



RACE IAS

Daily current affairs

13 May 2022

Hold local body polls every five years: SC:

Context:

The Supreme Court has declared that polls in each state must be conducted before expiry of the five years' term as per the constitutional mandate.

What was the case?

The Court ordered initiation of poll process of over 23,000 local bodies in Madhya Pradesh which has been due since 2019. Madhya Pradesh Government had been citing OBC reservation issue for the delay.

- The state government had contended that OBCs constitute around 50% of the population of the state and not granting them reservation in local bodies would be injustice to them.

Triple test conditions for providing reservations:

Referring to the Constitution Bench decision in 'K Krishna Murthy (Dr) and Ors v Union of India & Anr' (2010), the court said triple test conditions have to be fulfilled before providing reservations for the OBCs.

They are:

1. To set up a dedicated commission to collect empirical data on backwardness.
2. Specify the proportion of reservation required in local body and wise in light of recommendations of the Commission.
3. Such reservation not to exceed aggregate of 50 % of the total seats reserved in favour of SCs/STs/OBCs taken together.

A three-judge bench in *Vikas Kishanrao Gawali Vs. The State of Maharashtra and Others* in March 2021, upheld that the triple test is a necessary precondition for reservation to OBCs in local bodies.

Constitutional Provisions in this regard:

73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts:

The Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies, respectively, are provided with a five-year term of office at every level.

- Fresh elections have to be completed before the expiry of its duration of 5 years.

It can be dissolved before the completion of its term.

- In case of dissolution, elections have to be conducted before the expiry of a period of six months from the date of its dissolution.
- However, if the remainder of the period for which the dissolved Panchayat would have continued is less than six months, it shall not be necessary to hold any election under this clause for constituting the Panchayat for such period.

A Panchayat constituted upon the dissolution of a Panchayat before the expiration of its duration shall continue only for the remainder of the period for which the dissolved Panchayat would have continued.

Sources: [the Hindu](#).

May 11 Delhi High Court ruling on Marital Rape:

Context:

Delhi High Court has (May 11) delivered a split verdict in a batch of petitions challenging the exception provided to **marital rape** in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) - Section 375.

Exception provided to marital rape in the Indian Penal Code (IPC):

Section 375 defines rape and lists seven notions of consent which, if vitiated, would constitute the offence of rape by a man.

- However, the provision contains an exemption: “Sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under eighteen years of age, is not rape.”

What’s the issue? What were the petitions against?

This exemption essentially allows a marital right to a husband who can with legal sanction exercise his right to consensual or non-consensual sex with his wife. This amounts to rape too.

- It undermines consent of a woman based on her marital status.

What has the Court ruled?

Split Verdict:

- Justice Rajiv Shakti: The exception under Section 375 is unconstitutional.
- Justice C Hari Shankar held that the provision is valid.

What happens when a split verdict is delivered?

In case of a split verdict, the case is heard by a larger Bench. This is why judges usually sit in Benches of odd numbers (three, five, seven, etc.) for important cases.

Marital Rape:

Section 375 of the IPC holds that “sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under 15 years of age, is not rape”.

- No other statute or law recognises marital rape.
- Victims only have recourse to civil remedies provided under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

Can marital Rape be criminalised? Pros and Cons.

Sources: Indian Express.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010:

Context:

Representatives of NGOs, middlemen and public servants of Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) division of MHA were recently arrested by the CBI for

committing violations of FCRA provisions and facilitating illegal clearances in lieu of bribes”.

What's the issue?

FCRA clearances have been a fraught issue for several years, and the government has often been accused of targetting NGOs for political or ideological reasons by cancelling or not renewing their clearances.

- The registrations of about 5,900 NGOs had ceased to be active after December 31, 2021, owing to either the NGOs not applying for renewal before the due date, or the MHA refusing their renewal for alleged violation of the FCRA.

How FCRA regulates NGO funding?

FCRA regulates foreign donations and ensures that such contributions do not adversely affect the internal security of the country.

The Act, first enacted in 1976 was amended in the year 2010 and then 2020.

Section 5 of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 gives the Union government “unchecked and unbridled powers” to declare an organisation as being one of political nature and deny it access to funds from sources abroad.

- FCRA is implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Applicability:

- The provisions of the Act apply to the territory of India, to citizens of India who may be outside India and to companies or their branches outside India that are registered or incorporated in India.
- The entities covered by the Act include an individual, a Hindu undivided family, an association, or a registered company.

For how long is approval granted?

Once granted, FCRA registration is valid for five years. NGOs are expected to apply for renewal within six months of the date of expiry of registration. In case of failure to apply for renewal, the registration is deemed to have expired, and the NGO is no longer entitled to receive foreign funds or utilise its existing funds without permission from the ministry.

Prior Reference Category under the Act:

It implies that to donate to such an NGO, a foreign donor has to take prior clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Latest 2020 amendments and criticisms associated:

- The amendments mandated that registered NGOs open a designated account in the main branch of the State Bank of India in the Capital in which the foreign contributions to their various causes would exclusively land.
- The petitioners have argued that this measure would be cumbersome for NGOs operating in rural India and far away from the Capital.

Sources: Indian Express.

National Technology Day:

Context:

Since 1999, May 11 is celebrated as **National Technology Day** to mark India's technological advancements.

The theme of Year 2022 is: "Integrated Approach in Science and Technology for a Sustainable Future".

Significance of the day:

- On May 11, 1998, India detonated three nuclear bombs in the Indian Army's Pokhran Test Range.
- Dr APJ Abdul Kalam lead the Indian team of scientists to successfully test-fire the Shakti-1 nuclear missile at Rajasthan's Pokhran test range.
- Two days later, the country successfully tested two more nuclear weapons as a part of the same Pokhran-II/Operation Shakti initiative. After these tests Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared India a nuclear state, making it the sixth country to join the 'nuclear club' of nations.
- Hansa 3, India's first indigenous aircraft was first tested on the same day in 1998 in Bangalore.
- Successful test firing of Trishul, a short range missile made in India, was also done on the same day.

Technology Development Board India:

On the occasion of National Technology day, TDB hosts scientific-technology based webinars and felicitate individuals for excellent works in the field of Science and Technology every year.

- Established in 1996, TDB is a statutory body that works under the Department of Science and Technology, GOI.
- It also provides financial assistance for concerns of Indian industries and other agencies for commercialization of indigenized technologies or adoption of imported technologies for wider domestic applications.

Note:

India is currently among nine countries in the world that have a publicly known nuclear weapons.

- In 1974, India conducted its first nuclear test, codenamed “Smiling Buddha”, at Pokhran in Rajasthan.

Sources: pib.

W boson:

Context:

Researchers have announced that they have made a precise measurement of the mass of the so-called W boson.

What did the researchers find? Why is it significant?

They stated that the W boson is slightly heavier than that predicted by the so-called Standard Model of particle physics.

- This result is highly significant because this implies the incompleteness of the standard model description.

What is the standard model description?

The Standard Model of Particle Physics is scientists' current best theory to describe the most basic building blocks of the universe. It explains how particles called quarks (which make up protons and neutrons) and leptons (which include electrons) make up all known matter.

- The Standard Model explains three of the four fundamental forces that govern the universe: electromagnetism, the strong force, and the weak force.

Why is the standard model believed to be incomplete?

- It gives a unified picture of only three of the four fundamental forces of nature. It totally omits gravity.
- The model does not include a description of dark matter particles. So far these have been detected only through their gravitational pull on surrounding matter.

What is W Boson?

Discovered in 1983, the W boson is a fundamental particle.

Together with the Z boson, it is responsible for the weak force.

The W boson, which is electrically charged, changes the very make-up of particles.

It switches protons into neutrons, and vice versa, through the weak force, triggering nuclear fusion and letting stars burn.

In contrast to the photon, which is massless, the W bosons are quite massive, so the weak force they mediate is very short ranged.

Sources: the Hindu.

Marsquake detected by NASA InSight:

Context:

NASA has reported that on May 4, its **InSight** Mars lander detected the largest quake ever observed on another planet.

- The rover first landed on Mars in November 2018, and has since heard 1,313 quakes.

Mars InSight lander

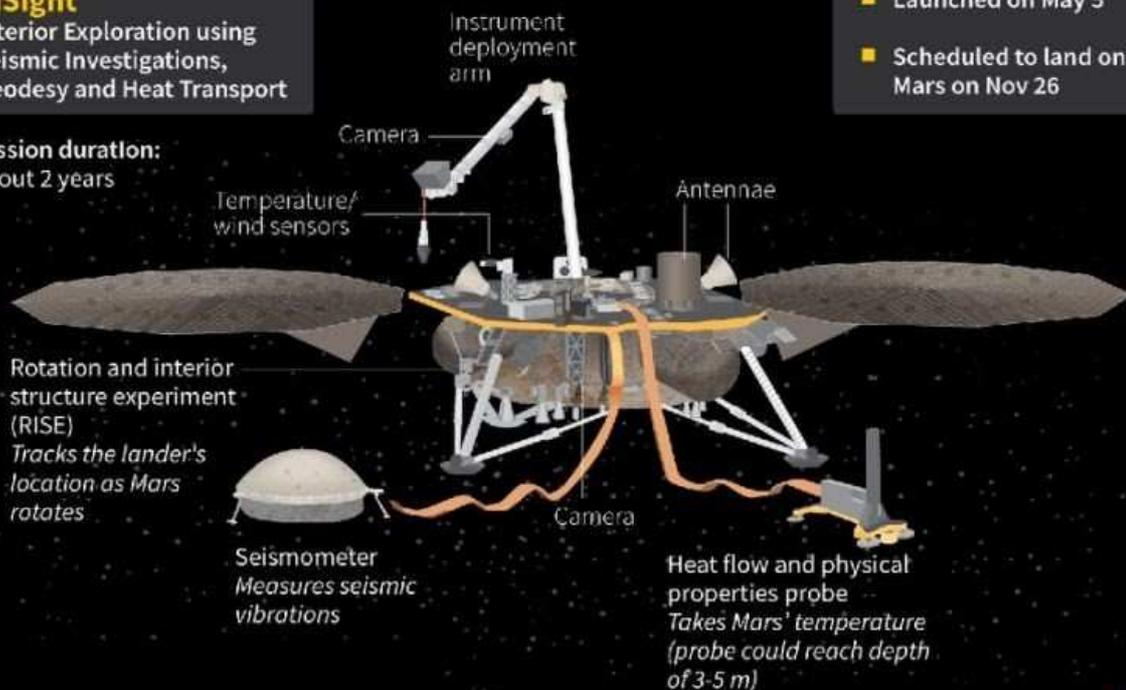
NASA's newest unmanned Mars lander aims to detect "marsquakes" and unravel the mystery of how rocky planets like Earth form

InSight

Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport

- Launched on May 5
- Scheduled to land on Mars on Nov 26

Mission duration:
About 2 years



Sources: NASA, ESA

AFP

What are marsquakes, and why do they happen?

- On Earth, quakes are caused by shifts in tectonic plates.
- Mars, however, does not have tectonic plates, and its crust is a giant plate.
- Therefore, 'marsquakes' are caused due to stresses that cause rock fractures or faults in its crust.

About InSight Mission:

- InSight is part of NASA's Discovery Program.
- It will be the first mission to peer deep beneath the Martian surface, studying the planet's interior by measuring its heat output and listening for marsquakes, which are seismic events similar to earthquakes on Earth.
- It will use the seismic waves generated by marsquakes to develop a map of the planet's deep interior.

Significance of the mission:

- The findings of Mars' formation will help better understand how other rocky planets, including Earth, were and are created.
- InSight would delve deep beneath the surface of Mars, detecting the fingerprints of the processes of terrestrial planet formation, as well as measuring the planet's "vital signs": Its "pulse" (seismology), "temperature" (heat flow probe), and "reflexes" (precision tracking).

InSight seeks to answer one of science's most fundamental questions: How did the terrestrial planets form?

Other Mars Missions:

1. NASA's Perseverance Rover.
2. UAE's Hope Mars Mission (UAE's first-ever interplanetary mission).
3. India's Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) or Mangalyaan.
4. Tianwen-1: China's Mars Mission.

Sources: Times of India.

Drought in Numbers, 2022 report:

Context:

The Drought in Numbers, 2022 report was released on May 11 at the ongoing 15th Conference of Parties (CoP15) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

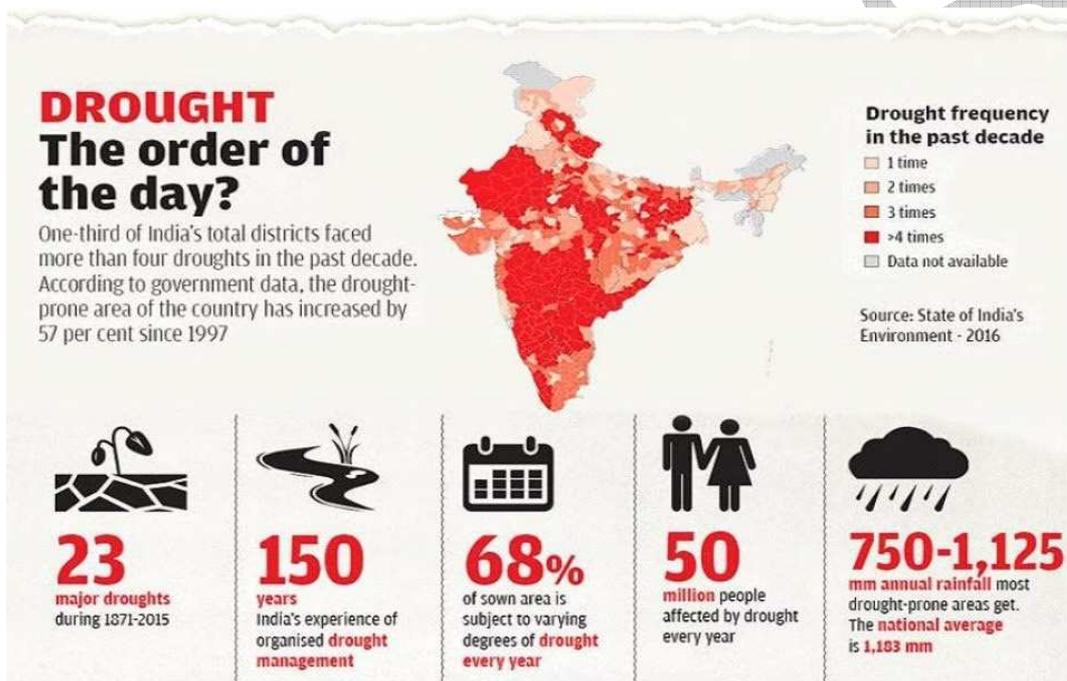
- The latest assessment analysed droughts and impacts on life and livelihood over 122 years covering 196 countries.

Highlights of the Report:

- The frequency and duration of drought is increasing at an alarming rate across the world since the onset of the 21st century.
- An entire new generation is growing up being "water scarce".
- Since 2000, there has been a 29 per cent increase in frequency and duration of droughts in the world.
- Drought is considered a slow onset disaster, thus giving enough time to prepare for it. But in recent decades, drought has emerged as one of the biggest drivers of human life loss and economic loss among weather-related disasters.

Water scarcity and Drought in India - what the report says?

- India has featured in the assessment as one of severely drought-impacted countries. Nearly two-thirds of the country suffered drought during 2020-2022.
- Geographically, India's drought vulnerability compares with that of sub-Saharan Africa.
- The effect of severe droughts was estimated to have reduced India's gross domestic product by 2-5 per cent over the 20 years from 1998-2017.



Concerns for India:

- India's drought-prone area has increased by 57 per cent since 1997.
- One-third of India's districts have faced more than four droughts over the past decade and 50 million people are affected by drought every year.
- Some 97.85 million hectares – nearly 30 per cent of the country's land – underwent land degradation during 2018-19.
- Drought impacts India's dominantly rainfed agriculture that accounts for 60 per cent of the sown area on average.

Do you want to know more about Droughts, its causes and effects?

- Go through this mindmap.

Sources: down to Earth.

UNCCD Conference of Parties (COP 15):

Context:

India is taking part in the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Cote d'Ivoire (Western Africa).

About COP15 of UNCCD:

Theme: The COP15 theme, 'Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity', is a call to action to ensure land, the lifeline on this planet, continues to benefit present and future generations.

Mandate: COP15 of UNCCD to drive progress in the future sustainable management of land and will explore links between land and other key sustainability issues.

UNCCD COP 15 Agenda: Drought, land restoration, and related enablers such as land rights, gender equality and youth empowerment are among the top items on the Conference agenda.

About UNCCD:

- Established in 1994.
- It is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.
- It is the only convention stemming from a direct recommendation of the Rio Conference's Agenda 21.
- Focus areas: The Convention addresses specifically the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, known as the drylands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found.

Sources: PIB.

Island Coastal Zone Regulation (ICRZ), 2019:

Context:

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has approved an exemption to the laws governing the regulation of coastal zones and has paved the way for gas-powered plants to be set up at Andaman and Nicobar islands.

Details:

- A 50 MW Liquefied Natural Gas(LNG)-based power project will be commissioned at Hope Town, Port Blair. It will be a dual-fuel power plant—that runs on both diesel and LNG.
- The plant will be developed by the National Thermal Power Corporation(NTPC).

Activists say, this permission violates the Island Coastal Zone Regulation (ICRZ), 2019, which limits infrastructure development on vulnerable coastal stretches.

ICRZ:

In 2019, the Government of India notified the Island Coastal Zone Regulation(ICRZ).

- It declared certain coastal stretches as 'Coastal Regulation Zone' and imposed restrictions on setting up and expanding industries, operations and processes within such protected zones.

Amendments:

In 2021 National Coastal Zone Management Authority(NCZMA) recommended amending the ICRZ rules to allow gas-based power plants within the Island Coastal Regulation Zone area only in islands with geographical areas greater than 100 sq. km.

- This was needed to meet the energy requirement of the islanders while reducing the dependency on highly polluting sources such as conventional Diesel Generator(DG) sets.
- Accepting these recommendations, the Government of India amended the ICRZ rules.

Sources: the Hindu.

Amrit Sarovar Mission:

Launched in April this year.

- The objective of the Mission Amrit Sarovar is “construction/development” of at least 75 ponds in every district of the country.

- As part of the initiative, each of the ponds will have a pondage area of minimum 1 acre (0.4 hectares) with water holding capacity of about 10,000 cubic metres.
- All rural districts have been directed to develop at least 75 ponds, totalling about 50,000 Amrit Sarovars across the country.
- The scheme also mentions that if the district is unable to create as many new Amrit Sarovars, they may take up rejuvenation of the existing ponds for restoring their ecological and productive utility.

Why in News?

75 ponds in Ghaziabad set for revival under Centre's 'Amrit Sarovar' scheme.

What is tomato flu?

"Tomato flu" cases are being detected in Kerala.

- The flu that gets its name because of the red blister it causes.
- Flu affects children below five years of age.
- Symptoms include rashes, skin irritation and dehydration.
- This flu is a self-limiting one and there is no specific drug for this. This means that the symptoms will resolve overtime on their own if supportive care is given.
- Like other cases of flu, tomato fever is also contagious. "If someone is infected with this flu, they need to be kept in isolation as this could spread rapidly from one person to another.

Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA):

India has been unanimously elected as the new Chair of the Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA) for 2022-2024 at the meeting of the Executive Board and General Assembly in Manila, Philippines.

- Commission on Elections, Manila was the current chair of AAEA.
- The new member of the Executive Board now includes Russia, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Taiwan and the Philippines.

AAEA:

- The Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA) was established in 1998.

- Currently, 20 Asian EMBs are members of AAEA.
- ECI is a founder member of EMB of the AAEA and also served on the Executive Board of the AAEA as the Vice-Chair during 2011-13 and Chair during 2014-16.
- The mission of the Association of Asian Election Authorities is to provide a non-partisan forum in the Asian region for sharing experiences and best practices among election authorities to discuss and act upon ways to promote open and transparent elections with the objective of supporting good governance and democracy.

Sporting events as events of national importance:

- The Information and Broadcasting Ministry has notified several sporting events as that of national importance under the Sports Broadcasting Signals (Mandatory Sharing with Prasar Bharati) Act.
- The notification, which supersedes the earlier one issued in March 2021, has declared all Olympics Games, Commonwealth Games and Asian Games as events of national importance.

The list includes sports such as cricket, tennis, hockey etc.

AIR PRIME Playbook:

AIM-PRIME (Program for Researchers in Innovation, Market Readiness, and Entrepreneurship) Playbook was launched by NITI Aayog.

- The playbook is aimed at promoting early-stage science-based, deep technology ideas to market through training and guidance over a period of 12 months using a blended learning curriculum.
- Focus Area: Science-based, knowledge-intensive, deep technology entrepreneurship.
- Implementing Agency: Atal Innovation Mission has collaborated with Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).