2021.
- Rule 10B of the Symbols Order provides that the concession of a common free symbol shall be available to a 'registered unrecognised party' for two general elections.



### Background:

- The denial of a common symbol to the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in Tamil Nadu has sparked scrutiny of the allotment process for political party symbols.
- This issue highlights questions surrounding the allotment of symbols to registered unrecognised parties.

### Rules Governing Symbol Allotment:

- Recognition of political parties as 'national' or 'state' parties is determined by the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 (Symbols Order) by the ECI.
- Criteria for state-level recognition include winning Lok Sabha or Assembly seats or securing a percentage of votes polled.
- Symbols are allotted to parties and candidates as per the provisions of the Symbols Order, playing a crucial role in the voting process, especially for illiterate voters.

### Current Issue:

- Rule 10B of the Symbols Order allows registered unrecognised parties a common free symbol for two general elections.
- To qualify for a common symbol in subsequent elections, a party must have secured at least 1% of votes polled in the previous election.
- The Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) secured more than 1% votes but lost its common symbol due to a delay in applying, while the VCK was denied a common symbol for not meeting the vote threshold.

### Way Forward:

- The ECI's decisions, based on existing rules, may seem counterintuitive to the average voter.
- Consideration may be given to amending rules so that registered unrecognised parties meeting certain criteria, like securing 1% of votes or having elected representatives, can be allotted a common symbol of their choice.
- This would provide fair recognition for past electoral performance and enhance the democratic process.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

# No Need For More Talks On 'Resolved' Katchatheevu Issue, Says Sri Lanka

**CONTEXT:** Sri Lanka dismisses the need for further discussions on the Katchatheevu issue, following recent remarks by Indian officials, while historical documents reveal India's strategic reasoning behind ceding the islet in 1974 amid renewed scrutiny over the territorial dispute.

**BACKGROUND:** Sri Lanka and India have a history of dispute over Katchatheevu, a small island. Sri Lanka claims ownership, while India once did but ceded the island in 1974. Recently, Indian politicians have made remarks about Katchatheevu, prompting Sri Lanka to remind India that the issue is settled. Documents released in India show the Indian government worried about a weak legal case and security interests when giving up the island.

### Sri Lanka Rejects Calls to Reopen Discussion on Katchatheevu

- Sri Lanka says there is no need to revisit the settled issue of Katchatheevu, an island ceded by India in 1974.
- This statement comes after recent remarks by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.
- Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry believes the issue was resolved 50 years ago and further discussions are unnecessary.



### Sri Lanka Claims Strong Case for Katchatheevu Ownership

- Historical documents reveal India's rationale behind giving up the island.
- Documents released under Right to Information Act show the Indian government believed they had a weak legal case.
- Sri Lanka reportedly had stronger historical evidence to claim Katchatheevu.

### India Feared International Court and China's Influence

- Documents show Indian Foreign Secretary Kewal Singh briefed Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi in 1974.
- Singh expressed concerns about a potential loss at the International Court of Justice.
- He also cited a "pro-China lobby" in Sri Lanka that could exploit the dispute.

**CONCLUSION:** While the resurgence of comments from Indian officials reignited tensions, Sri Lanka maintains a firm stance. They believe the 1974 agreement settled the matter and that historical documents support their claim to Katchatheevu. India's decision back then, influenced by a weak legal case, security interests, and potential foreign influence, seems unlikely to be revisited. The future of Katchatheevu hinges on whether both nations can prioritise regional cooperation over historical disputes.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

# No Sanctions Against India For Buying, Refining Russian Oil, Say U.S. Officials

**CONTEXT:** U.S. officials visiting Delhi state that there will be no sanctions against India for purchasing and refining Russian oil, emphasizing that their aim is to limit revenue to Russia rather than restrict trade in Russian oil, amid concerns over rising prices and narrowing discounts.

**BACKGROUND:** Since the outbreak of the Ukraine war in 2022, India and China have emerged as significant purchasers of Russian oil, despite pressure from the West to reduce ties with Moscow. The U.S. has imposed sanctions aiming to limit Kremlin revenue, but officials clarify that the goal isn't to restrict Russian oil trade. India emphasizes its need-based oil purchases, while recent U.S. measures have led to heavy discounts on Russian oil exports, impacting global markets.



- **U.S. Treasury Department's Position:**
- Officials visiting Delhi clarified that U.S. sanctions and the oil price cap aim to limit revenues to the Kremlin, not to restrict the purchase of Russian 'Ural' oil.
- They asserted that the measures, including a second phase of sanctions against oil shipping companies, are having some impact.
- However, they dismissed concerns about the rising price of Ural oil and the narrowing of Russian discounts to Indian refiners.
- **Clarification on Refined Oil:**
- Anna Morris, Acting Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing, stated that once Russian oil is refined in a country and then exported, it is no longer considered Russian oil from a sanctions perspective.

- She addressed allegations of "oil laundering" by India for European markets, calling them misleading.

### Sanctions and Indian Companies:

- U.S. officials confirmed that no Indian company has been sanctioned by the U.S. for oil purchases from Russia.
- However, a Mumbai-based company has faced sanctions over Iranian oil purchases, while a Bengaluru-based high-tech company was listed for engaging in dual-use technology trade with Russia.

### India's Response:

The External Affairs Ministry emphasised that all oil purchases are guided by India's energy security requirements and commercial interests.

- India seeks to buy oil from wherever it receives the cheapest available supplies.

### Importance of India and China:

- Since the start of the Ukraine war, India and China have become major purchasers of Russian oil.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin praised India for its independent foreign policy despite pressure from the West.

### Effect of U.S. Price Cap:

- The U.S. announced a price cap on Ural oil to limit purchases below \$60 per barrel, resulting in heavy discounts offered by Russian exporters.
- Officials claimed success in ensuring stable export volumes and discounts ranging from \$12 to \$19 over the past year.

### Russian Response:

- The Russian Foreign Ministry stated that Russian oil supplies to India remain at a steadily high level.

**CONCLUSION:** amidst rising global concerns over Russia's actions and consequent sanctions, U.S. officials visiting Delhi have clarified that India will not face sanctions for purchasing and refining Russian oil. Emphasizing India's need-based oil procurement and commercial interests, the dialogue highlights the delicate balance between geopolitical pressures and energy security. As major purchasers of Russian oil, India's stance underscores its strategic autonomy, while ongoing discussions aim to mitigate the impact of international sanctions on global energy markets.



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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## Israel Must Ensure Safety Of Indian Workers: Govt.

**CONTEXT:** India urges Israel to prioritize the safety and security of Indian workers being flown to the conflict-affected nation under a government-to-government agreement, amid concerns following recent attacks and tensions in the region.



### India Raises Concerns About Safety of Workers in Israel Indian Workers Flown to Israel Under G2G Agreement

- The Indian government is sending blue-collar workers to Israel under a government-to-government (G2G) agreement.
- An initial batch of 60 workers departed for Israel this week, with an eventual total of 42,000 workers planned.



### Safety Concerns Raised Due to Regional Conflict

- The External Affairs Ministry spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, expressed concern about the safety of Indian workers due to the ongoing conflict in the region.
- This concern was heightened by a recent attack on Iranian diplomatic premises in Damascus, blamed by both Syria and Iran on Israel.

### Indian Government Urges Israel to Ensure Worker Safety

- Mr. Jaiswal emphasised that India is "conscious of their safety" and has urged Israeli authorities to ensure the well-being of the Indian workers.
- The G2G agreement predates the recent escalation in conflict, but India is seeking assurances from Israel.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## 10 Iranian Security Personnel Killed In Jihadist Attacks Near Pakistan Border

**CONTEXT:** Jaish al-Adl, a Sunni Muslim rebel organization based in Pakistan, is designated as a "terrorist" group by both Iran and the United States.



### Jihadist Attacks Target Security Forces in Southeastern Iran

#### Double-Digit Casualties Reported

- Jihadist attacks near the Pakistan border killed 10 Iranian security personnel, according to state media reports on Thursday.
- This revised death toll is double the initial figure reported.
- The number of fatalities is nearly as high as a similar attack in December 2023.

#### Unrest-Plagued Province Targeted

- The attacks occurred in Sistan-Baluchistan province, a region with a history of:
  - Drug smuggling activity.
  - Rebellious activity by the Baluchi minority.
  - Extremism among Sunni Muslim groups.

#### Details of the Attacks

- State television reported that the attacks concluded with the deaths of 10 security personnel and 18 attackers.
- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and police forces suffered casualties during nighttime assaults on a base and a police post.
- Iranian officials suspect the attackers may be foreigners, but haven't provided specifics.

#### Responsibility Claimed by Jaish al-Adl

- The Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice) group claimed responsibility for the attacks on their Telegram channel.
- This Pakistan-based Sunni Muslim organization is designated a terrorist group by both Iran and the United States.
- Jaish al-Adl has a history of attacks in the region, including a

deadly assault on a police station in December 2023 and another in January 2024.

**CONCLUSION:** The recent jihadist attacks in Sistan-Baluchistan highlight the ongoing security challenges faced by Iran in its southeastern province. The attacks, claimed by the Jaish al-Adl group, resulted in significant casualties among Iranian security personnel and raise concerns about the group's growing threat. With a history of violence in the region, Jaish al-Adl's continued activity underscores the need for Iran to address the underlying causes of unrest in Sistan-Baluchistan, while also effectively countering the threat posed by such extremist organizations.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

# Drones Hit Targets In Myanmar Capital, Claims Resistance Group

**CONTEXT:** Myanmar's main pro-democracy resistance group claimed to have launched drone attacks on the airport and military headquarters in Naypyitaw, while the ruling military countered that they had successfully intercepted and destroyed the drones during the attack.

**BACKGROUND:** Myanmar's long history of military rule was interrupted by a brief democratic period (2011-2021). A 2021 coup sparked resistance movements like the People's Defence Force (PDF) employing guerrilla tactics and drones. The PDF's recent drone attack on the capital highlights a growing challenge to the military junta led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. The international community condemns the coup, but a resolution to the crisis with its displaced civilians and ongoing air strikes seems distant.



## Myanmar: Drone Attacks Rock the Capital

### Drone Attacks on Naypyitaw

- Myanmar's main pro-democracy group claims its armed wing, the PDF, launched drone attacks on:
  - The airport in Naypyitaw, the capital.
  - The military headquarters.
- The military counters that they intercepted and destroyed the attacking drones.

### Unclear Outcomes

- No immediate evidence of damage or casualties exists.
- The military's acknowledgement of the attack is seen as a potential loss of control.
- Reports from BBC Burmese and Khit Thit suggest a temporary airport closure but lack confirmation from residents.

- Photos released by the government show downed drones, but details remain unverified.

### Resistance Tactics

- The Kloud Team, specializing in drone warfare, is believed to be responsible for the attack.
- Drones serve as a crucial weapon for the PDF due to their effectiveness against the military's superior firepower.
- Kloud Team reportedly targeted:
  - The house of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the military leader.
  - The military headquarters and air base.

### Ongoing Conflict

- Despite its military advantage, the junta struggles to quell the resistance.
- The military conducts airstrikes in disputed areas, often causing civilian casualties.
- Over 2.4 million people are displaced due to the ongoing conflict.

**CONCLUSION:** The claimed drone attacks by the pro-democracy forces in Myanmar's capital mark a significant escalation in the ongoing conflict. While the exact details of the attack and its outcome remain unclear, the military's acknowledgement itself is noteworthy. This suggests a potential challenge to their control and highlights the growing capabilities of the People's Defence Force (PDF) with their use of drones. With the international community struggling to find a resolution, Myanmar's future remains uncertain, with displaced civilians and military actions continuing to inflict a heavy toll on the country.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

# 10 Iranian Security Personnel Killed In Jihadist Attacks Near Pakistan Border

**CONTEXT:** During an election year, the government's slight rise in essential medicine prices, linked to WPI, raises industry concerns amid reliance on China for raw materials.



**Government's Essential Medicine Price Hike:**

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) increased Maximum Retail Prices (MRP) by 0.00551% for essential medicines at the onset of fiscal year 2024–25.

**Basis of Price Adjustment:**

The revision aligns with Wholesale Price Index (WPI) changes, allowing manufacturers to adjust prices without prior approval, aiming to maintain economic balance.

**Marginal Increment:**

Despite consecutive annual hikes, the current adjustment is considered minimal by the government, primarily affecting essential drugs such as antibiotics and painkillers.

**NPPA's Regulatory Role:**

NPPA regulates drug pricing, ensuring accessibility while maintaining affordability, particularly for drugs listed in the National List of Essential Medicines.

**Pharmaceutical Industry Concerns:**

The industry expresses apprehension over escalating input costs, stringent price controls, and dwindling profit margins exacerbated by the slight price hike.

**Dependency on Chinese Supplies:**

India's pharmaceutical sector heavily relies on China for raw materials, posing significant challenges, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Export and Import Dynamics:**

India emerges as a significant exporter of bulk drugs, yet remains dependent on China as its primary supplier, highlighting the nation's reliance on imported pharmaceutical inputs.

**Policy Considerations:**

Discussions on India's reliance on Chinese imports underscore the imperative for policy initiatives aimed at bolstering domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing capabilities.



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