

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**A new red line**

The Election Commission (EC) and Internet and Mobile Association of India — the body that represents social media firms — took a decisive step towards plugging this gap. The two agencies agreed on a Code of Ethics, which social media outfits will follow during the Lok Sabha elections.

Background

- Ever since the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, new media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, have become political battlegrounds.
- These spaces of electioneering have, however, remained unregulated because the Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951, does not cover social media.

The vision of Ethics Code

- The Code that came into effect on March 20 ticks several boxes — it emphasises transparency and stresses on measures to “prevent abuse of social media platforms”.
- However, as Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora put it, “the document should be seen as a work in progress”.
- Since adherence to the Code is voluntary, much will depend on the measures taken by individual social media outfits to put the document’s guidelines into practice.
- Section 126 of the RPA prohibits political parties and candidates from campaigning in the two days before voting.
- In January, an EC panel suggested bringing social media platforms under the Act’s ambit so that voters are “afforded a period of reflection”.
- The panel suggested that these new media platforms should abide by the EC’s guidelines about taking down “objectionable content”.
- Social media outfits, however, did not agree with the recommendation that such content “be taken down within three hours of a notice”.
- Valid legal orders will be acknowledged and/ or processed within three hours for violations reported under Section 126.
- Also welcome is the Code’s insistence on “transparency in paid political advertisements”. Any political advertisement posted without the EC’s certification and notified as such by the EC will be acted upon expeditiously, the Code says.
- The Code asks social media firms to train the EC’s nodal officers on how their “platforms work and on mechanisms for sending requests on dealing with offensive material”.
- These companies will also develop a “reporting mechanism” through which the poll watchdog can inform the platforms about “potential violations of Section 126”.

Way Forward: The Code’s success will depend, in large measure, on how these channels of communication work. In the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections, the conduct of the social media firms — and the EC — will be watched.

Right to Self-Defence

The right to self-defence extends not only to one’s own body but to protect the person and property of another; the Supreme Court has interpreted the provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The court acquitted a forest ranger, who was jailed for shooting an alleged sandalwood smuggler in 1988.

Key points of SC ruling

- The court observed that the right of private defence extends not only to “the defence of one’s own body against any offence affecting the human body but also to defend the body of any other person.
- The right also embraces the protection of property, whether one’s own or another person’s, against certain specified offences, namely, theft, robbery, mischief and criminal trespass.
- The court explained that the right does not arise if there is time to have recourse to the protection of the public authorities. Nor does it extend to the infliction of more harm than is necessary.
- When death is caused, the person exercising the right of self-defence must be under reasonable apprehension of death, or grievous hurt, to himself or to those whom he is protecting, the court explained.

Right to Self-defence

- Sections 96 to 106 of the IPC deals with the right to private defence.
- It is not necessary that there should be an actual commission of the offence in order to give rise to the right of private defence.
- A person who faces imminent and reasonable danger of losing his life or limb may in an exercise of self-defence inflict any harm even extending to death on his assailant either when the assault is attempted or directly threatened.
- It is enough if the accused apprehends that such an offence is contemplated and it is likely to be committed if the right of private defence is not exercised, the court ruled.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

Italy to join BRI

Italy set to become first G7 country to join 'Belt and Road' initiative.

About G7

- The G7 or the Group of Seven is a group of the seven most advanced economies as per the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- The seven countries are Canada, USA, UK, France, Germany, Japan and Italy. The EU is also represented in the G7.
- These countries, with the seven largest IMF-described advanced economies in the world represent 58% of the global net wealth (\$317 trillion).
- The G7 countries also represent more than 46% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) based on nominal values, and more than 32% of the global GDP based on purchasing power parity.
- The requirements to be a member of the G7 are a high net national wealth and a high HDI (Human Development Index).

Concerns for the West

- Italy's decision to get closer to Beijing has caused concern amongst its Western allies notably in Washington.
- The White House National Security Council has earlier urged Rome not to give "legitimacy to China's infrastructure vanity project".
- Critics of the BRI say it is designed to bolster China's political and military influence, bringing little reward to other nations, and warn that it could be used to spread technologies capable of spying on Western interests.

On India-Maldives ties

India and the Maldives appeared to return to the old days of strategic bonhomie when External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj met her counterpart Abdulla Shahid in Male during a brief visit this week.

The significant improvement in relationship

- It is the first full-fledged bilateral visit at the political level from India to the Maldives after the new government assumed office.
- Mr. Solih's inauguration, which was marked by the attendance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was assumed to be a potential inflection point in the trajectory of bilateral ties with India.
- The previous five years witnessed Male's disconcerting drift, under the aegis of the Abdulla Yameen government, into what many Maldivians felt was the stifling embrace of China.
- Chinese financing for infrastructure and construction projects poured in even as the functioning of the political Opposition and the judiciary was harshly curtailed.

Way forward for India

- It would be unwise for New Delhi to take the Indian Ocean nation for granted.
- In December, when Mr. Solih visited India, a \$1.4 billion financial assistance package for the Maldives was announced.
- While the proximity of the Indian general election may have precluded any major policy announcements from New Delhi, the two countries have agreed to exempt holders of diplomatic and official passports from visa requirements, inked an MoU on Indian grant-in-

aid for “high-impact community development projects”, and other agreements on energy efficiency and renewable energy, areas critical to the agenda of Mr. Solih.

- At a broader level, the archipelago and the larger Indian Ocean region could expect more collaborative approaches on regional maritime security issues, including counterterrorism and trans-national crimes.

Challenges

- The massive debts the Maldives incurred, by some estimates to the tune of \$3 billion, linked to infrastructure investments need to be unwound.
- Second, the multiparty alliance must hold firm despite immense political pressures that arise from varying visions for governance.
- Some tensions already seem to be bubbling to the top: on February 25, Mohamed Nasheed, former President and important coalition-builder in the MDP, tweeted about the country’s Supreme Court “meddling in elections — again”.
- For genuine peace and bilateral harmony to take root in the region, building a shared vision for the future of the Maldives is the immediate task at hand.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

A new law to empower forest staff

A proposed legislation accords significant powers to India’s forest officers — including the power issue search warrants, enter and investigate lands within their jurisdictions, and to provide indemnity to forest officers using arms to prevent forest-related offences.

Indian Forest Act, 2019

- The Indian Forest Act, 2019 is envisaged as an amendment to the Indian Forest Act, 1927.
- It is an attempt to address contemporary challenges to India’s forests.
- It proposed to provide indemnity to Forest-officer using arms etc, to prevent the forest offence.
- Forest-officer not below the rank of a Ranger shall have power to hold an inquiry into forest offences and shall have the powers to search or issue a search warrant under the CrPC, 1973.
- Any Forest-officer not below the rank of a Forester may, at any time enter and inspect any land within his area of jurisdiction.

Defining Village forests

- Village forests according to the proposed Act, may be forestland or wasteland, which is the property of the government.
- It would be jointly managed by the community through the Joint Forest Management Committee or Gram Sabha.

Issues surrounding this Act

- Independent experts said that the proposed law would lead to conflicts during implementation, particularly when seen in the context of the Forest Rights Act, 2006.
- In effect, the aim is to strengthen the forest bureaucracy in terms of deciding on how to decide on [title claims] over forest land, what parts to declare [off-limits] for conservation, checking encroachments, etc.
- In recent times, things have dramatically changed since 1927 with new laws, greater rights accorded to forest dwellers by the Constitution.

India’s first forest-certification scheme gets global recognition

Recently, a Geneva-based non-profit decided to endorse the Certification Standard for Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) developed by Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF), an Indian non-profit.

Forest Certification

- Forest certification is a global movement initiated in 1990s after Rio Earth Summit.
- It is a market-based non-regulatory conservation tool designed to promote sustainable management of forests and trees outside forests by an independent third party.
- As several developed countries have put trade restrictions on import of non-certified timber, non-timber forest products and wood-based goods into their countries, getting sustainable forest management certificates has become mandatory for exports.

Significance

- The council of Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) that provides independent third-party certification for sustainable forest management took this decision through a postal ballot.
- India now has a globally recognised forest-certification scheme developed specifically for Indian forests.

About NCCF

- Forest-based industries in India, particularly those for paper, boards, plywood, medium density fibreboard, furniture and handicrafts etc, have been pushing for forest certification to enhance their market accessibility to western markets including European Union and USA.
- The NCCF was set up in 2015 by representatives of forest-based industries, non-profits, forest auditors and government forest departments with an aim to set standards for certifying India's forests, their products and their sustainable management.
- The NCCF's forest certification scheme is aimed to improve India's forest management regime that is often criticised for various issues ailing the sector such as forest rights, forest degradation, biodiversity losses, encroachments, lack of manpower, etc.

World Water Day- 22 March

- World Water Day is celebrated every year on March 22nd.
- The theme for World Water Day 2019 is 'Leaving no one behind,' which is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: as sustainable development progresses, everyone must benefit.
- Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water for all by 2030. By definition, this means leaving no one behind.
- World Water Day is coordinated by UN-Water – the UN's inter-agency collaboration mechanism for all freshwater related issues – in collaboration with governments and partners.

About World Water Day:

- In the year 1992, March 22 was first officially added in the schedule 21 of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development as World Water Day in the Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- The celebrations to mark world water day started from the year 1993. The aim of the day is to increase awareness among people about the importance, need and conservation of water.
- The World Water Development Report is also released by the UN every year around World Water Day.

Water, a human right:

- In 2010, the UN recognized "the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights."
- The human right to water entitles everyone, without discrimination, to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use; which includes water for drinking, personal sanitation, washing of clothes, food preparation, and personal and household hygiene.
- People are left behind without safe water for many different reasons. The following are some of the 'grounds for discrimination' that cause certain people to be particularly disadvantaged when it comes to accessing water:
 - Sex and gender.
 - Race, ethnicity, religion, birth, caste, language, and nationality.
 - Disability, age and health status.
 - Property, tenure, residence, economic and social status.
 - Other factors, such as environmental degradation, climate change, population growth, conflict, forced displacement and migration flows can also disproportionately affect marginalized groups through impacts on water.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You've got a dream that's worth more than your sleep.