

### **CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**

#### **The Lack of a Legal Status for the Model Code of Conduct Leaves Room for Ambiguity**

For the past few months, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has been brought under increasing scrutiny for its diffidence and deference to the ruling regime. The Election Commission is ceding space to the ruling party instead of innovatively enhancing the residuary powers bestowed upon it by Article 324 of the constitution.

#### **Incidents of concession from ECI**

- Deferral of announcement of dates for the state assembly elections – The ECI's deferral of announcement of dates for the state assembly elections in five states in October last year, was largely construed as giving time to the prime minister to complete his public address in Ajmer, before the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) kicked in.
- EVMs– More recently, the charges of EVM malfunctions and the ECI's reluctance to check a more substantial proportion of VVPATs.
- Not restraining political parties – and what appears to be its helplessness in restraining political parties – especially the ruling BJP – from violating the MCC, have diminished the stature of the ECI.

#### **ECI's Role in present Elections**

- No legal sanction to MCC – The ECI has remained averse to giving the MCC a statutory character, preferring the advantage of 'quick' executive action and also to retain Article 324 as the source of its authority rather than re-assign it to a pre-existing parliamentary statute.
- Political parties' disregard – MCC compliance deficit being witnessed in the 2019 elections reflects the political parties' disregard towards the MCC, as well as the inability of the ECI to retain its constitutional advantage through constant vigilance and stern action.

### **INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**

#### **External Affairs Ministry sets up Indo-Pacific Wing**

India has just set up an Indo-Pacific division in the foreign office. MEA's territorial divisions are crucial for policy making, so the creation of an Indo-Pacific division is a big step by the government.

#### **India-Pacific Wing**

- The brainchild of foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale, the new division is intended to give a coherent architecture to the policy, which was articulated in the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018.
- The division will integrate the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN region and the Quad to the Indo-Pacific table.
- It is not clear whether the different trilateral groupings in the Indo-Pacific theatre, like the India-Japan-US, India-Australia-Indonesia and India-Australia-Japan would be part of this division's responsibility.
- The division will be headed for the moment by joint secretary for whom it will be an additional charge apart from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

#### **Why such move?**

- The US recently renamed its Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific Command as it seeks to give teeth to its Indo-Pacific policy.
- In India, the policy will be run by the MEA, though it is expected that as it moves along, it will work with the defence ministry which runs its own Indo-Pacific policy.
- For instance, Indian ships are currently touring Vietnam on a goodwill visit en route to China, while others are in Mozambique to provide relief.
- While South Asia is wary of China, it is equally wary of the US and its allies, preferring to keep the region outside great power politics.
- It is this that India wants to address and engage with.

#### **Maintaining the regional spirit**

- India is planning to put greater energy to the IORA because the heart of its Indo-Pacific policy is rooted in the Indian Ocean.
- This integrates the blue economy part of the Indian policy with the security part — a trilateral security mechanism between India, Sri Lanka and Maldives.
- In its Indo-Pacific diplomacy, India has repeatedly placed Asean at the centre of its policy.
- Singapore, Vietnam and now Indonesia are key partners in the region for India. This will also involve the Quad and taking this new grouping to the region.

### **ISSUES RELATED TO INTERNAL SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

#### **Assam Rifles**

The Delhi High Court has sought the response from the Cabinet Committee on Security on a plea seeking directions to remove the dual control of Assam Rifles and bring it under the Ministry of Defence.

#### **Key facts:**

- Assam Rifles which is also referred to as the Sentinels of North East is the oldest paramilitary force of India.

- The administrative control of Assam Rifles lies with the Home Ministry, while the operational control is with the Defence Ministry.

What's the issue now?

- A plea filed in the court alleges the dual control as the violation of the rights of the troopers of Assam Rifles. The plea challenges the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961 saying that it places Assam Rifles under the head 'Police', which is arbitrary, unreasonable and violates the rights of Assam Rifles ex-servicemen guaranteed under Article 14 of the Constitution.
- The petition argues since the objective and functions of Assam Rifles were that of military and paramilitary force, its categorisation as a police force was arbitrary, unreasonable and in violation of the rights of its personnel. The petition seeks a grant of pay, allowances, pension (including arrears) and ex-servicemen facilities to Assam Rifles personnel at par with the Indian Army.

**ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**

**World Heritage Day 2019: Significance and this year's theme**

- The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1982 had decided to celebrate April 18 as the International Day for Monuments and Sites or World Heritage Day.
- Approved by UNESCO in 1983 during its 22nd General Conference, the day is dedicated to recognising sites of historical importance, raising awareness regarding them, and stressing on the need to restore and preserve them.
- The day promotes cultural importance, while also highlighting the many impediments in doing so.
- Every year, a theme is proposed for the day which guides the celebrations and the many activities that ICOMOS National and International Scientific Committees and by other bodies organise.
- The theme for this year's celebrations is 'Rural Landscapes', which is related to the theme of the 2019 ICOMOS Scientific Symposium on Rural heritage that will take place in Marrakesh, Morocco in October.

Rural Landscapes

- ICOMOS defines rural landscape as, "Principles concerning rural landscapes as heritage", adopted by the ICOMOS General Assembly in 2017.
- Rural landscapes are defined as "terrestrial and aquatic areas co-produced by human-nature interaction used for the production of food and other renewable natural resources, via agriculture, animal husbandry and pastoralism, fishing and aquaculture, forestry, wild food gathering, hunting, and extraction of other resources, such as salt. Rural landscapes are multifunctional resources.
- At the same time, all rural areas have cultural meanings attributed to them by people and communities: all rural areas are landscapes.
- Rural landscape has been a site of both tangible and intangible heritage and has also helped in maintaining a balance between the environment and human activities.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC**

**Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) programme**

The Union Cabinet has approved the ongoing Phase 4 of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) programme. The total fund requirement for the GSLV Continuation Programme is Rs 2729.13 crores including the cost of five GSLV vehicles, essential facility augmentation, programme management and launch campaign.

The programme and its significance:

- The GSLV Programme – Phase 4 will enable the launch of 2 tonne class of satellites for Geo-imaging, Navigation, Data Relay Communication and Space Sciences into the Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO).
- Under the GSLV Continuation Programme, five GSLV flights have been planned during the period 2021-2024.
- The GSLV Continuation Programme – Phase 4 will meet the launch requirement of satellites for providing critical Satellite Navigation Services and Data Relay Communication for supporting the Indian Human spaceflight programme 'Gaganyaan' and the next interplanetary mission to Mars.
- It will help sustain the self-reliance in the launching of similar satellites for national requirements including next generation navigation satellites, data relay communication satellites and interplanetary missions.

What is Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV)?

- GSLV is a 49 m tall three stage vehicle with the first stage comprising a solid booster with four liquid strap-on motors, each weighing 40 ton. The second stage is a liquid engine and the third stage is the indigenously built Cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS) which uses 15 ton of cryogenic propellants such as Liquid Hydrogen (LH2) as fuel and Liquid Oxygen (LOX) as Oxidiser.
- With the recent successful launch of GSLV-F11 on December 19, 2018, GSLV has successfully placed 10 national satellites.

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**Change Nothing and Nothing Changes.**