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REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE LOK SABHA

Context

- A total of 74 women have won the recent Lok Sabha elections, a slight dip from 78 elected in 2019.

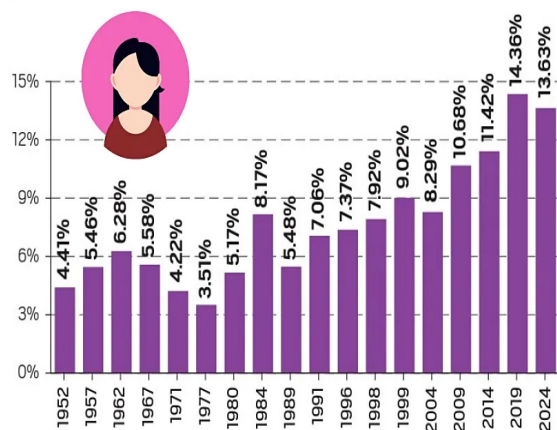
About the Women in the 18th Lok Sabha

- India has elected 74 women Members of Parliament (MPs) to the Lok Sabha in 2024, **four fewer than in 2019**, but **52 more than in India's first elections in 1952**.
- These 74 women constitute **just 13.63%** of the elected strength of the Lower House, which is much less than the **33% that will be reserved for women** after the next delimitation exercise.

Comparison with Previous Years

- Over the years, the Lok Sabha's gender composition has shown a general trend towards increasing women's representation. However, progress has been slow and not linear.

CHANGE IN WOMEN'S STRENGTH IN LOK SABHA OVER THE YEARS



- In 1952**, women made up **just 4.41%** of the strength of the Lower House, and it increased to **more than 6% in the election held a decade later**, but again **dipped to below 4% in 1971**.
- Since then, there has been a **slow, but steady rise in women's representation (with a few exceptions)**, which crossed the **10% mark in 2009**, and **peaked in 2019 at 14.36%**.
- After the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, that number rose to just 12.15%. There are no seats set aside for female or male candidates in the Indian parliament.

Global Comparison

- According to the **Inter-Parliamentary Union**, women make up **roughly 26%** of lawmakers worldwide.
- One of the few nations with a majority of female legislators is **New Zealand**.
- For instance, 46% of MPs in South Africa, 35% in the UK, and 29% in the US, are women.

Reasons for low Participation of Women

- Low literacy:** One of the biggest obstacles to empowering women politically is illiteracy. In general, female candidates are less educated and experienced than male candidates.
 - In India, women have a literacy rate of 65% compared to men's 82%.
- Lack of political will:** The fact that the bill reserving one-third of the seats for women was repeatedly defeated shows that the lawmakers lack political will.
 - All parties' platforms still include the measure, but it has never been put into action.
- Masking of the identity:** 206 women individually participated in the 2019 elections, but only one of them took home the victory.
 - It demonstrates the role that political parties and a person's upbringing played in determining their political success. Her **true identity is concealed by the party and family**.
- Patriarchy:** Despite having the majority, women do not actually experience their authority because male spouses or other family members often have a say in their decisions. The formation of **Sarpanchpati in Panchayati** is a clear example of this.
- Gender Disparities:** Women still face obstacles in the form of gender biases and disparities in education, resource ownership, and attitudes.
- Lack of confidence and finance:** They were the other main obstacles that kept women from pursuing careers in politics.
- Sexual division of labour:** A system in which the ladies of the household either handle all domestic labour themselves or organise it through domestic assistants.
- It implies that women devote far more time to caring for the home and children than do males.

- **Slander and abuse:** This is one of the primary barriers that prevent women from running in elections that they encounter during campaigning.
 - ♦ Lack of safety is the additional factor stated.

Significance of Women Participation

- **Representation:** Women lawmakers ensure that the interests and issues of women are represented in policy-making.
- **Diversity:** They bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the table, which can lead to more comprehensive and inclusive policies.
- **Empowerment:** Their presence in law-making bodies can empower other women and girls by providing them with role models.
- **Equality:** It is a matter of gender equality. Women make up half of the population and should therefore have an equal say in the laws that govern society.

Efforts to reduce the gap

- In India, the **National Commission for Women** has been actively working towards enhancing **women's participation in all spheres**, including law-making.
 - ♦ They have organised consultations on the rights of women under property law and conducted **impact assessments of the 73rd and 74th Amendments (1992)** in the Indian Constitution, which pertain to the **role of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)**.
- The **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** has conducted an analytical study on the **United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** and its implementation in India.
 - ♦ It is expected to be of great value to lawmakers, policymakers, executives, civil society, academicians, and students of gender studies, human rights, and related disciplines.
- **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (2023):** This recent amendment, also known as the Women's Reservation Bill, proposes to reserve **one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament)** and state legislative assemblies. While pending presidential assent, it marks a significant step towards greater female representation in national politics.

- **National Policy for Women Empowerment:** The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development, and empowerment of women.
 - ♦ The Policy aimed to be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals.

Conclusion

- The representation of women in the Lok Sabha is a reflection of the broader societal attitudes towards gender equality.
- While there has been a gradual increase in the number of women MPs over the years, there is still a long way to go to achieve gender parity in the Indian Parliament.
- The **upcoming delimitation exercise, which will reserve 33% of seats for women**, is a step in the right direction.
 - ♦ However, it is essential to continue the discourse on this issue and work towards creating an inclusive and representative political system.

Source: IE

INDIAN TOY INDUSTRY PUSH INTO THE UAE MARKET

Context

- The Toy Association of India (TAI) has brought a delegation to the UAE, consisting of members including manufacturers, importers, exporters, retailers, and toy testing lab designers.

Indian Toy Industry

- According to the Ministry of State for Commerce and Industry, India's exports of toys have surged by **60%**, climbing from **\$203.46 Mn in 2018-19 to \$325.72 Mn** in the fiscal year **2022-23**.
- The import of toys has witnessed a decline of **57%**, dropping from **\$371.69 Mn in 2018-19 to \$158.70 Mn** in **2022-23**.
- The Indian toy industry is among the fastest-growing globally, projected to reach **\$3 Bn by 2028**, growing at a CAGR of 12% between 2022-28.
- The toy manufacturers in India are mostly located in **Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu**, and clusters across central Indian states.

Potentials for toy industry

- **Availability of Raw Material:** India is the world's **2nd largest producer of polyester and related fibers**, accounting for **8% global** share for plush toys; availability of plastics, paper boards, and textiles at competitive prices
- **Competitive Labor Costs:** India stands out as an advantageous destination due to its comparatively lower labor costs amongst other competing geographies.
- **The import duty** on toys was increased from **60% to 70% in Budget 2023**.
 - ◆ **100% FDI** is allowed under the **Automatic Route**.

What are the associated challenges?

- **Limited Brand Awareness:** Indian toy brands have low visibility both domestically and internationally. Limited marketing and brand-building efforts hinder their ability to compete with well-known global brands.
- **Fragmented Industry Structure:** The industry is highly fragmented with a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which limit their ability to achieve economies of scale and invest in research and development (R&D).
- **Global Competitors:** Asia's successful industrializing nations promote toy exports for job creation, starting with Japan about a century ago, China since the 1980s, and currently Vietnam following in their footsteps.
- **Regulation and Adhering to Standards:** Many of them have struggled to keep up with the regulatory changes and adhere to BIS standards.
- **High Cost:** Small manufacturers are unable to upgrade to machinery production as taxes levy on the equipment is high.

Government initiatives

- **Vocal for Local:** The Government of India provides comprehensive support through the **National Action Plan for Toys (NAPT)** by bringing together 20+ Ministries/ Departments.
 - ◆ The import duty on toys was increased from **60% to 70% in Budget 2023**.
- **Large Cluster Ecosystem:** The Government of India has established 60+ toy clusters to encourage domestic and global toy manufacturers to set up operations in India.

- ◆ There is a 400 acre cluster set up by Aequus in Koppal, Karnataka and a 100 acre facility being developed in Uttar Pradesh.
- **Quality Control Order (QCO) on Toys:** It was issued in 2020 under the BIS act to ensure toys manufactured or imported into the country were in-line with global quality standards.
- **Customized State Incentives:** Multiple states have announced incentives for toy manufacturers subsidizing nearly 30% of the cost of manufacturing.

Way Ahead

- India has recently concluded **Free Trade Agreements** with geographies such as UAE and Middle East, providing zero-duty market access opportunities for India-made toys.
- Also there is a need for Strengthen industry associations to provide a **unified voice for the sector** and to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders.

Source: AIR

SC MANDATES SELF-DECLARATION BY ADVERTISING AGENCIES BEFORE RELEASING ADVERTISEMENTS

Context

- The Supreme Court has issued a directive **that all advertisers/ Advertising Agencies must submit a 'Self-Declaration Certificate'** before publishing or broadcasting any advertisement.

About

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has introduced a new feature on the **Broadcast Seva Portal for TV and Radio Advertisements** and on **Press Council of India's portal for Print and Digital/Internet Advertisements**.
- The self-declaration certificate is to certify that the advertisement:
 - ◆ does not contain misleading claims, and
 - ◆ complies with all relevant regulatory guidelines.
- Advertisers must provide **proof of uploading the Self-Declaration Certificate** to the relevant broadcaster, printer, publisher, or electronic media platform for their records.
- No advertisement will be permitted to run on television, print media, or the internet **without a valid Self-Declaration Certificate** and will become Mandatory For All New Advertisements From 18th June, 2024.

- It is a step towards **ensuring transparency, consumer protection, and responsible advertising practices.**

Significance of the Step

- **Ensure transparency and accountability:** The step seeks to prevent the publication of misleading advertisements without holding manufacturers, promoters, and advertisers responsible. This promotes a fair and transparent marketplace where consumers are not deceived.
- **Ensure consumer protection:** The step aims to safeguard consumer rights by preventing unfair trade practices and false advertisements that harm public interest. This ensures that consumers make informed decisions based on accurate information.
- **Ensure better implementation of Legislations and Rules:** The step is likely to improve the enforcement of existing laws and regulations, such as the Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements of Misleading Advertisements Regulations, thereby strengthening the legal framework against false advertising.

Advertising Standards in India

- Some of the principal legislations are –
 - ♦ Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1955
 - ♦ Press Council of India Act, 1978
 - ♦ Cable Television Networks(Amendment) Rules, 2006
- There are also some prominent, prohibitory legal provisions that regulate advertising.
 - ♦ In 1985, the **Advertising Standards Council of India (“ASCI”)**, a non statutory tribunal, was established that created a self regulatory mechanism of ensuring ethical advertising practices.
- ASCI entertained and disposed of complaints based on its **Code of Advertising Practice (“ASCI Code”)**.
- This Code applies to advertisements read, heard or viewed in India even if they originate or are published abroad so long as they are directed to consumers in India or are exposed to a significant number of consumers in India.
- **The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)** under the Department of Consumer Affairs has notified **‘Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements, 2022’**.

- ♦ Its objective is to **curb misleading advertisements** and protect the consumers, who may be exploited or affected by such advertisements.

Source: PIB

REVIEW OF THE AGNIPATH SCHEME

Context

- **The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition** said the new government should **review the “Agnipath” scheme** for short term recruitments to the armed forces.

Agnipath Scheme

- It was introduced in **2022**, and is also called the **Tour of Duty scheme.**
- It 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 for 15 years.
- **Age Limit :** Candidates between the **age of 17.5 years to 21 years** are 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.

Significance of the Scheme

- **Reducing the Average Age in Military:** There has been a focus within the military to bring down the average age of soldiers, especially within the Army, since the 1980s.
 - ♦ The scheme aims to recruit Indian youth to serve in the Armed Forces.
- **Short Term Services in Other Countries:** In modern armed forces of various countries, the service ranges from 2 to 8 years with options for active and reservist.
 - ♦ The Israeli army has service of 30 months and 20 months respectively for men and women.
 - ♦ Similarly the United States and United Kingdom also have short duration contracts.
 - ♦ The ‘Agnipath’ scheme will be comparable to the time frame in many world class armed forces.

- **Technologically Advanced Future:** Future wars will be fought with artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber space and space based ISR (Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance).
 - ♦ Agnipath in India will ensure a youthful and tech-savvy profile of the armed forces.
- **Budgetary Constraints:** One of the greatest challenges facing the Indian armed forces today is overall budgetary constraint.
 - ♦ Huge salary and pension bills have placed enormous stress on the availability of funds for military modernization.
- **Employment:** This scheme will increase employment opportunities and because of the skills and experience acquired during the four-year service such soldiers will get employment in various fields.
 - ♦ This will also lead to availability of a higher-skilled workforce to the economy which will be helpful in productivity gain and overall GDP growth.

Concerns

- **Short Duration:** Four years is too short a time for a conscript to acquire the skills essential for operating sophisticated systems in the technology-intensive Navy and Air Force.
- **May Lead to Cohesiveness:** For the Army, which has a regimental system, it is feared that it will impair the unit's cohesiveness as the soldier on a short-term contract would not have the same dedication and devotion to the nation or duty.
- **Lack of Employment Guarantee:** It is argued that it would be unfair to the recruit since he would be devoid of an employment guarantee at the expiry of four years.
- **Training Duration:** The main weakness of the scheme is that a mere six-month training for a soldier, especially to prepare him for an increasingly high technology environment, would be thoroughly inadequate.

Conclusion

- The Agnipath scheme, designed to modernize and streamline the Indian Armed Forces, has faced significant criticism and challenges.
- With political promises to abolish the scheme and ongoing feedback from military personnel, the future of the Agnipath scheme remains uncertain.

- As the government and military leadership consider adjustments, the primary goal will be to balance operational effectiveness with the welfare and satisfaction of soldiers.

Source: TH

NEWS IN SHORT

NATA PRATHA

Context

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has expressed serious concern over a practice known as 'Nata Pratha'.

What is Nata Pratha?

- It is a social evil comparable to modern forms of prostitution.
- Under 'Nata Pratha' practice, girls in some communities are **sold by their own families** either on a stamp paper or otherwise in the name of marriage, having no legal sanctity, in rural areas of **Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat**.
- This practice undermines the well-being, rights, and potential of minors & could lead to gender-based violence and discrimination.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

- It is a statutory body, established under the Protection of Human Rights Act (PHRA), **1993**.
- It is responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights, defined by the act as **Rights Relating to Life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual** guaranteed by the constitution or embodied in the international covenants and enforceable by courts in India.

Source: TH

JOINT TASK FORCE ON INVESTMENT (JTFI) BETWEEN INDIA AND QATAR

Context

- First Joint Task Force on Investment (JTFI) held between India and Qatar.

About

- The meeting outlays the **robust economic relationship** between India and Qatar rooted in a shared vision for inclusive development.

- India's bilateral trade with Qatar in **2022-23 was US\$ 18.77 billion.**
- **India's export to Qatar** during 2022-23 was **US\$ 1.96 billion** and **India's import** from Qatar was **US\$ 16.8 billion.**
- India is among the **top three largest export destinations for Qatar** (China and Japan being the other two) and is also among the **top three sources of Qatar's imports, along with China and US.**
- Qatar is the **largest supplier of LNG to India** accounting for over **48%** of India's global LNG imports.
- Qatar is also **India's largest supplier of LPG** accounting for **29%** of India's total LPG imports. Therefore, the **balance of trade continues to be heavily in Qatar's favour.**

Source: AIR

NEW RAMSAR SITES: NAGI AND NAKTI WETLANDS

Context

- Recently, the **Nagi and Nakti Bird Sanctuaries** of **Bihar**, have been recognised as **wetlands of international importance** under the Ramsar Convention.

About the Nagi and Nakti Wetlands

- These **man-made wetlands** are located in the **Jamui district of Bihar**, nestled in the **Jhajha forest range.**
- These are designated as **bird sanctuaries in 1984** for their importance as wintering habitats for **several migratory species.**
- Over 20,000 birds congregate here during the winter months, including one of the largest congregations of **red-crested pochard (Netta rufina)** on the Indo-Gangetic plain.
- The **Nagi Bird Sanctuary** hosts one of the largest congregations of **bar-headed geese (Anser indicus)** on the Indo-Gangetic plain.
- The wetlands and their fringes provide **habitat for over 75 bird species, 33 fish, and 12 aquatic plants**, and support globally threatened species, including the endangered **Indian elephant (Elephas Maximus Indicus)** and a **vulnerable native catfish (Wallago Attu).**

Recognition under the Ramsar Convention

- The **Ramsar Convention** (adopted in **1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar**) is an international treaty aimed at conserving wetlands.
- It provides a framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources across its 172-member countries including India.
- Currently, the **highest number** of such sites is in the **UK (175)** followed by **Mexico (144).**
 - ♦ It places **India joint third with China** in terms of the number of such 'Ramsar Sites'.
 - ♦ With the inclusion of Nagi and Nakti Bird Sanctuaries, the total number of such wetlands in **India has risen to 82.**

Do You Know?

- These wetlands were **originally developed for irrigation through the construction of the Nakti Dam**, and have since transformed into a thriving habitat for a wide variety of flora and fauna.
- The **Nagi Bird Sanctuary** was created following the **damming of the Nagi River**, which enabled the gradual formation of water bodies with clear water and aquatic vegetation.

Source: IE

BIOPHARMACEUTICAL ALLIANCE

Context

- Recently, the **Biopharmaceutical Alliance** was launched during the Bio International Convention 2024 held in San Diego, US.

About the Biopharmaceutical Alliance

- It was launched in response to the **drug supply shortages** experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic by **India, South Korea, US, Japan, and European Union (EU).**
- It aims to put **joint efforts** into building a **resilient supply chain** and to address the challenges of **drug supply shortages** in the bio-pharmaceutical sector.
- The **participants** emphasised the importance of a reliable and sustainable supply chain and agreed to coordinate the respective **countries' bio policies, regulations, and research and development support measures.**

- They acknowledged that the **production of essential raw materials and ingredients** is concentrated in a few countries and agreed to work together to build a detailed pharmaceutical supply chain map.

India's Role

- The **National Biopharma Mission in India** aims to enable and nurture an ecosystem for preparing India's technological and product development capabilities in biopharmaceutical to a level that will be globally competitive over the next decade.
- The mission is focused on transforming the health standards of the country through affordable product development.

Source: AIR

CLEARING CORPORATIONS

Context

- The **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** has established a committee, led by former **RBI Deputy Governor Usha Thorat**, to re-evaluate the ownership and financial framework of **clearing corporations (CCs)**.

Need

- This initiative aims to **reinforce the resilience, independence, and neutrality of CCs**, which are critical risk management institutions in the securities market.
- Current regulations mandate **dispersed ownership and a specific governance structure** for CCs, but the existing system is dominated by parent exchanges, raising concerns about their independence and capital infusion capabilities.
- SEBI's committee will assess the **feasibility of broadening eligible investors in CCs** and suggest diverse ownership models, aligning with international practices where major CCs have diversified shareholding.

What are Clearing Corporations (CCs)?

- Clearing Corporations (CCs) play a vital role in the **smooth functioning of stock exchanges by handling the clearing and settlement of trades** in securities and other financial instruments. They ensure that transactions are completed efficiently and securely, minimizing risks for market participants.
- The **Securities Contracts (Regulation) (Stock Exchanges and Clearing Corporations) Regulations, 2018**, govern the ownership and governance framework of CCs in India. These regulations aim to ensure the independence and neutrality of CCs, which is essential for their role as risk managers and regulators.

Source: ET

NANOPARTICLES

Context

- The Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) Researchers have shown that common minerals can be broken by water microdroplets to make corresponding nanoparticles.

What are Nanoparticles?

- A nanoparticle is a small particle that ranges between **1 to 100 nanometres** in size. Undetectable by the human eye, nanoparticles can exhibit significantly different physical and chemical properties to their larger material counterparts.
- **Applications of Nanoparticles;**
 - ◆ Creating fluorescent biological labels for important biological markers and molecules in research and diagnosis of diseases,
 - ◆ Drug delivery systems
 - ◆ Gene delivery systems in gene therapy
 - ◆ For biological detection of disease causing organisms and diagnosis
 - ◆ Isolation and purification of biological molecules and cells in research.

Source: IT





