

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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## CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER AND OTHER ELECTION COMMISSIONERS (APPOINTMENT, CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND TERM OF OFFICE) ACT, 2023

### In Context

- The **Supreme Court** declined a request for an interim stay on the **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023**.

### About

- The Act replaces the **Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991**.
  - ♦ The Act set the **salary of the CEC and ECs** at the same level as a Supreme Court judge.
  - ♦ It did not provide for their appointment process, which continued to be decided by the President.

### Background

- In 2023, while examining the appointment of the CEC and ECs, the Supreme Court declared that their appointment **should not be done solely by the Executive**.
- The Court noted that the ECI should be independent of Executive control.
- It mandated a selection process, which would hold until Parliament made a law.
  - ♦ The Court directed that the appointment should be done by the President on the recommendation of a Selection Committee.
  - ♦ **The Selection Committee** will consist of: (i) the Prime Minister, (ii) the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, and (iii) the Chief Justice of India.

### Article 324 of Constitution

- Article 324 of the Constitution states that the Election Commission will comprise the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** and such number of Election Commissioners (ECs), as the President may decide.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) is responsible for managing the preparation of electoral rolls and conducting elections to

Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President.

- The Constitution specifies that the **President** will appoint the CEC and ECs, **subject to the provisions of an Act of Parliament**.

### Key Features of the CEs and ECs Appointment Act, 2023

- **Election Commission:** The Election Commission will consist of a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and other Election Commissioners (ECs). The President will **periodically fix the number of ECs**.
- **Appointment of the Commission:** The Commission will be appointed by the President, upon the **recommendation of the Selection Committee**.
  - ♦ The Selection Committee will comprise the **Prime Minister, Cabinet Minister, and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha** (or leader of the single largest opposition party).
  - ♦ A **Search Committee** headed by the **Cabinet Secretary** will suggest five names to the Selection Committee.
  - ♦ The Selection Committee may consider any person other than those suggested by the Search Committee.
- **Eligibility criteria:** The CEC and ECs must: (i) be persons of integrity, (ii) have knowledge and experience in the management and conduct of elections, and (iii) be or have been Secretary (or equivalent) to the government.
- **Term and reappointment:** Members of the Election Commission will hold office for six years, or until they attain the **age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier.
  - ♦ Members of the Commission **cannot be re-appointed**.
  - ♦ If an EC is appointed as a CEC, the overall period of the term may not be more than six years.
- **Salary and pension:** The salary, allowances, and other conditions of service of the CEC and ECs will be **equivalent to that of the Cabinet Secretary**.
- **Removal:** The Bill **retains the manner of removal** of CEC and ECs as specified in the Constitution.
  - ♦ The CEC may be removed in the same manner and on the **same grounds as a Supreme Court Judge**.

- ◆ ECs may be removed only upon the recommendation of the CEC.

### Concerns of the Act

- **Independence of the Election Commission:** The Constitution envisages the Election Commission (ECI) as an independent body that is responsible for conducting free and fair elections.
  - ◆ Several provisions in the Bill may undermine the independence of the ECI.
- **Selection Committee is Dominated by the Government:** The Selection Committee will consist of the Prime Minister, a Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha which means majority of members are from the government of the day.

### Suggestions for Composition of the Selection Committee

- **Goswami Committee (1990):** CEC appointed by the President in consultation with the Chief Justice + Leader of Opposition of Lok Sabha.
    - ◆ **For EC:** Appointed by the President in consultation with the Chief Justice + Leader of Opposition of Lok Sabha + CEC.
  - **The Constitution (Seventeenth Amendment) Bill 1990:** Chairman of Rajya Sabha + Speaker of Lok Sabha + Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha.
    - ◆ The CEC was further made a part of the consultative process in the appointment of the Election Commissioners.
  - **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution Report (2002):** Prime Minister + Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha + the Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha + the Speaker of Lok Sabha + the Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha.
  - **Law Commission (2015):** Prime Minister + the Leader of Opposition of Lok Sabha + the Chief Justice.
  - **Supreme Court (2023):** Prime Minister + Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha + Chief Justice.
- **Validity of Selection Committee:** The Act upholds the validity of the Selection Committee **even if there is a vacancy** or defect in constituting the Committee.
  - **Role of Search Committee:** The Selection Committee selects names from a panel of five people suggested by the Search Committee.

- ◆ The Selection Committee may go beyond the names suggested by the Search Committee, and choose any other candidate which may undermine the role of the Search Committee.

- **Eligibility Criteria:** Only a person who is or has been at a rank equivalent to Secretary to the government will be eligible.
  - ◆ By limiting the eligibility criteria of the CEC and ECs to civil servants, the Bill may exclude other qualified individuals from such posts.
- **Salaries:** The Act equates the salary of the CEC and ECs to that of the Cabinet Secretary of the government. Earlier, it was equated to the salary of the Supreme Court Judge.
  - ◆ Both salaries are currently equivalent but they are regulated differently.
  - ◆ The salary of a Cabinet Secretary salary is fixed by the government upon the recommendation of the Central Pay Commission which allows the greater control of the Executive in determining the salary of the CEC and ECs.

### Conclusion

- The CEC and EC Appointment Act 2023 shows reform in the selection process for the ECI, but it also raises concerns about the potential hijacking of the process of appointment of CEC & EC in the hands of the executive.
- The suggested alterations could potentially impact the autonomy and operations of the Election Commission of India .
- The independence of the Election Commission is paramount to guarantee impartiality and integrity in the execution of electoral processes.
- Addressing these concerns and upholding the non-partisan nature of the Election Commission is essential for maintaining public trust in the electoral system and ensuring fair and unbiased elections.

Source: *IE*

## INDIA AND CZECH REPUBLIC TIES

### In News

- India signed bilateral cooperation agreements with the Czech Republic at the **Vibrant Gujarat summit**.

### Key Points

- India and Czech Republic have agreed to strengthen mutual ties and tap into untapped potential for innovation cooperation.

- ◆ Their collaboration is set to extend across various areas, including new and emerging technologies, automobiles, climate change, and defence.

### India-Czech Republic Bilateral Relations

- **Historic Linkages:** India's relations with former Czechoslovakia and with present Czech Republic, have always been warm, friendly and have a long history.
  - ◆ In the medieval ages, the **Kingdom of Bohemia** (now a part of Czech Republic) traded with India in precious goods and Indian spices.
  - ◆ During the Czech National Revival- a cultural movement which took place during the 18th and 19th centuries with the purpose of reviving the Czech language, culture and national identity, prominent Czech scholars got inspired by ancient Indian culture.
- **Diplomatic relations:** They were established with Czechoslovakia on 18 November, 1947.
  - ◆ After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1993, India immediately recognized the Czech Republic.
- **Economic and Commercial Relations:** The bilateral economic relations gained momentum after the Czech Republic gained entry into the European Union in 2004.
  - ◆ New mechanisms and diversified interaction thereafter resulted in revival of bilateral trade to more than US \$ 3.16 billion in 2022, from just US \$ 86 million in 1993 as per Czech statistics.
- **Defence Cooperation:** The bilateral Defence Cooperation gained momentum with the signing of MoU on Bilateral Defence Cooperation in October 2003.
  - ◆ Accordingly, a Joint Defence Committee has been set up.
  - ◆ The Czech defence companies have been regularly supplying military equipment to Indian armed forces.
- **Science and Technology Cooperation:** India and Czech Republic are working in niche technologies given the latter's strength as the incubator of Technologies in strategic sectors such as defence, nuclear energy, cyber security, AI, Big Data, nanotechnology, laser etc.

- ◆ In June 2017, ISRO launched Czech nanosatellite -VZLUSAT-1 (size 20 cm x 10 cm x 10 cm and weight 2 kg), the first Czech technological satellite. Its mission is to verify new products and technologies on Earth's orbit.

- **Multilateral Cooperation:** The Czech Republic strongly supported India's full membership of the **Nuclear Suppliers Group(NSG)** through its constructive role in NSG and in EU deliberations.
- **Educational and Tourism Cooperation:** Indology has a very old tradition in Prague, starting with the establishment of a Chair in Sanskrit in the prestigious Charles University in the 1850s.
  - ◆ Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, Tamil are currently taught in this University.
  - ◆ In January 2020 Czech Foreign Minister announced an expansion in quota for fast track visas for highly skilled/professionals from India.
  - ◆ The Czech Republic is a popular destination for Indian tourists.
- **Indian Community:** Approximately 9000 Indian nationals- mostly IT professionals, business personnel and students residing in the Czech Republic.

### Do you know ?



- The Czech Republic is a **landlocked country** in Central Europe.
- It is **bordered by** Poland to the north, Germany to the west, Austria to the south and Slovakia to the east.
- Its capital and largest city is **Prague**.
- It consists of **five main geographic regions:** the Bohemian Mountains, the Sudeten Mountains, the Bohemian Basin, the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands and the Moravian Lowlands.
- It has several major rivers, including the Elbe, Ohre, and Vltava.

Source: LM

## GREEN HYDROGEN: ENABLING MEASURES ROADMAP FOR ADOPTION IN INDIA

### In Context

- **The World Economic Forum** has released its report '**Green Hydrogen: Enabling Measures Roadmap for Adoption in India**'.
  - ♦ The report recommends **five areas** that can benefit from **public-private interventions** in expediting the adoption of green hydrogen in India.

### Extraction of Hydrogen

- Hydrogen exists in **combination with other elements**.
- Hence, for using it as a source of energy, it has to be **extracted from naturally occurring compounds** like water (which is a combination of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom).
- **Green hydrogen** refers to hydrogen that is produced **using renewable energy sources**, such as wind, solar, or hydropower, through a process called electrolysis.
  - ♦ Electrolysis involves splitting water (H<sub>2</sub>O) into hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>) and oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) using an electric current.
  - ♦ When this electricity comes from renewable sources, the hydrogen produced is considered "green" because the overall process has a **minimal environmental impact**.
- **Grey Hydrogen**: It involves extracting hydrogen from natural gas through a process called **steam methane reforming (SMR)**.
  - ♦ This process releases **carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)** as a byproduct, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Blue Hydrogen**: It involves **capturing and storing the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions** generated during the production of hydrogen from **natural gas**.
- **Significance of Green Hydrogen**: Green hydrogen is gaining attention as a clean and sustainable energy carrier because it **avoids carbon emissions** during its production.
  - ♦ It is seen as a key component in efforts to **decarbonize various sectors**, including industries that currently rely heavily on fossil fuels.

- ♦ The use of green hydrogen is being explored in areas such as **transportation, industrial processes, and energy storage**, with the goal of reducing overall carbon footprints and promoting a more sustainable energy future.

### Need for the Transition

- India is currently the **third-largest economy in the world** in terms of energy needs, and the country's demand for energy is set to surge – demand is estimated to grow **35% by 2030**.
- India set a **commitment to achieve net zero by 2070** at the **United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26)**.
- Green hydrogen is critical to help meet **India's energy security needs** while reducing emissions on the path to net zero.
- Most of the country's current hydrogen supply is **grey hydrogen**.

### Key Highlights of the Report

- **Trends**: There is limited on-the-ground traction for green hydrogen in the country, and indicates that most are in a "wait-and-watch" phase.
  - ♦ Many expect sizable production of green hydrogen to take effect beginning in 2027 and after.

### Five goals that, if met, can accelerate the offtake of green hydrogen in India:

- On the supply side, a cost of \$2/kg of hydrogen to reach **cost-parity with grey hydrogen**.
- On the demand side, enabling end industries to offtake green hydrogen by **creating incentives for its use**.
- **Increasing direct subsidies** for early adopters – for example, the USA has announced, under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a tax credit of up to \$3/kg of hydrogen.
- Supporting **long capital investment** cycles for technologies with long-term clarity on policies and incentives.
- Encouraging the development and testing of **indigenous electrolyser technology**.

### Initiatives by Government of India for Transitioning towards Green Hydrogen

- **National Hydrogen Energy Mission (NHEM)**: NHEM is a part of National Hydrogen Mission (NHM) which was announced by the finance minister in the Union Budget 2021-22.

- ♦ **Objective:** To make India a global hub for the production and export of green hydrogen.
- **Green Hydrogen Policy:** Several states in India have been working on formulating green hydrogen policies to attract investments and promote the development of green hydrogen projects.
- **Hydrogen Energy Roadmap:** The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has been working on a roadmap for hydrogen energy to guide the development and deployment of hydrogen technologies in the country.
- **International Collaboration:** Collaborations with countries and organizations that have advanced in hydrogen technologies aim to facilitate knowledge transfer and technology adoption.
- **Policy Support for Renewable Energy:** Policies promoting the growth of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, indirectly support the production of green hydrogen, as these sources are often used in the electrolysis process to generate hydrogen.
- **Incentives and Subsidies:** The government may provide financial incentives, subsidies, or other support mechanisms to encourage the private sector to invest in green hydrogen projects.
  - ♦ This can include tax incentives, grants, and subsidies for production and consumption.
- The NCAP's initial target was to reduce **two key air pollutants, PM10 and PM2.5**, by 20-30% by 2024, with 2017 levels as the base. In September 2022, the Centre revised this to a 40% reduction by 2026.
- The plan includes 131 non-attainment cities, across 23 states and Union territories, which were identified by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.
  - ♦ **Non-attainment cities** are those that have fallen short of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for over five years.
- **"PRANA"** – Portal for Regulation of Air-pollution in Non-Attainment Cities, is a portal for monitoring the implementation of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

#### Five-year status check of the NCAP's progress

- For 49 cities, PM2.5 data was available for all five years. Out of these, 27 cities recorded improvements in PM2.5 levels from 2019 to 2023.
- Similarly, for PM10, data across five years was available for 46 cities. Of these, 24 cities saw an improvement in their PM10 levels.

### CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

#### Funding:

- **Underutilisation of funds:** Allocated funds are not utilised fully by most of the cities. Cities are lacking necessary will to implement action plans effectively.
- **Unequal distribution:** Some cities receive more funding than others, leading to disparity in progress and resentment.

#### Implementation Hurdles:

- **Inter-departmental coordination:** Seamless collaboration between various government agencies (environment, transport, industry) is crucial, but bureaucratic silos often hinder progress.
- **Infrastructure gaps:** Lack of adequate monitoring stations, waste management facilities, and cleaner alternatives for industries slows down progress.

#### Public Awareness and Behavior Change:

- **Limited awareness:** Many citizens don't understand the gravity of air pollution, hindering adoption of cleaner practices like carpooling or using public transport.

#### Conclusion

- India has a unique opportunity to become a global leader in the hydrogen energy ecosystem.
- With proper policy support, industry action, market generation and acceptance, and increased investor interest, India can position itself as a low-cost, zero-carbon manufacturing hub, at the same time fulfilling its goal of economic development, job creation, and improved public health.

Source: **DTE**

## 5 YEARS OF NATIONAL CLEAN AIR PROGRAMME (NCAP)

#### Context

- The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) recently **completed five years**.

#### About National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change launched the **NCAP in 2019** as a long-term, time-bound, national level strategy to tackle the rising air pollution.

- **Resistance to change:** Existing habits and reliance on personal vehicles can pose a barrier to adopting eco-friendly behaviors.
- **Ineffective outreach:** Public awareness campaigns might not reach all communities, particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups.

### Industrial Compliance and Regulation:

- **Stringent standards vs. economic interests:** Strict emission norms might be met with resistance from industries fearing financial implications.
- **Weak enforcement:** Existing environmental regulations lack strong enforcement mechanisms, leading to non-compliance by polluting industries.
- **Outdated technologies:** Industries using older, polluting technologies lack incentives to invest in cleaner alternatives.

### Rapid urbanization and population growth:

- Increasing emissions from vehicles and construction activities put additional pressure on air quality.

### Geographical factors:

- Topography and weather patterns can trap pollutants, making it harder to disperse them in certain regions like Delhi NCR.

### Measures:

- **Push for utilization of funds:** There is a need to ensure that the funds are equitably distributed among cities with their proper utilisation.
- **Streamlined implementation:** Addressing bureaucratic bottlenecks and expediting project execution.
- **Effective public awareness campaigns:** Targeting diverse communities with tailored messages and promoting behavior change.
- **Strengthening regulations and enforcement:** Implementing stricter standards, improving monitoring, and holding polluters accountable.
- **Investing in technology and innovation:** Supporting research and development of cleaner technologies for industries and cleaner fuels for vehicles.

### Way Ahead:

- NCAP represents **a significant step towards cleaner air in India.**

- **Continued efforts from all stakeholders,** including government agencies, industries, and citizens, are essential for achieving its ambitious targets and ensuring a healthier future for all.

Source: *IT*

## THIRTY METER TELESCOPE (TMT) PROJECT

### Context:

- An Indian delegation visited Mauna Kea, Hawaii, USA and discussed challenges in the progress of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) project and ways to overcome them.

### About

- The project has faced considerable challenges. The upcoming projects have **invited local opposition on the grounds that building telescopes violates religious and cultural customs.**
- **Alternate site:** There are plans to construct the TMT at an alternate site, on **La Palma in Spain's Canary Islands**, which is seen as the next best choice.

### Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) Project

- The TMT has been conceived as a **30-metre diameter primary-mirror optical and infrared telescope** that will enable observations into deep space.
- It is proposed as a **joint collaboration involving institutions in the US, Japan, China, Canada, and India.**
  - ♦ Indian participation in the project was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2014.

### Indian contribution

- India expects to be a major contributor to the project and **will provide**
  - ♦ **hardware** (segment support assemblies, actuators, edge sensors, segment polishing, and segment coating),
  - ♦ **instrumentation** (first light instruments), and
  - ♦ **software** (observatory software and telescope control systems) worth **\$200 million.**
  - ♦ Of the 492 precisely polished mirrors that the telescope needs, **India will contribute 83.**
- **The Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIAP) is leading** the consortium of Indian institutions that are involved with the TMT project.

Source: *TH*

## NEWS IN SHORTS

### KALARAM TEMPLE

#### In News

- Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Kalaram temple.

#### About

- The Kalaram temple is situated within the **Panchvati** area of Nashik City (Maharashtra).
  - Panchavati** translates to **five banyan trees** where, according to Ramayana, Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman lived during exile.
- Built in 1792, the temple was funded by **Sardar Rangarao Odhekar Peshwa**.
- The temple derives its name from a **black statue of the Lord** — **Kala Ram** translates literally to “**Black Ram**”.
- The temple has been constructed with black stones and has four entrance doors, one each facing East, West, South and North.
- This temple is also the site of a landmark agitation. In **1930**, **B R Ambedkar and Pandurang Sadashiv Sane** led an **agitation** to demand access for Dalits to Hindu temples.

Source: *TH*

### AGNIPATH SCHEME

#### In News

- Army Chief General Manoj Pande** said that the **Agnipath scheme was finalised after extensive consultations**.

#### About

- Introduced in **2022**, the Agnipath scheme — also called the **Tour of Duty scheme** is a **short-term recruitment scheme for the Indian Army**.
- Under the policy, soldiers — called ‘**Agniveers**’ — are recruited for **four years**, at the end of which **only 25 percent** of recruits from a batch are retained for regular service.
- Age Limit** : Candidates between the **age of 17.5 years to 21 years** will be eligible for enrolling in the Agnipath scheme.
- The scheme provides an avenue to Indian youth, desirous of serving the country to get recruited in the Armed Forces for a short duration.

- The scheme enhances the youth profile of the Armed Forces.

Source: *TH*

### AKASH-NEW GENERATION MISSILE

#### In Context

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) conducted a **successful flight-test of the New Generation AKASH (AKASH-NG) missile**.

#### About

- It is a new generation **state-of-the-art surface-to-air missile (SAM)** for the Indian Air Force (IAF) to destroy high manoeuvring low radar cross section agile aerial threats.
- It has been **indigenously designed and developed** by the DRDO and produced by defence public sector units along with other industries.
- Multiple advanced versions of the missile are under development by the team.

Source: *News on Air*

### COAL CONTROLLER ORGANISATION (CCO)

#### Context:

- Recently, the Union Finance Ministry approved the restructuring of the Coal Controller Organisation (CCO) aimed at regulating commercial coal mining and increasing coal production.

#### Restructuring of the CCO

- The Union government formed a **four-member panel** to review the functions of the Coal Controller's Office in 2019 **to align the organisation with the current scenario** in the coal sector reforms.
- The committee had **proposed restructuring** of the Coal Controller Organisation.

#### About the Coal Controller Organisation (CCO)

- It is a subordinate Office of the **Ministry of Coal**, and Nodal Office for collection, compilation and dissemination of Coal Statistics in Government of India.
- It has **offices in Kolkata and New Delhi**, and **field offices** in Dhanbad, Ranchi, Bilaspur, Nagpur, Sambalpur and Kothagudem.



- ♦ The Kolkata office also looks after the coal mines under the Northeast Council (NEC) command area and renders assistance to Coal Controllers on various issues.

Source: ET

## HENLEY PASSPORT INDEX (HPI) 2024

### Context

- India's Passport secured the **80th rank** in the latest **Henley Passport Index 2024**.

### Key Points

- The index includes 199 different passports and 227 different travel destinations.
- **Four EU member states** — France, Germany, Italy and Spain — join Singapore and Japan in the **most powerful passports** in the world.

Least Powerful Passports		Most Powerful Passports in 2024	
Rank	Countries	Rank	Countries
104	Afghanistan	1	France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Singapore, Spain
103	Syria	2	Finland, South Korea, Sweden
102	Iraq	3	Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands
101	Pakistan		

- Henley Passport Index (HPI) is an annual list put together by **Henley & Partners**, a London-based global citizenship and residence advisory firm.
  - ♦ It is based on exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA)

Source: IE

