

## Removal of Ministers Under Serious Charges



**For Prelims:** Council of Ministers , Representation of the People Act , Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 .

**For Mains:** Governance and Accountability of Elected Representatives, Role of Parliament and Judiciary in Legislative Oversight

Source: IE

### Why in News?

The Central Government has introduced the **130th Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2025** in the Lok Sabha to remove central and state Ministers arrested for 30 consecutive days on **serious criminal charges**.

#### 130<sup>th</sup> Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2025

- **Amendments:** The Bill proposes amendments to **Articles 75, 164, and 239AA** of the Constitution, which deal with the **Union Council of Ministers, Council of Ministers in the states, and Ministers in Union Territories** respectively.
- **Key clause:** A Minister(including the Chief Ministers & the Prime Minister) will also be included under the ambit of this law. arrested and detained for 30 consecutive days for offences punishable with five years or more must be removed by the President on the Prime Minister's advice.
  - Removal is reversible upon release from custody.
- **Objective:** Uphold **constitutional morality and good governance** , ensuring ministers under serious allegations **cannot continue in office** and maintain **public trust** .

### What is the Current Legal Framework for Removing Detained Ministers from Office?

- There is **no automatic removal** of a Minister upon arrest. Under **Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA)** , legislators (including Ministers) are **disqualified only after conviction** for certain offences with **imprisonment of two years or more** .

- Under **Section 8(1) of the RPA, 1951** , a legislator convicted under the **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988** , is disqualified for six years if punished with a fine.
  - If sentenced to imprisonment, disqualification lasts for the entire imprisonment period plus six years after release.
- Ministers are subject to the same qualifications as legislators, though their duties differ.
- The **presumption of innocence** applies until conviction; mere arrest does not trigger removal.

## Key Judicial Pronouncements Regarding Ministerial Accountability

- **Public Interest Foundation PIL (2018):** The Supreme Court held it **cannot legislate or add new grounds** for disqualification beyond Parliament's provisions. Parliament alone has the power to make laws on disqualification.
  - SC recommended a **strong law** requiring political parties to revoke membership and deny tickets to those charged with heinous offences.
- **Manoj Narula v Union of India (2014):** The Supreme Court ruled there is **no legal bar on appointing Ministers** with criminal antecedents but advised the **Prime Minister** to avoid selecting those charged with serious or heinous offences.
- **V Senthil Balaji Case:** In 2025, the Supreme Court directed Tamil Nadu Minister V. Senthil Balaji to choose between **freedom or office** after noting it had been misled by his reappointment post-bail, which was granted in the alleged cash-for-jobs scam.
  - He subsequently stepped down from office, and his bail continued.
- **Arvind Kejriwal Case (2024):** The SC granted Arvind Kejriwal bail in the liquor policy money laundering case, **barred him from official duties** , **could not compel resignation** , but he later voluntarily resigned from office.

## Why is a New Provision Needed for the Removal of Detained Ministers?

- **Tackling Criminalisation of Politics:** Many elected representatives have pending criminal cases. Current laws only disqualify them **after conviction** , allowing accused Ministers to continue in office for years, eroding public trust.
  - The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) 2025 report on MLAs reveals that 45% of the legislators analyzed have **declared criminal cases** , with 29% facing serious charges such as **murder, kidnapping, and crimes against women**.
- **Strengthening Accountability of Ministers:** Ministers hold **executive power** and can influence investigations.
  - Judicial processes in India are slow. By the time a conviction is reached, Ministers may have served long terms while under investigation, defeating the purpose of accountability.
  - A mechanism is needed to ensure that those **detained for serious offences** cannot continue in office unchecked.
- **Enhancing Public Confidence in Governance:** Ensuring that Ministers facing serious charges are **temporarily removed** protects the integrity of government and reassures citizens about ethical governance.

# What Measures are Needed for Strengthening Ministerial Accountability?

- **Strengthen Legal and Constitutional Provisions:** Introduce clear rules for removal or suspension of Ministers facing serious criminal charges, even during investigation or detention.
  - **170th Law Commission Report (1999)** proposed disqualification of legislators when **charges are framed** for offences punishable by up to **five years' imprisonment** , for **five years or until acquittal** , whichever is earlier.
    - The Election Commission (2004) and Law Commission's **244th report (2014)** supported this approach.
  - **244 th Law Commission Report (2014)** proposed disqualification should occur **when charges are framed by a court** , indicating **prima facie judicial satisfaction** of sufficient material for trial.
- **Transparent Appointment Process:** Ensure that political parties exercise **due diligence when selecting Ministers**, avoiding candidates with criminal antecedents.
  - Implement guidelines for the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers to prioritize integrity in ministerial appointments.
- **Parliamentary Oversight:** Strengthen the role of committees and ethics panels to monitor Ministers' conduct. Mandate periodic disclosures of assets, liabilities, and pending cases to Parliament for scrutiny.
- **Ethical Governance and Codes of Conduct:** Implement a binding ministerial code of conduct emphasizing transparency, integrity, and service to the public.
  - Encourage political parties to adopt internal accountability mechanisms and enforce ethical standards.

## ***Drishti Mains Question:***

How can constitutional and legal measures strengthen ministerial accountability while balancing the presumption of innocence?

## **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)**

### ***Mains***

**Q.** On what grounds a people's representative can be disqualified under the Representation of Peoples Act, 1951? Also mention the remedies available to such person against his disqualification (2019)

It is often said that 'politics' and 'ethics' do not go together. What is your opinion in this regard? Justify your answer with illustrations. (2013)

Discuss the procedures to decide the disputes arising out of the election of a Member of the Parliament or State Legislature under The Representation of the People Act, 1951. What are the grounds on which the election of any returned candidate may be declared void? What remedy is available to the aggrieved party against the decision? Refer to the case laws. (2022)

# Transforming India's Electoral Landscape



**For Prelims :** , Election Commission of India , Registered Unrecognised Political Parties , VVPAT , Representation of the People Act, 1950 , Representation of the People Act, 1951 , CAG , Right to Information Act, 2005 , Law Commission .

**For Mains :** Role of the Election Commission of India in Ensuring Free and Fair Elections, Recent Electoral Reforms, and Additional Measures Needed to Strengthen Electoral Integrity.

Source: PIB

## Why in News?

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has undertaken several initiatives to streamline the electoral process, enhance transparency, strengthen voter participation, and uphold the credibility of India's democratic framework.

## What are the Key Reforms Undertaken to Strengthen India's Electoral Process?

- **Electoral Roll Management :** The **Election Commission** has identified **476 inactive Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs)** for **delisting** , ensuring that the **list of political parties** remains **accurate and up-to-date** .
  - **Electoral rolls** were **revised** ahead of **by-elections** in **four states** through a **special summary revision** , marking the **first such exercise in two decades** .
  - Also, a **special intensive revision** of the **electoral roll in Bihar** was carried out to ensure that **no eligible voter is left out** and **no ineligible names remain** .
  - **Duplicate EPIC (voter) cards** were **eliminated nationwide** , giving each voter a **unique identification number** and **reducing errors** in **voter lists** .
- **Technology-Driven Transparency and Monitoring :** The **Election Commission** launched **ECINET** , a **one-stop digital platform** , which brings together over **40 applications and websites** used by **electors, voters, election officials, and political parties** .
  - **Digital index cards** and **reports** were introduced to make **election-related data** more **accessible** at the **constituency level** , supporting **informed decision-making** .
  - **100% webcasting of polling stations** was implemented to **monitor key activities** and ensure that the **polling process** is conducted **smoothly and without violations** .
- **Booth-Level Improvements :** **Standard photo ID cards** were issued to **Booth Level Officers (BLOs)** to improve **field-level transparency** and enhance **public trust** in the **election process** .
  - **Polling stations** were **limited to 1,200 voters each** , reducing **crowding** , **shortening queues** , and allowing **additional booths** in **high-rise residential complexes and societies** .
- **Voter Verification and Accuracy :** **Mandatory VVPAT slip counting** was enforced in cases of **mismatch** between **Form 17C (account of votes recorded at a polling station)** and **EVM data** ,

and wherever **mock poll data** was **not erased** , to ensure the **accuracy and credibility** of **vote counting**.

# What are the Major Challenges Confronting India's Electoral Process?

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- **Escalating Election Expenditure:** The **gap between actual expenses** incurred in elections and the **legally permitted limit** is widening.
  - Candidates and parties often overshoot spending ceilings, leading to underreporting and shadow financing.
  - This fuels **corruption** and contributes to the **generation of black money** .
- **Criminalisation of Politics:** Many **criminal-background candidates** contest and win, as the **politician-criminal nexus** thrives on funds and muscle power.
  - In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, **251 of 543 newly elected MPs (46%)** face **criminal cases** .
- **Voter Disenfranchisement and Turnout Issues:** Despite **robust machinery** , challenges like **bogus voting** , **missing names in electoral rolls** , and **low urban turnout** persist.
  - **Internal migrants** , the **elderly** , and **differently-abled citizens** face **barriers** to exercising their **democratic rights** , weakening **inclusivity** .
- **Freebie Politics and Populist Promises:** The growing culture of **unsustainable freebies** during **elections** undermines **fiscal discipline** and **responsible governance** .
  - **Voters** are swayed by **short-term gains** rather than **long-term developmental agendas** .
  - **Absence of clear guidelines** makes it difficult to distinguish between **welfare schemes** and **fiscal populism** .
- **Electoral Violence and Booth-Level Vulnerabilities:** **Electoral Violence** and **Booth-Level Vulnerabilities** : Though reduced, **sporadic violence** , **intimidation of voters** , and **disclosure of booth-level voting patterns** still occur.
  - **Weak booth management** in **sensitive constituencies** undermines **free and fair elections** .
  - **Absence of totalizer machines** further exposes communities to **post-poll reprisals** .
- **Technological and Cyber Threats:** The emergence of **deepfakes** , **misinformation** , and **algorithm-driven manipulation** on **social media** poses a **new-age threat** to **electoral integrity** .
- **Electoral Roll Manipulation:** **Electoral roll manipulation** allegations and **duplicate EPIC numbers** across states undermine voter list credibility and public trust.
- **Lack of Inner-Party Democracy:** **Political parties** continue to function in a highly **centralised** and **opaque** manner with **dynastic dominance** , lack of **transparent candidate selection** , and **weak accountability** .
  - This contradicts the **democratic ethos** and restricts **genuine leadership** from emerging.



# ELECTORAL REFORMS IN INDIA

ELECTORAL REFORMS ARE CHANGES MADE TO IMPROVE THE ELECTION PROCESS AND ENSURE FAIRNESS.

## Electoral Reforms Before 1996

- ⑤ **Model Code of Conduct (1969):** Guidelines to regulate political parties and candidates prior to elections
- ⑤ **61st Constitutional Amendment Act (1988):** Lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 years
- ⑤ **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) (1989):** Switched from individual colored ballot boxes to ballot papers, and later to EVMs
- ⑤ **Booth Capturing (1989):** Provision for adjournment of poll or countermanding of elections in such cases
- ⑤ **Elector's Photo Identity card (EPIC) (1993):** Electoral roll is the basis to issue EPIC to registered electors
- ⑤ **ECI- A Multi-member Body (1993):** Election commissioners were appointed in addition to CEC

## Electoral Reforms of 1996

- ⑤ **Time-limit for By-elections:** Elections must occur within 6 months of any vacancy in a legislative house
- ⑤ **Listing of Names of Candidates:** Contesting candidates categorized into 3 groups for listing
  - Recognised & registered-unrecognised political parties
  - Other (independent)
- ⑤ **Disqualification for Insulting the National Honour Act, 1971:** Leads to election disqualification for 6 years upon:
  - Insulting the National Flag, Constitution of India or preventing the singing of National Anthem

## Electoral Reforms After 1996

- ⑤ **Vote Through Proxy (2003):** Service voters in Armed Forces & forces under Army Act can vote by proxy
- ⑤ **Allocation of Time on Electronic Media (2003):** Equitable sharing of time on electronic media during elections to address the public
- ⑤ **Introduction of Braille Signage Features in EVMs (2004):** To facilitate the visually impaired voters to cast their votes without an attendant

## Electoral Reforms Since 2010

- ⑤ **Voting Rights to Indian Citizens Living Abroad (2010)**
- ⑤ **Online Enrollment in Electoral Roll (2013)**
- ⑤ **Introduction of NOTA option (2014)**
- ⑤ **VVPAT Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (2013):** Introduction of VVPAT with EVMs to conduct free and fair elections
- ⑤ **Photos of Candidates on EVMs and Ballot Papers (2015):** To prevent confusion in constituencies with namesake candidates
- ⑤ **Introduction of Electoral bonds (2017 Budget):** An alternative to cash donations for political parties
  - Declared as unconstitutional by SC (2024)
- ⑤ **Launch of Electronic EPIC (2021)**
- ⑤ **Home Voting for People with Disabilities & Those Above 85 years of Age (2024)**

### IMPORTANT COMMITTEES/ COMMISSION

| Committees/ Commission                              | Year | Purpose  |
|---|------|--|
| ■ Tarkunde Committee                                | 1974 | ■ By Jaya Prakash Narayan (JP) during the "Total Revolution" movement.   |
| ■ Dinesh Goswami Committee                          | 1990 | ■ Electoral Reforms  |
| ■ Vohra Committee                                   | 1993 | ■ On the Nexus between Crime and Politics                                |
| ■ Indrajit Gupta Committee                          | 1998 | ■ State Funding of Elections   |
| ■ Second Administrative Reforms Commission of India | 2007 | ■ Report on Ethics in Governance (Headed by Veerappa Moily)              |
| ■ Tankha Committee (Core Committee)                 | 2010 | ■ To look into the whole gamut of the election laws & electoral reforms. |



## What Steps are Required to Further Strengthen India's Electoral Framework?

- **Electoral Finance Reform** : Introduce partial state funding (as suggested by the **2nd ARC** ) with reimbursement of legitimate expenses, mandatory **digital disclosure of donations above a threshold** , regulation of **anonymous corporate funding** , stronger **CAG /ECI audits** , and a **public election expenditure portal** to curb money power and enhance voter trust.
  - Also, the idea of bringing political parties under **Right to Information Act, 2005** should be explored.
- **Promoting Inner Party Democracy** : Political parties are the backbone of democracy, yet most function as closed, family-controlled units.
  - The law must mandate **regular internal elections, transparent candidate selection processes, and audited party constitutions.**
  - Also, the **1999 Law Commission Report** recommended a **regulatory framework for inner party democracy** .
- **Regulating Digital Campaigns & Deepfakes:** Mandate **traceable disclosure labels** on all political ads (sponsor, funding, geo-targeting).
  - Establish a **National Deepfake Detection Cell** (with IITs & CERT-In) to scan social media in real

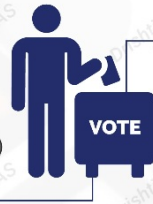
time.

- Enforce **strict takedown protocols** with penalties for non-compliant platforms. Launch **voter literacy drives** to counter algorithmic bias, deepfakes, and misinformation.
- **Strengthening the ECI:** Election Commission must enjoy financial autonomy, with its budget charged to the Consolidated Fund of India.
  - **Regional EC cells with permanent staff** can ensure robust monitoring across India's vast constituencies.
  - **Regular performance audits** of electoral processes by parliamentary committees would **enhance credibility** and **strengthen the ECI** as guardian of free and fair elections.
  - **ECI** should establish a **permanent, independent cadre of officers** to ensure **autonomy and impartiality** , reduce **dependence on central/state governments** , eliminate **conflict of interest** , and protect the **sanctity of the electoral process**.
- **Electoral Process Reforms:** Expand use of **totalizer machines** nationwide to mix votes across booths, preventing disclosure of booth-level patterns.
  - Ensure **uniform electoral rolls** , stricter adherence to the **Model Code of Conduct** , and **cap campaign duration** to maintain a level playing field and boost voter confidence.
- **Towards Simultaneous & Sustainable Elections:** Pilot **One Nation, One Election** at local/state levels. Implement a **permanent national electoral roll** and **common voter ID** to reduce duplication.
  - Redirect savings from simultaneous polls to governance, and gradually introduce a **fixed electoral calendar** for cost-efficient, time-efficient, and governance-friendly elections.

# Election Commission of India (ECI)

## About

- **Autonomous Constitutional Authority** - Administers Union/state election
  - LS, RS, State LA, the offices of the President and VP
- Estd - **25<sup>th</sup> Jan 1950** (National Voters' Day)



## Constitutional Provisions

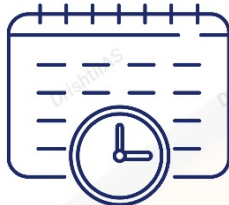
Part XV - Article 324 to 329

## Structure

- 1 Chief Election Commissioner and 2 Election Commissioners **appointed by President**
- **Tenure- 6 years, or up to the age of 65 years**, whichever is earlier
- Retiring ECs – **eligible for further appointment by the govt.**
- **Removal of CEC-** Resolution on the **ground of proven misbehaviour or incapacity**, with majority of 2/3rd members present and voting, supported by more than 50% of the total strength of the house



## Major Roles and Responsibilities



- Determining Electoral Constituencies
- Preparing/Revising electoral rolls
- Notifying the schedules and dates of elections
- **Registering political parties and granting them the status of national or state parties**
- Issuing the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for political parties
- Advising the President on **matters concerning the disqualification of MPs**

## Challenges

- Truncated Tenure of CEC
- Executive Influence in Appointments
- Dependence on Centre for Finance
- Lack of Independent Staff



**Drishti IAS**

## Conclusion:

A resilient democracy rests on the strength of its electoral foundations. **Strengthening independence of institutions, enhancing transparency, widening voter participation, deepening inner-party democracy**, and embracing technology are indispensable. Only through such holistic and sustained efforts can India safeguard the **integrity, credibility, and fairness of its electoral system** and truly uphold the spirit of a vibrant democracy.



### ***Drishti Mains Question:***

Q. While procedural reforms are essential, the true autonomy of the Election Commission of India hinges on its independence from the executive." Critically examine this statement in the context of recent disputes and the need for an independent ECI cadre.

[Watch Video on YouTube: [▶ https://www.youtube.com/embed/bH-Ar6\\_DX08](https://www.youtube.com/embed/bH-Ar6_DX08) ]

## **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)**

### ***Prelims***

**Q. Consider the following statements: (2021)**

1. In India, there is no law restricting the candidates from contesting in one Lok Sabha election from three constituencies.
2. In the 1991 Lok Sabha Election, Shri Devi Lal contested from three Lok Sabha constituencies.
3. As per the existing rules, if a candidate contests in one Lok Sabha election from many constituencies, his/her party should bear the cost of bye-elections to the constituencies vacated by him/her winning in all the constituencies.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) 2 and 3

**Ans: (b)**

### ***Mains***

**Q.** Discuss the procedures to decide the disputes arising out of the election of a Member of the Parliament or State Legislature under The Representation of the People Act, 1951. What are the grounds on which the election of any returned candidate may be declared void? What remedy is available to the aggrieved party against the decision? Refer to the case laws. (2022)

## Why in News?

India is grappling with an escalating drug abuse crisis. The **Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan** was launched to address this issue and has now completed **five years of implementation**.

### Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan

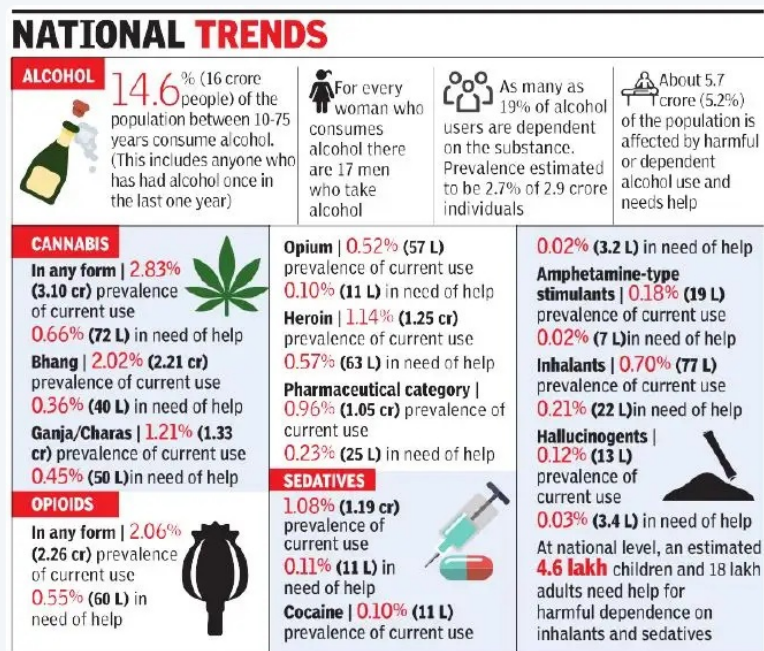
- **About:** Launched on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2020 by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.
  - It aims to raise awareness on **substance use, focusing on educational institutions, universities, and schools**.
  - It targets the identification of dependent populations and strengthens counseling and treatment facilities.
  - Initially focused on 272 vulnerable districts, now extended to all districts in India.



- **3-Pronged Strategy:** Three-pronged strategy— **supply control, demand reduction, and medical treatment**.
- **Key Achievements:**
  - **Mass Sensitisation** (18.10+ crore people, 4.85+ lakh institutions)
  - **Youth Mobilisation** (1.67+ crore students, pledge & events)
  - **Digital & Tech Integration** (social media, website, app, geo-tagging)
  - **Volunteer Network** (20,000+ Master Volunteers)
  - **Community Outreach** (campaigns, monitoring, awareness drives)
  - **Collaborations** (MoUs with spiritual/social organisations including The Art of Living, Brahma Kumaris, Sant Nirankari Mission, Ram Chandra Mission (Daaji), ISKCON etc).

# Prevalence of Drug Abuse in India

- **Drug Addiction:** Around **10 crore people** in India are affected by narcotics (NCB data). States like **Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Punjab** recorded the highest FIRs under the **NDPS Act (2019-2021)** .
- **Major Consumed Drugs:** According to the **National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use (2019)** , about **16 crore people (14.6%)** aged 10–75 use **alcohol** , while **3.1 crore (2.8%)** use **cannabis** .



## 2 Major Drug-Producing Regions in World

- **Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan):** Major **opium hub** affecting **J&K, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat** .
- **Golden Triangle (Laos, Myanmar, Thailand):** Key **heroin-producing region** (Myanmar approx 80% of global supply), with trafficking routes passing through **India** , making it a vulnerable transit and consumption zone.



## What are the Key Challenges in Drug Control India?

- **Mnemonic: DOPE**
- **D - Dark Net & New Substances** : Rise of **new psychoactive substances** and **illicit online trade** using **darknet and cryptocurrency**.
- **O - Organizational & Infrastructure Gaps** : **Lack of trained personnel**, forensic labs, rehab centers, and specialized facilities.
- **P - Poor Awareness & Prevention** : Inadequate **education, weak community-level awareness**, especially in rural and youth populations.
- **E - Exclusion & Stigma in Addiction Treatment** : **Social stigma** and **high demand** discourage rehabilitation, limiting control efforts.

## What Measures Should be Taken to Eradicate Drug Abuse in India?

- **Mnemonic: SAFE**
- **S - Strengthen Law Enforcement:** Enhance **NDPS act, 1985 & Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PITNDPS) Act, 1988** implementation with **adequate resources, training, modern equipment** , robust **intelligence & surveillance** , and inter-agency coordination.
- **A - Awareness & Prevention:** Expand **treatment and rehabilitation facilities** , strictly following **National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR)** for awareness campaigns on de-addiction, and rehabilitation.
- **F - Focus on Supply Reduction:** Improve **border control** , use advanced technology such as AI , **Big Data, drones, satellites** , and online citizen reporting systems, support **alternative livelihoods** for illicit crop farmers (e.g., Jharkhand poppy scheme), and intercept supply chains.
- **E - Enhance International Cooperation:** Collaborate with **neighboring countries, UNODC, Interpol** to track and prevent drug trafficking.
- **World Drug Day 2024 | Drug Abuse Problem in India | Government Initiative | UPSC | Drishti IAS English**

[Watch Video on YouTube:

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/embed/-HP0j-G8oTQ> ]

# UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

## *Prelims*

### **Q1. Consider the following statements: (2019)**

1. The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) has a 'Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air'.
2. The UNCAC is the ever-first legally binding global anti-corruption instrument.
3. A highlight of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) is the inclusion of a specific chapter aimed at returning assets to their rightful owners from whom they had been taken illicitly.
4. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is mandated by its member States to assist in the implementation of both UNCAC and UNTOC.

### **Which of the statements given above is correct?**

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Ans: (c)**

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## *Mains:*

**Q.** India's proximity to the two of the world's biggest illicit opium-growing states has enhanced her internal security concerns. Explain the linkages between drug trafficking and other illicit activities such as gunrunning, money laundering and human trafficking. What counter-measures should be taken to prevent the same? (2018)



# Kerala 'First' Digitally Literate State in India



Source: IE

**Kerala** has been declared the **first fully digitally literate state in India** , marking a milestone in bridging the digital divide through the **Digi Keralam Project**.

- Digi Keralam Project targeted **senior citizens, homemakers, and digitally excluded groups**, using youth volunteers and the **K-SMART (Kerala Solutions for Managing Administrative Reformation and Transformation) platform** to provide online access services, boosting inclusion and governance.
- Earlier in 2002, the **Akshaya project** was launched by then **President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam** in Kerala, to make **one family member digitally literate** , promoting IT access and citizen service delivery across the state.

## Digital Literacy in India

- **Digital Literacy:** It is the ability of individuals and communities to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions within life situations.
  - According to the **Central Board for Workers Education** Only 38% of India households are digitally literate (61% in urban areas and 25% in rural areas).
- **Initiatives Promoting Digital Literacy:**
  - The Government of India implemented two digital literacy schemes, **National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) and Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (DISHA)** , with a cumulative target of 52.50 lakh beneficiaries across the country (one person from every eligible household).
    - Under these two schemes, 53.67 lakh beneficiaries were trained, with 42% from rural India. Both schemes have now been closed.
  - **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA):** Aims to promote digital literacy in rural India, 6.39 crore individuals trained nationwide till March 2024.

Read more: [Right to Internet Access and Digital Literacy](#)

# Saltwater Crocodile in Sundarbans



Source: TH

As per the State Forest Department's survey, the population of **saltwater crocodiles** in the **Sundarban Biosphere Reserve (SBR)** has increased.

- The study highlighted the estimated population of saltwater crocodiles ranges from 220 to 242. Saltwater crocodiles prefer creeks and rivers with high tide widths below 180 meters.
- Saltwater crocodiles are **hypercarnivorous apex predators** maintaining **ecosystem health** by feeding on carcasses in water bodies.
  - A **hypercarnivorous apex predator** is the **ultimate specialized hunter** , existing at the **top of its food chain** with **no natural enemies** , and relying on **other animals** for **over 70% of its diet** .
- They can tolerate a **wide range of water salinity during winter** , but increasing salinity may threaten their habitat.

## Sundarbans

- **Location:** The **Sundarbans** , the world's largest **mangrove forest** , lies in the delta of the **Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers** along the **Bay of Bengal** , with **40% in India** and the remainder in **Bangladesh** .
- **Ecosystem:** An **ecotone** between **land and sea** in **tropical and subtropical regions** , featuring a **diverse mix of habitats** including **freshwater swamps, intertidal mangroves, saline forests, and open water** .
- **Global Recognition:** **UNESCO World Heritage site** in 1987 (India) and 1997 (Bangladesh), and **Ramsar site** (2019).

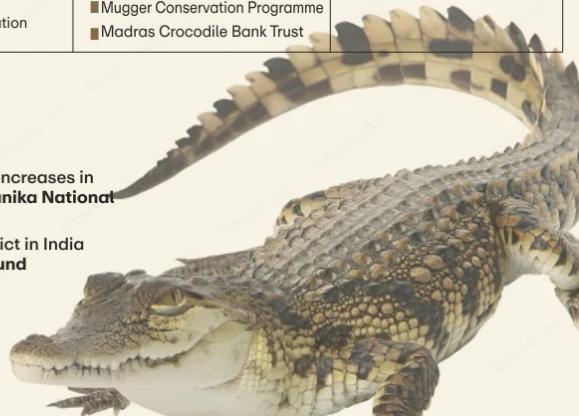
# CROCODILE SPECIES IN INDIA

India harbours three diverse  crocodile species—Mugger, Saltwater, and Gharial—found in distinct habitats nationwide.

| Aspects                     | Gharial  | Mugger/Indian Crocodile  | Saltwater Crocodile  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Scientific Name             | <i>Gavialis Gangeticus</i><br>  | <i>Crocodylus Palustris</i><br> | <i>Crocodylus Porosus</i><br> |
| Distribution: India         | <b>Viable Population:</b> National Chambal Sanctuary (U.P, Raj, M.P)<br><b>Small Non-Breeding Population:</b> Son, Gandak, Hooghly, Ghagra & Satkosia WLS (Odisha) | Throughout India   | East Coast (Odisha's Bhitarkanika WLS, Andaman & Nicobar Islands coast & Sundarbans)                             |
| Distribution: Neighbourhood | Brahmaputra of Bhutan & Bangladesh & Irrawaddy River   | Extinct in Bhutan and Myanmar  | Across Southeast Asia  |
| Special Feature             | Longest of all Crocodile, Long and thin Snout  | Egg-laying, Hole-nesting, Wide & U-shaped Snout  | Largest living reptile, Pointed & V-shaped Snout   |
| Habitat                     | Freshwater   | Freshwater   | Saltwater, Brackish & Wetlands   |
| IUCN Status                 | CR   | VU   | LC   |
| CITES Status                | Appendix I   | Appendix I   | Appendix I   |
| CMS Status                  | Appendix I   | -  | Appendix II  |
| WPA,1972 Status             | Schedule I   | Schedule I   | Schedule I   |
| Threats                     | Dams, Pollution, Sand mining   | Habitat Destruction  | Hunted for its skin and Habitat loss   |
| Government Initiatives      | ■ Odisha: Rs. 1000 award to conserve Gharial in Mahanadi River Basin<br>■ Indian Crocodile Conservation Project,1975   | ■ Indian Crocodile Conservation Project,1975<br>■ Mugger Conservation Programme<br>■ Madras Crocodile Bank Trust | Indian Crocodile Conservation Project,1975   |

## MISCELLANEOUS FACTS

- 🕒 17th June: World Crocodile Day
- 📉 Annual Reptile Census, 2023: Marginal Increases in number of saltwater crocodiles (Bhitarkanika National Park and its nearby areas)
- 📍 Odisha's Kendrapara District: Only district in India where all three species of crocodiles found



Read More: [Sundarbans](#)

## Ecuador & Peru



Source: DTE

Indigenous communities in **Ecuador** and **Peru** opposed a new **oil deal** , citing risks of **deforestation** , **river pollution** , **biodiversity loss** , and **ecological damage** in the **Amazon rainforests** .

# Amazon Rainforests

- **About:** The **Amazon Rainforest** is the **largest tropical rainforest in the world** , covering around **6.7 million sq km** in the **Amazon River basin** of **northern South America**.
  - About **60% of the rainforest is in Brazil** , while the remaining area is shared among **Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela** , and **French Guiana** , making it the **largest drainage system globally** .
  - It is bounded by the **Guiana Highlands (north)** , **Andes Mountains (west)** , **Brazilian Central Plateau (south)** , and the **Atlantic Ocean (east)** .
- **Ecological Significance:** Covers **over half of the world's rainforest volume** , crucial for **biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and climate regulation** .
  - Though only **1% of Earth's surface** , it sustains **around 10% of global wildlife** , including habitats for **river dolphins** and **over 70% of the world's jaguars** .



## Ecuador

- Ecuador (with capital **Quito** ) lies in **western South America** between **Colombia** and **Peru** . The **Equator line** passed through it.
- The **Andes** run through Ecuador, with **Cotopaxi** as the **highest active volcano**.

## Peru

- Situated on the **western coast of South America** , **Peru (capital- Lima)** connects the **Pacific Ocean** , **Andes Mountains** and the **Amazon Basin** .
  - It shares borders with **Ecuador and Colombia** (north), **Brazil** (east), and **Bolivia and Chile** (south).
- Key drainage includes the **Amazon River** and **Lake Titicaca** (world's highest navigable lake, shared

with Bolivia).

- About **60%** of Peru is covered by the **Amazon forest** .
- Other features include **Atacama Desert** (southern Peru), **Nazca Lines** , and the **Humboldt Current** and **El Niño** .

**Read More:** [Galápagos Islands](#)