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THE HINDU Page 10

ALLOCATION OF SYMBOLS TO PARTIES

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Polity)

How are symbols allotted to political parties?

Why was the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi denied a common symbol by the ECI in Tamil Nadu?

Rangarajan. R

The story so far:

The Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) that secured 3.9% and 6.5% votes in Tamil Nadu in 2019 and 2021 respectively, has been allotted a new common symbol (Mike). The Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) that secured 1.09% and 0.99% votes in 2019 and 2021 has been denied a common symbol (Pot). This has raised questions about the allotment of symbols to 'registered unrecognised parties'.

What do the rules specify?

A party is recognised as a 'national' or 'state' party under the provisions of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 (Symbols Order) by the Election Commission of India (ECI). The criteria for recognition at the State level consists of (a) winning one Lok Sabha seat for every 25 seats or 3% of Legislative Assembly seats or (b) winning one Lok Sabha or two Assembly seats along with 6% of votes polled or (c) securing 8% of votes polled in a general election. Symbols are allotted to political parties and contesting candidates as per the provisions of the Symbols Order by ECI. In the largest democracy where a sizeable population is still illiterate, symbols play a crucial role in the voting process. A recognised political party has a reserved symbol that is not allotted to any other candidate in any constituency. For registered but unrecognised political parties, one of the free symbols is allotted as a common symbol during an election if that party contests in two Lok Sabha constituencies or in 5% of seats to the Assembly of a State as the case may be.

What is the current issue?

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. Furthermore, a party shall be eligible for a common symbol in any subsequent general election if it had secured at least 1% of votes polled in the State on the previous occasion when the party availed of this facility. Such an unrecognised party should however apply for a symbol every time in the prescribed format. This application can be made any time during the period commencing six months prior to the expiry of the term of the Lok Sabha or State Assembly as the case may be. The symbols are thereafter allotted on a 'first-come-first-served' basis.

In the above cases, the NTK had secured more than 1% of votes in the last two elections with the common symbol of 'Ganna Kisan'. However, since they applied for that symbol only in February 2024, the ECI had allotted that symbol to Bharatiya Praja Aikyata Party (BPAP), that had applied earlier, based on the 'first-come-first-served' rule. However, the BPAP has not contested elections in Tamil Nadu before. 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

Current Issue: Allocation of Common Election Symbols

- **Rule 10B of Symbols Order**: Provisions for concession of common free symbol to registered unrecognised parties for two general elections and eligibility criteria for subsequent elections.
- **NTK's Situation**: Despite securing more than 1% of votes in the last two elections, NTK lost its common symbol due to late application, leading to symbol allocation to BPAP.
- **VCK's Denial:** VCK was denied a common symbol due to failure to secure 1% of votes in 2021 State Legislative Assembly elections, despite having representation in Lok Sabha and State Assembly under a different symbol.

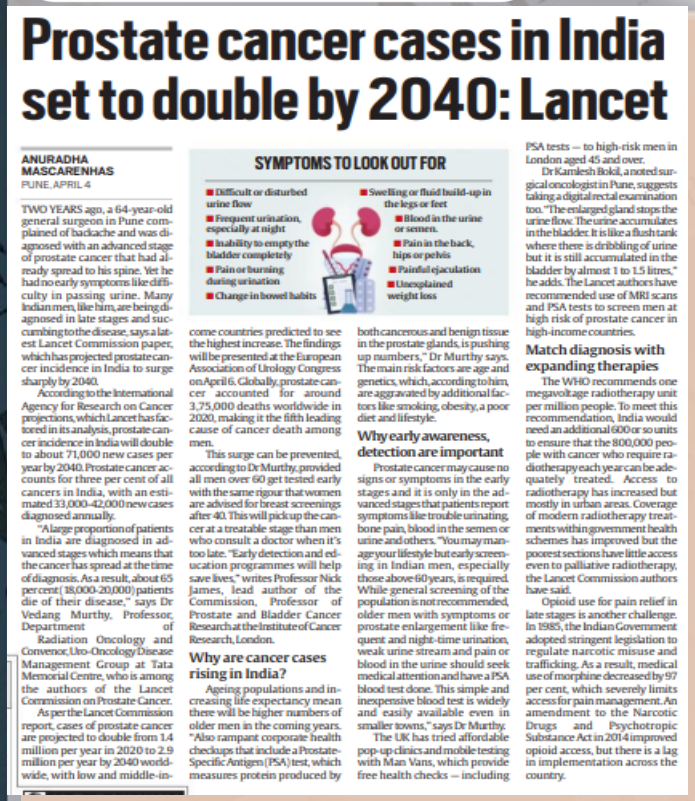
Context: The Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) that secured 3.9% and 6.5% votes in Tamil Nadu in 2019 and 2021 respectively, has been allotted a new common symbol (Mike).

Allocation of Symbols to Parties

- **Governed by:** The provision of **Section 29A** of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951.
- **Registration by:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) under **Article 324.**
- **Process:** Any party seeking registration must apply to the Election Commission **within a period of 30 days** following the date of its formation. The applicant needs to:
- **Recognition Criteria for National and State Parties:** Parties are classified as either 'national' or 'state' parties based on the criteria outlined in the Election Symbols Order, 1968, established by the Election Commission of India (ECI).
    - Recognition at the state level hinges on specific benchmarks, including winning Lok Sabha seats, percentage of Legislative Assembly seats, or percentage of votes polled in a general election.
- **Allotment of Symbols**: The Election Commission of India (ECI) allocates symbols to political parties and candidates in accordance with the provisions of the Symbols Order.
- **Common Symbols for Registered Unrecognized Parties**: Registered but unrecognized parties are provided with common symbols during elections if they meet certain criteria, such as contesting in a minimum number of Lok Sabha constituencies or a percentage of Assembly. seats.

PROSTATE CANCER

(Syllabus GS Paper 3 – Sci and Tech)



Prostate cancer cases in India set to double by 2040: Lancet

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, APRIL 4

TWO YEARS ago, a 64-year-old general surgeon in Pune complained of backache and was diagnosed with an advanced stage of prostate cancer that had already spread to his spine. Yet he had no early symptoms like difficulty in passing urine. Many Indian men, like him, are being diagnosed in late stages and succumbing to the disease, says a latest Lancet Commission paper, which has projected prostate cancer incidence in India to surge sharply by 2040.

According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer projections, which Lancet has factored in its analysis, prostate cancer incidence in India will double to about 71,000 new cases per year by 2040. Prostate cancer accounts for three per cent of all cancers in India, with an estimated 33,000-42,000 new cases diagnosed annually.

"A large proportion of patients in India are diagnosed in advanced stages which means that the cancer has spread at the time of diagnosis. As a result, about 65 percent (18,000-20,000) patients die of their disease," says Dr Vedang Murthy, Professor, Department of Radiation Oncology and Convenor, Uro-Oncology Disease Management Group at Tata Memorial Centre, who is among the authors of the Lancet Commission on Prostate Cancer.

As per the Lancet Commission report, cases of prostate cancer are projected to double from 1.4 million per year in 2020 to 2.9 million per year by 2040 worldwide, with low and middle-income countries predicted to see the highest increase. The findings will be presented at the European Association of Urology Congress on April 6. Globally, prostate cancer accounted for around 3,75,000 deaths worldwide in 2020, making it the fifth leading cause of cancer death among men.

This surge can be prevented, according to Dr Murthy, provided all men over 60 get tested early with the same rigour that women are advised for breast screenings after 40. This will pick up the cancer at a treatable stage than men who consult a doctor when it's too late. "Early detection and education programmes will help save lives," writes Professor Nick James, lead author of the Commission, Professor of Prostate and Bladder Cancer Research at the Institute of Cancer Research, London.

Why are cancer cases rising in India?

Ageing populations and increasing life expectancy mean there will be higher numbers of older men in the coming years. "Also rampant corporate health checkups that include a Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) test, which measures protein produced by both cancerous and benign tissue in the prostate glands, is pushing up numbers," Dr Murthy says. The main risk factors are age and genetics, which, according to him, are aggravated by additional factors like smoking, obesity, a poor diet and lifestyle.

Why early awareness, detection are important

Prostate cancer may cause no signs or symptoms in the early stages and it is only in the advanced stages that patients report symptoms like trouble urinating, bone pain, blood in the semen or urine and others. "You may manage your lifestyle but early screening in Indian men, especially those above 60 years, is required. While general screening of the population is not recommended, older men with symptoms or prostate enlargement like frequent and night-time urination, weak urine stream and pain or blood in the urine should seek medical attention and have a PSA blood test done. This simple and inexpensive blood test is widely and easily available even in smaller towns," says Dr Murthy.

The UK has tried affordable pop-up clinics and mobile testing with Man Vans, which provide free health checks — including PSA tests — to high-risk men in London aged 45 and over.

Dr Kamlesh Bokil, a noted surgical oncologist in Pune, suggests taking a digital rectal examination too. "The enlarged gland stops the urine flow. The urine accumulates in the bladder. It is like a flush tank where there is dribbling of urine but it is still accumulated in the bladder by almost 1 to 1.5 litres," he adds. The Lancet authors have recommended use of MRI scans and PSA tests to screen men at high risk of prostate cancer in high-income countries.

Match diagnosis with expanding therapies

The WHO recommends one megavoltage radiotherapy unit per million people. To meet this recommendation, India would need an additional 600 or so units to ensure that the 800,000 people with cancer who require radiotherapy each year can be adequately treated. Access to radiotherapy has increased but mostly in urban areas. Coverage of modern radiotherapy treatments within government health schemes has improved but the poorest sections have little access even to palliative radiotherapy, the Lancet Commission authors have said.

Opioid use for pain relief in late stages is another challenge. In 1985, the Indian Government adopted stringent legislation to regulate narcotic misuse and trafficking. As a result, medical use of morphine decreased by 97 per cent, which severely limits access for pain management. An amendment to the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act in 2014 improved opioid access, but there is a lag in implementation across the country.

SYMPTOMS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Difficult or disturbed urine flow
- Frequent urination, especially at night
- Inability to empty the bladder completely
- Pain or burning during urination
- Change in bowel habits
- Swelling or fluid build-up in the legs or feet
- Blood in the urine or semen.
- Pain in the back, hips or pelvis
- Painful ejaculation
- Unexplained weight loss

Context: According to a Lancet report published recently, the number of new prostate cancer cases around the world is projected to more than double over the next two decades as poorer countries catch up with the ageing of richer nations.

Prostate Cancer

- **About**: It originates in the prostate, a small gland in males responsible for producing seminal fluid.
- **Prevalence and Variability**: Among cancers, prostate cancer ranks as one of the most common types, with growth rates varying from slow to aggressive.
- **Early Detection and Treatment**: Detecting prostate cancer in its early stages, when localized within the prostate, offers the best prospects for successful treatment.
- **Symptoms:** Advanced stages of prostate cancer may manifest in various symptoms, including urinary difficulties, blood in urine or semen, bone pain, weight loss, and erectile dysfunction.
- **Risk Factors**: Age, race (particularly among Black individuals), family history, and obesity.

Key Findings of Report

- **Projected Rise in Prostate Cancer Cases**: The number of new cases annually is expected to increase from 1·4 million in 2020 to 2·9 million by 2040.
- **Inadequacy of Lifestyle Changes**: The surge in cases cannot be prevented solely by lifestyle changes or public health interventions.
- **Necessity for Government Strategies**: Governments need to prepare strategies to effectively deal with the rising incidence of prostate cancer.
- **Incidence in India**: Prostate cancer incidence in India is projected to double to about 71,000 new cases per year by 2040.
    - Prostate cancer accounts for three percent of all cancers in India, with an estimated 33,000-42,000 new cases diagnosed annually.
- **Diagnosis and Mortality in Advanced Stages**: A large proportion of patients in India are diagnosed in advanced stages, leading to a higher mortality rate, where about 65 percent die of the disease.

TIMES OF INDIA

Apr 4

PURANA QILA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 – History)

ASI plans to dig deeper for more historical legacy at Delhi's Purana Qila

Context: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has planned to further excavate the Purana Qila site near the kunti temple.

Purana Qila

- **About:** The fort is one of the oldest in Delhi, situated along the Yamuna river, known as Indraprastha or Pandavon ka Qila or Old fort.
- **Evidence**: Mentioned by the Greek traveler Megasthenes in the 4th century BCE as one of the seven cities of Delhi, showcasing its ancient roots.
- **Constructed by**: The 2nd Mughal Emperor Humayun, later completed by Afghan Sher Shah Suri, serving as the inner citadel of Din Panah during Humayun's reign.
- **Architectural Features**:
    - **Red Sandstone Citadel:** Rectangular in shape, Purana Qila's walls were crafted from red sandstone, showcasing Mughal architectural prowess.
    - **Strategic Moat:** A wide moat, connected to the Yamuna river, surrounded the fort, adding to its defensive capabilities.
- **Unique Structures**:
    - **Symbolic Gateways**: Humayun's construction of the massive gateway and walls laid the foundation for Dinpanah, featuring Indo-Islamic architectural elements.
    - **Iconic Landmarks**: Inside the fort, visitors can explore the Qila-i-Kuhna mosque, Sher Mandal tower, a stepwell, and remnants of the extensive rampart, each reflecting historical and architectural significance.
- **Previous Findings of the Excavation:** Shards of Painted Gray Ware Pottery, Vaikuntha Vishnu Sculpture, terracotta plaque portraying Gaja Lakshmi, erracotta ring well, well-defined four-room complex from the Sunga-Kushan period and 136 coins, 35 seals and sealings, and various copper artifacts.

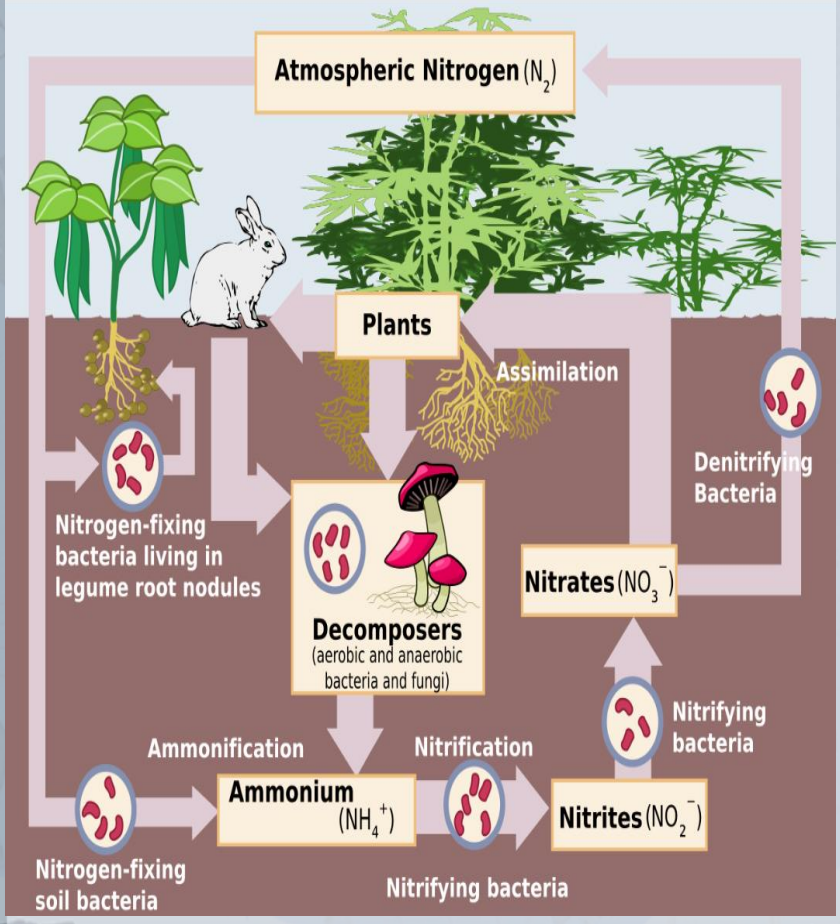
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Apr 4

NITROGEN FIXING BACTERIA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Envi. & Eco)

Evolution in action? New study finds possibility of nitrogen-fixing organelles



Context: Recently, researchers found nitrogen-fixing symbiotic organisms displaying organelle-like behaviors.

Nitrogen Fixing Bacteria

- **About:** These are microorganisms that convert atmospheric nitrogen into fixed nitrogen, essential for plant growth.
- **Importance in the Nitrogen Cycle**: These bacteria are responsible for over 90% of nitrogen fixation, playing a crucial role in maintaining the nitrogen cycle.
- **Types of Nitrogen-Fixing Bacteria**: There are two main types: free-living bacteria like Anabaena and Azotobacter, and mutualistic bacteria such as Rhizobium associated with leguminous plants.

Nitrogen Fixation

- **About**: Nitrogen fixation refers to the conversion of atmospheric N2 into reactive compounds like nitrates, nitrites, or ammonia.
- **Importance**: Reactive nitrogen forms produced through fixation are vital for crop growth and development.
- **Consequences of Nitrogen Deficiency**: Nitrogen deficiency impedes crop growth and compromises their health.
- **Biotic Sources**: Around 90% of natural nitrogen fixation is carried out by soil microorganisms.
- **Abiotic Sources**: Natural inducers like lightning and UV rays can trigger abiotic nitrogen fixation.
- **Industrial and Technological Nitrogen Fixation**: Nitrogen can also be fixed using electrical equipment or through industrial processes.

DARK ENERGY

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Sci and Tech)



3D map of universe may open a window to dark energy

Researchers, including team from India, publish finding based on observations by Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 4

AN INTERNATIONAL team of researchers has just released the most comprehensive "three-dimensional" map of the universe, which, scientists hope, could reveal some clues about dark energy, the mysterious force that is believed to be causing the universe to expand uncontrollably.

The researchers, including an Indian team led by Shadab Alam at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Mumbai, has published its findings from the first year of observations by the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument, or DESI, a unique piece of equipment that, once fitted over a telescope, can capture light from 5,000 galaxies at the same time.

Using DESI, which is mounted over the Mayall 4-Meter Telescope in Arizona, United States, researchers have been able to measure light from six million galaxies — some of which existed as far back as 11 billion years ago — to prepare the most detailed map of the universe as yet with very precise information about the distances between these galaxies.

"The key thing is that we have been able to measure the distances between these galaxies with a very high degree of accuracy. That is why we call it a three-dimensional map. Otherwise, we have a catalogue of tens of billions of objects in the universe. We have identified these objects, but for most of them we don't know how far they are from us. Knowing the precise distances of the galaxies is crucial because that allows us to calculate the expansion rate of the universe," Alam told The Indian Express. And that, scientists hope, could offer them their first clues into the mystery of dark energy that is supposed to make up almost 70 per cent of the universe but about which nothing is known.

The hypothesis of dark energy comes mainly from the observed phenomenon of the universe expanding at a rapid rate. The vast empty spaces between stars and galaxies have been measured to be expanding at an accelerating pace, despite the countervailing force of gravitation that has the effect of pulling things together. Scientists have been unable to find any explanation for this rapid expansion, and have been forced to hypothesise that there must be some "dark" energy causing this expansion.

Understanding the nature of dark energy is one of the fundamental problems in science right now, because it can offer key insights into the origin and evolution of the universe, as well as its eventual fate. It can reveal new fundamental forces at work, and could unravel our entire knowledge of the physical world. The problem is that, so far, scientists have not been able to figure out even the first piece of the puzzle.

But the data from DESI is causing some excitement.

"There is already a slight hint of new physics in the data from DESI. It is possible that it eventually turns out to be trivial, but there is promise. Also, right now we have been able to analyse only one year of observational data from DESI. It is scheduled to run for five years. This March 31, DESI completed three years of operations," Alam said.

One of them is the measurement of the expansion rate of universe. The DESI collaboration has measured that the expansion rate of the universe was increasing by 68.5 km per second after every 3.26 million light years of distance.

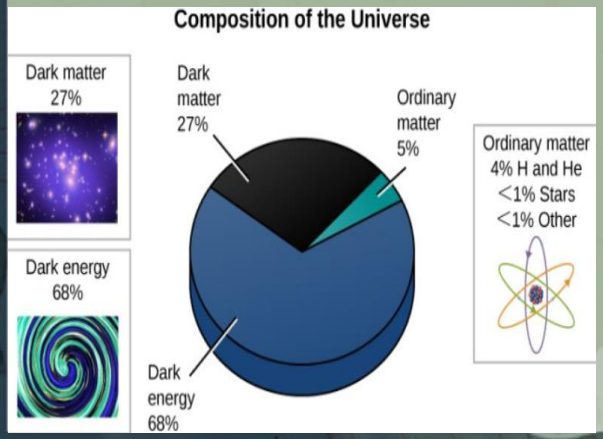
"From the scientific point of view, knowing this expansion rate with high precision is extremely significant. It can give us our first clues into the behaviour of dark energy," Alam said.

DESI is a collaboration of more than 900 researchers in institutions across the world. From India, TIFR is the only participating institution.

Context: A recent release by an international team of researchers unveils the most comprehensive "three-dimensional" map of the universe, offering insights into the enigmatic force of dark energy driving uncontrollable expansion.

Dark Energy

- **About**: It is an unidentified type of energy that influences the universe on its grandest scales.
- **Supernova Observations**: Initial evidence for dark energy came from observations of supernovae, revealing the universe's unexpected acceleration in its expansion.
- **Contradiction to Previous Assumptions**: Before these findings, it was believed that the universe's expansion would gradually slow down due to known forms of matter and energy.
- **Characteristics of Space**: Dark energy redefines our understanding of space, transforming it from a void into a dynamic, stretchable medium that responds to the presence of energy.
- **Expansion Dictated by Energy Forms**: Various forms of energy, including matter, radiation, and dark energy, uniquely influence the universe's expansion, leading to a non-uniform expansion rate across different regions of space.
- **Balancing Act**: Dark energy dominates the universe's energy budget, dictating the overall rate of expansion and necessitating a delicate balance with other forms of energy for the stability of the cosmos.



- **Does it Exist?**
  - **Accepted Premise**: Since the 1990s, dark energy has been the leading hypothesis to explain the accelerated expansion of the universe.
  - **Ongoing Research:** As of 2021, cosmology research continues to actively investigate the fundamental nature and properties of dark energy.

Dark Matter

- **About**: It is a hypothetical form of matter that is believed to exist in the universe but is invisible and does not interact with light. It makes up over 80% of all matter in the universe.

LIVEMINT

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AGNI PRIME

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Sci and Tech)

Night launch of nuclear capable Agni Prime missile successful

India has successfully carried out a night launch of new generation nuclear capable ballistic missile 'Agni Prime' from the Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha, boosting the country's strategic deterrence capability.

The defence ministry said the test-flight was carried out on Wednesday evening and it met all the trial objectives, validating the reliable performance, as confirmed from the data captured by a number of range sensors deployed at different locations.

The Strategic Forces Command (SFC), along with Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), carried out the flight test of the missile that has a strike range of 1,000 to 2,000 km.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO, SFC and the armed forces for the successful test flight and stated that the successful development and induction of the missile will be an excellent force multiplier for the military. PTI



SFC, along with DRDO, carried out the flight test of the Agni Prime missile that has a strike range of 1,000 to 2,000 km. PTI

Context: India successfully carried out the launch of the new-generation nuclear-capable ballistic missile 'Agni Prime' from Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha.

Agni Prime

- **About**: The 'Agni Prime' or 'Agni-P' is a nuclear-capable new-generation advanced variant of the Agni class of missiles.
- **Advanced Features and Design**: It is a two-stage canisterised missile with a maximum range of 1,000 to 2,000 km.
  - The 'Agni Prime' missile is lighter than all the earlier Agni series of missiles, weighing at least 50 per cent less than the Agni 3 missile.
  - It incorporates new guidance and propulsion systems, enhancing its efficiency and accuracy.
- **Enhanced Transportability and Storage**: Being canisterised, it can be transported by road and rail, and stored for longer periods.
  - This feature significantly reduces the time required for preparation and launch.
- **Launch Capabilities**: The missile uses a cold launch mechanism and can be fired in salvo mode, adding to its versatility.

India's Missile Arsenal Expansion:

- **Agni-5:** It is a land based nuclear MIRV-capable Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM).
  - **Operational range:** 7,000–8,000 kilometres.
- **Agni I:** Medium Range with a Range of 700-800 km.
- **Agni II:** Medium Range with a Range more than 2000 km.
- **Agni III:** Inter-Medium Range with Range of more than 2,500 Km
- **Agni IV:** Inter-Medium Range with Range more than 3,500 km.
- **Agni- VI**: Longest of the Agni series, an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) with a range of ICBM 11,000–12,000 km.

INDIAN LAUREL TREE

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

Watch: Andhra forest officials hack into tree, water gushes out



Context: Forest department authorities in Andhra Pradesh's Alluri Sitharama Raju district cut the bark of an Indian laurel tree, with water gushing out.

Indian Laurel Tree

- **About**: It is a tropical or subtropical tree primarily found across Asia, Western Pacific Islands, and Australia.
- **Scientific name**: Terminalia elliptica (syn. T. tomentosa), also known as Chinese banyan, Malayan banyan.
- **Habitat:** It provides a dense canopy, smooth light-gray bark, and shiny green lanceolate leaves, making it an ornamental tree.
- **Distribution**: Southern and Southeast Asia, including India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.
- **Features**: The thick foliage of the Indian Laurel tree creates an excellent habitat for various bird species.
    - The small round figs produced by the tree serve as food for birds.
- **Water Scarcity and Indian Laurel Trees**: Water gushing out from the Indian laurel tree's bark coincides with water scarcity in parts of India, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.
    - Bengaluru is facing a severe water crisis.
    - Reservoirs in Andhra Pradesh have a water storage of 22 per cent, significantly lower than last year's 66 per cent.

Reservoir Levels Across India

- Among the 21 major states with tracked reservoir status, 15 have levels below the decade-average.
- In Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, reservoir levels are over 20 per cent below the decade-average.
- Andhra Pradesh experiences the highest departure from the ten-year average at 49 per cent.

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DEMOCRACY INDEX
(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Polity)

On global indices measuring democracy

How do researchers measure democracy? Why is India worried about its ranking on global indices which measure democracy and political participation? What are the strengths and weaknesses of global datasets? Why does India want to make its own democracy index?

EXPLAINER

Saumya Kalia

The story so far:

The V-Dem Institute's recent democracy index termed India as "one of the worst autocratisers". Similar indices have downgraded India's democratic standing in recent years – India is only 'partly free' (Freedom House), is home to a "flawed democracy" (The Economist Intelligence Unit) and is better classified as an "electoral autocracy." The Indian Government has however refuted these assessments. It now plans to release its own democracy index, which, according to *Al Jazeera*, will help India "counter recent downgrades in ratings and severe criticisms by international groups".

Why does India care about a democracy index?

From the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project to Freedom House, there is a consensus that India's democracy is in peril. Ahead of the election season, these indices and "negative commentary" by think tanks and agencies threaten India's sovereign ratings and its ranking on the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, the *Al Jazeera* report noted. India has previously denounced all global rating assessments of Indian conditions, from democracy and press freedom to hunger, human development and happiness. Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar in 2021 called the makers of these indices "self-appointed custodians," who are "not motive-less." The grouse with democracy assessments is that the methodology is flawed, sample sizes are inadequate, and that these indices favour cultural bias and subjective opinion over objective metrics. India, for instance, ranks between Niger (which is ruled by a military junta) and the Ivory Coast, and is in the same category as Palestine. Any yardstick of democracy – be it fair elections or electoral participation – would suggest India is "doing as well as any other democracy," Mr. Jaishankar said.



GETTY IMAGES

What data do indices use?

There are many approaches to measuring democracy, some using facts, some judgment and some a mix of both. The four broad types of data that these indices use are – observational data (OD) which is data on observable facts, such as voter turnout rates; 'in-house' coding, where researchers assess country-specific information using academic material, newspapers, etc.; expert surveys, where selected experts from a country provide a subjective evaluation; and representative surveys, where a selected group of citizens offer judgments. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has endorsed the use of observational, objective data over judgment-based methodology for assessments to make them "more broadly acceptable." Others, however, find fact-based metrics "insufficient", and expert intervention necessary, to capture on-ground realities of governance.

Additionally, each index asks and responds to a different question evaluating the health of democracy. 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? Is it egalitarian – are economic and social resources distributed equally? The approach also varies vastly. Some use only two indicators while others have more than 400; the weightage assigned and aggregation model followed also fluctuates across projects. V-Dem's researchers code a series of indicators for 12 areas across media, civil society, political parties, and civil liberties and each area is assigned five experts.

What are the limitations of indices?

The first and the most frequently cited criticism is that there is a degree of subjectivity that tugs at the indices' credibility and precision. Regardless of the scholarly pool and aggregation model used, evaluations are still based on the judgment of researchers and coders, rather than tangible characteristics. V-Dem's "egalitarian" indicator, for instance, assesses the equality of social groups in the political arena – an equivocal question in comparison to say, how many political parties are present in the country. However, a project investigated the degree of expert biases in some indices and found them to be limited. Scholar Paul Staniland, who studied V-Dem's assessment of India since 1947, concurred, telling the *BBC* that "there's not an obvious anti-right-wing bias." Another concern is over the scope of countries included in these indices. Only some survey non-independent and microstates. Smaller countries may thus be overlooked in certain cases. The next criticism is of a perceived ideological discrepancy, partly due to the amorphous definition of democracy itself. Lesotho, which suffered a military coup in 2014, is assigned a higher score than India.

Therefore, there is no singular, perfect democracy index, just like there is no singular definition of democracy. Experts, including Mr. Staniland, agree the indices "capture important big-picture dynamics and trends" in democracy. They offer ways to benchmark the strengths and weaknesses of regimes, and make different components comparable over time periods and geographies.

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.

Context: The V-Dem Institute's recently released democracy index labeled India as "one of the worst autocratisers" — a designation it had already acquired in 2018 when it ceased to be classified as a democracy on the index.

Democracy Index

- **About**: The V-Dem Institute, based at Sweden's University of Gothenburg, has been annually assessing 202 countries' democratic status since 1789.
- **Freedom House's Focus:** Since 1973, the U.S.-based Freedom House has been providing assessments specifically on civil liberties and political rights.
- **Economic Intelligence:** The Economic Intelligence Unit has been evaluating democracies since 2006, focusing on aspects such as electoral processes, liberalism, participation, and effectiveness.
- **Additional Assessment Tools**: Other notable assessment methodologies include the Lexical Index, Boix-Miller-Rosato coding, Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Worldwide Governance Indicators, and International IDEA's Global State of Democracies report.
- **Four broad types of data that these indices use:**
    - Observational data (OD) data on observable facts, such as voter turnout rates
    - 'In-house' coding, where researchers assess country-specific information using academic material, newspapers, etc.
    - Expert surveys, where selected experts from a country provide a subjective evaluation
    - Representative surveys, where a selected group of citizens offer judgments
- **V-Dem Institute sorts countries into four regime types**: Liberal Democracy, Electoral Democracy, Electoral Autocracy, and Closed Autocracy.
    - India since 2018 is classified as an "electoral autocracy" due to a visible "democratic backsliding","crackdowns" on civil liberties.

Defining Democracy

- **Electoral Democracy**: Democracy is fundamentally characterized by free and fair elections where citizens participate.
- **Liberal Society**: Democracies ensure civic rights and offer protections to citizens, fostering liberal values.
- **Egalitarianism**: Examining the equitable distribution of economic and social resources within the society.
- **Rating Spectrum**: Different indices utilize varied scales, from numerical rankings to classifications ranging from autocracy to democracy, reflecting diverse perspectives on democracy's health.

INDIAN EXPRESS

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FALI S NARIMAN

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Polity)

Unflinching ethics, indomitable courage: CJI on Fali Nariman

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 4



Fali S Nariman

"THE VALUES which Fali Nariman embodied — unflinching ethics, indomitable courage and an unwavering pursuit of principle — provide a balm to the soul of the profession," said CJI D Y Chandrachud as he paid homage to the late Senior Advocate Fali S Nariman, who passed away on February 21 this year.

Remembering Nariman, the CJI delivered a heartfelt speech at a full-court reference to the eminent jurist, surrounded by the legal fraternity from the bar and the bench, along with the senior advocate's family members.

Born on January 10, 1929, in what was then called Burma, it was the Japanese invasion that caused Nariman's family to migrate to India, which the CJI termed 'fate'.

An 'outsider' to Delhi, Nariman first practised law in Bombay. "A 'foreigner' in Delhi has to establish himself both in integrity and ability. Only then will the Supreme Court Bar accept [them] as one of their own. But once they do, its members are the most affectionate and loyal of all comrades," read the CJI from Nariman's book *Before Memory Fades*, stating that he had passed this test with flying colours.

After the imposition of the Internal Emergency in June 1975, Nariman resigned as Additional Solicitor General. The CJI read Martin Luther King's speech: "Cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?' Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?' Vanity asks the question, 'Is it popular?' But Conscience asks the question, 'Is it right?' Mr Nariman was guided only by the last question," added the CJI. Authoring numerous books and articles, Nariman ensured that legal discourse was disseminated to everyone and did not remain constrained to lawyers, said the CJI.

Attorney General for India R Venkataramani and SCBA president Adish Aggarwala also paid homage to the late jurist.

In his reference speech, AG Venkataramani spoke about how Nariman dedicated his life to social and political causes. He also recalled that the Senior Advocate celebrated constitutional milestones achieved by juniors in the fraternity.

Towards the end of the reference, CJI Chandrachud said that Nariman fought many battles – some which still needed to be fought. "In the end, it was not Mr Nariman who gave up on these battles, it was only his body. His soul will live on in the many lives he touched and the thousands more he inspired," he said.

Context: Recently, CJI paid homage to the late Senior Advocate Fali S Nariman, stating that the values he embodied - unflinching ethics, indomitable courage, and an unwavering pursuit of principle provide a balm to the soul of the profession.

Fali S Nariman

- **Born:** 1929, in Rangoon (Myanmar), British India.
- **Legal Career:** Enrolled as an advocate of the Bombay High Court in 1950.
  - In 1971, he became a Senior Advocate in the Supreme Court.
  - In 1972, he was appointed as Additional Solicitor General of India, resigned a day after the imposition of Emergency in 1975, in protest.
  - President of the Bar Association of India from 1991 to 2010.
- **Political career:** He was a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha from 1999 to 2005.
- **Awards:** Received Padma Bhushan in 1991 and Padma Vibhushan in 2007 for contributions to law and jurisprudence.
- **Notable works:** Prolific author with notable works including "Before the Memory Fades" and "The State of the Nation."
- **Legal System and Judicial Independence**: He was part of was the challenge to the Constitutional amendment to set about a National Judicial Appointments Commission to replace the Collegium system for appointing judges.
  - Arguing against the new system, the jurist had said the proposed commission would be a "complete anathema to judicial independence".

PIB Apr 3

MYCGHS APP

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Health)

Union Health Ministry launches myCGHS iOS app

Context: Recently, the secretary of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched the myCGHS app.

myCGHS app

- **About:** The app is tailored to improve access to Electronic Health Records, information, and resources for Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) beneficiaries.
- **Developed by**: National Informatics Centre (NIC) Himachal Pradesh and NIC Health Team, ensuring reliability and quality.
- **Features**: Offering a suite of features aimed at enhancing information and accessibility for CGHS beneficiaries, making healthcare management more convenient.
- **Wide Range of Services**: Facilitates various services including appointment booking, accessing lab reports, checking medicine history, and more, providing comprehensive healthcare management options.
- **Security Features:** Incorporates robust security measures like 2-factor authentication and mPIN functionality to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of users' data.

Central Government Health Scheme

- **About:** It is a comprehensive healthcare scheme initiated by the Central Government for its employees, pensioners, and dependents, aiming to provide quality healthcare services.
- **Establishment**:1954,
- **Aim**: To cater to the healthcare needs of government employees and their families, ensuring accessible medical facilities.
- **Targeted Beneficiaries**: Provides healthcare facilities to registered employees and pensioners of the Central Government of India, ensuring their well-being.
- **Reimbursement Facilities**: Enrolled members are offered reimbursement and cashless facilities under this scheme, easing financial burdens related to healthcare.
- **Coverage**: Encompasses healthcare under various systems of medicine such as Allopathy, Homeopathy, Ayurveda, and Unani, catering to diverse medical needs.
- **Choice of Hospitals:** CGHS beneficiaries have the flexibility to undergo treatment at any empanelled private hospital of their choice, enhancing accessibility and options for quality healthcare.

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