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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

GOVT. INTRODUCES WOMEN'S QUOTA BILL IN LOK SABHA; PM CALLS FOR A CONSENSUS

In a historic move after the Special Session shifted to the new Parliament House .

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Eighth) Amendment Bill, 2023, however, would be implemented only after the 2026 delimitation exercise using data from the Census to be conducted after the passage of the Bill this year. The reservation in the Lok Sabha can hence be implemented only in the Lok Sabha election in 2029 and not in 2024.

Highlights of the Bill

- The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. The allocation of reserved seats shall be determined by such authority as prescribed by Parliament.
- One third of the total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be reserved for women of those groups in the Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies.
- Reserved seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the state or union territory.
- Reservation of seats for women shall cease to exist 15 years after the commencement of this Amendment Act.

Key Issues and Analysis

- There are divergent views on the reservation policy.

Proponents stress the necessity of affirmative action to improve the condition of women. Some recent studies on panchayats have shown the positive effect of reservation on empowerment of women and on allocation of resources.

- Opponents argue that it would perpetuate the unequal status of women since they would not be perceived to be competing on merit. They also contend that this policy diverts attention from the larger issues of electoral reform such as criminalisation of politics and inner party democracy.
- Reservation of seats in Parliament restricts choice of voters to women candidates. Therefore, some experts have suggested alternate methods such as reservation in political parties and dual member constituencies.
- Rotation of reserved constituencies in every election may reduce the incentive for an MP to work for his constituency as he may be ineligible to seek re-election from that constituency.
- The report examining the 1996 women's reservation Bill recommended that reservation be provided for women of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) once the Constitution was amended to allow for reservation for OBCs. It also recommended that reservation be extended to the Rajya Sabha and the Legislative Councils. Neither of these recommendations has been incorporated in the Bill.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS : INDIA – CANADA TIES

CONTEXT: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's startling allegation, tying the killing of Canadian Khalistani leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June, to "agents of the Government of India", marks a new low in their unravelling ties.

Details of the events

Mr. Trudeau's accusation has set off a chain of events. After Canada expelled a senior Indian diplomat, India summoned the Canadian High Commissioner and expelled Canada's Station chief for intelligence.

The United States and Australia, partners with Canada in the "Five Eyes" intelligence sharing agreement, have expressed "deep concerns" over the issue.

The External Affairs Ministry has also accused Canadian diplomats of "anti-India" activities, indicating that more diplomats may be under scrutiny, while the Canadian government has spoken about the violation of the international rule of law, and of Canadian "sovereignty", which could invoke other areas of confrontation.

Unlike with Pakistan, where such allegations, name-calling and public confrontation have become routine, it is worth remembering that Canada is a part of the western NATO alliance, and home to Indians and Indian-origin Canadians, and the impact of the rupture will

be felt wider.

India's assertions over Canadian safe havens for anti-India, separatist violent Khalistani groups have already been proven by many incidents, beginning from the early 1980s to more recent targeting of Indian diplomats and Indian community centres.

That Nijjar, chief of the "Khalistan Tiger Force" — he was wanted in India, accused of being behind terror operations in Punjab in the 1990s, and had an Interpol red corner notice — was a Canadian citizen speaks for itself.

New Delhi must also consider how it wishes to proceed on its ties with Canada. The government had hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Canada in 2015, the first bilateral visit by an Indian PM since 1973, with the assumption that decades of mistrust over the Khalistan issue could be brushed aside.

Earlier this year, India and Canada attempted another reset, with visits by Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly, and fast-tracking free trade talks.

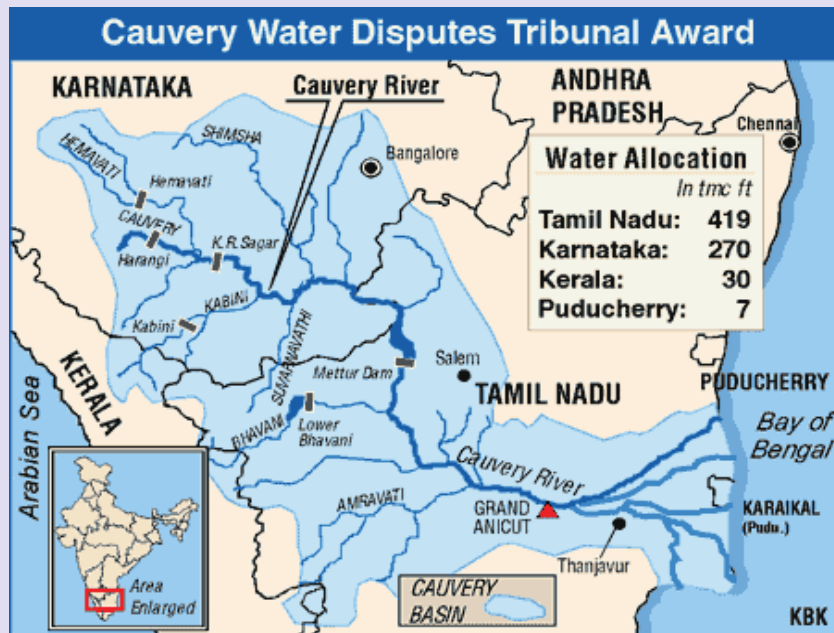
However, after the acrimonious Trudeau-Modi meeting on the sidelines of the G-20, and the latest allegations by Mr. Trudeau, diplomatic niceties are clearly at an end, while the FTA talks have been put on pause.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

THE CAUVERY WATER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY SHOULD ACT

Background:

- The Cauvery river water dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka has a long history, with both states vying for their share of the river's water.
- Historically, Tamil Nadu used about 602 TMC of the total yield of the Cauvery river. As a result, only about 138 TMC was available for Karnataka until the turn of the 20th century.
- In 1924, Tamil Nadu built the Mettur dam, and the two states signed an agreement effective for 50 years. The pact allowed Tamil Nadu to expand its agricultural area by 11 lakh acres from the existing 16 lakh acres. Karnataka was authorised to increase its irrigation area from 3 lakh acres to 10 lakh acres.
- In 1974, when the accord lapsed, Karnataka claimed that the agreement restricted its ability to develop farming activities along the Cauvery basin. To make up lost ground, it started building reservoirs. This led to a dispute between the two states.



Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) needs to act promptly

in formulating a distress-sharing formula for sharing Cauvery river waters. Here are the key points from the article:

- **Distress-Sharing Formula:** The concept of a distress-sharing formula, which would come into play during water scarcity situations, has been under discussion since the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) gave its interim order in 1991.
- **Recent Developments:** Recent submissions by Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, along with the deposition of the CWMA before the Supreme Court, highlight the urgent need for a distress-sharing formula that is acceptable to both states.
- **Complexities:** Tamil Nadu proposes a formula based on factors like deficit in inflows to Karnataka's reservoirs and rainfall patterns in various catchment areas. Karnataka, on the other hand, argues that the overall distress situation should consider both the southwest monsoon (June-September) and northeast monsoon (October-December) and be assessed till the end of January.
- **CWMA's Role:** The CWMA, established in 2018, has not made significant progress in resolving the dispute over the past five years. However, it is staffed with technical experts who should be capable of finding a rational and objective distress-sharing formula.
- **Transparency:** The article suggests that the CWMA and its assisting body, the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC), should make all their meeting proceedings available to the public on a website to ensure transparency and dispel misconceptions.
- **Despite the differing positions of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu,** the CWMA, or if necessary, the Union government, should actively work towards finding a formula to resolve the dispute. Need for a proactive approach to address the Cauvery water issue and avoid maintaining the status quo.
- **Urgency of addressing the Cauvery river water dispute** through a distress-sharing formula and urges the CWMA to take necessary steps to reach a resolution.

ART AND CULTURE

THREE HOYSALA TEMPLES DECLARED UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

CONTEXT: The Hoysala temples at Belur, Halebid, and Somanathapur in Karnataka were declared as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The Chennakeshava temple at Belur and the Hoysaleshwara temple at Halebidu — both in Hassan district — have been on the UNESCO's tentative list since 2014. The Keshava temple at Somanathapur in Mysuru district was appended to the other two monuments under the tentative list and all three were officially nominated by the Centre as India's entry for 2022-23 in February 2022.

The Hoysala temples are known for evolving a distinct

style that is ornate with temple architecture following a stellate plan built on a raised platform. The material used in temple construction is chloritic schist which is also known as soapstone that are soft and amiable to carving.

While the construction of the Chennakeshava temple at Belur commenced during the period of king Vishnuvardhana in 1117 CE and took 103 years to complete, the Hoysaleshwara temple was commissioned in 1121 CE while the Keshava temple at Somanathapur was commissioned by Somanatha Dandanayaka during the regime of Narasimha III in 1268 CE.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

SIMULTANEOUS POLLS: DO STATES HAVE A SAY?

GIST:

- The Constitution was envisioned as a living document capable of morphing with the needs of the times. Article 368 governs the process of amending the Constitution.
- The Constitutional provisions that require ratification by States in order to be amended are specifically listed in the proviso to Article 368(2) and pertain to the federal structure of the Constitution. They are commonly referred to as 'entrenched provisions'.
- In August 2018, the Law Commission of India, chaired by Justice B. S. Chauhan, released a draft report stipulating that simultaneous elections are not feasible within the existing framework of the Constitution.

The Union government has set up a committee to explore the feasibility of simultaneous elections to State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha. Here are the key points regarding this committee and the constitutional aspects related to amending the Constitution:

- **Committee Formation:** On September 2, the Union government established a committee led by former President of India Ram Nath Kovind. The eight-member High-Level Committee's primary task is to examine the 'one nation, one election' concept and propose recommendations for implementing simultaneous elections in India.
- **Terms of Reference:** The Law Ministry has defined seven terms of reference for the committee, one of which is to assess whether the constitutional amendments necessary for enabling simultaneous elections require ratification by the States.
- **Article 368:** The process of amending the Indian Constitution is governed by Article 368. Amendments can be made through three procedures:
 - **Simple Majority:** Some provisions can be amended by a simple majority vote in both Houses of Parliament. No specific quorum is required for this procedure.
 - **Special Majority:** For most provisions, a 'special majority' is needed, requiring at least two-thirds of the members present and voting in each House of Parliament and a majority of the total membership of each House.

- **Special Majority + State Ratification:** Certain amendments, often referred to as 'entrenched provisions,' require both a 'special majority' in Parliament and ratification by at least half of the State legislatures.
- **Amendments Requiring Ratification:** The provisions that mandate ratification by the States pertain to the federal structure of the Constitution and are outlined in the proviso to Article 368(2). They include changes related to elections for the President, distribution of powers between the Union and States, and representation of States in Parliament, among others.
- **Historical Perspective:** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a key architect of the Indian Constitution, advocated for State ratification to preserve the federal structure of the Constitution. He believed that requiring ratification by States was essential to prevent centralization of power.
- **Legal Precedent:** In past cases like *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu* (1992) and *Union of India v. Rajendra N. Shah* (2021), the Supreme Court has upheld the requirement of State ratification for certain amendments.
- **Law Commission's View:** In August 2018, the Law Commission of India released a draft report stating that simultaneous elections would require constitutional amendments, including ratification by at least 50% of the States. However, experts have raised concerns about potential infringement on the federal structure of the Constitution.
- **Challenges:** Achieving simultaneous elections could involve dissolving all State Assemblies, which have varying tenures. Amending Article 172 to synchronize State elections with Lok Sabha polls may be challenging without violating the federal structure, especially in states governed by opposition parties.

In summary, the committee is tasked with examining the feasibility of simultaneous elections, and the requirement for State ratification of constitutional amendments is an essential consideration in this context. The issue is complex, with legal and political implications for India's federal structure.

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SOCIAL JUSTICE

FIRST-EVER WHO REPORT ON HYPERTENSION

CONTEXT: The World Health Organization (WHO) released its first-ever report on the devastating global impact of high blood pressure, along with recommendations to prevent it.

Key Findings of the Report

The report shows approximately 4 out of every 5 people with hypertension are not adequately treated, but if countries can scale up coverage, 76 million deaths could be averted between 2023 and 2050.

Hypertension affects 1 in 3 adults worldwide. This common, deadly condition leads to stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney damage and many other health problems.

The number of people living with hypertension (blood pressure of 140/90 mmHg or higher or taking medication for hypertension) doubled between 1990 and 2019, from 650 million to 1.3 billion.

Nearly half of people with hypertension globally are currently unaware of their condition. More than three-quarters of adults with hypertension live in low- and middle-income countries.

Older age and genetics can increase the risk of having high blood pressure, but modifiable risk factors such as eating a high-salt diet, not being physically active and drinking too much alcohol can also increase the risk of hypertension.

Recommending ways to win the race against this silent killer, the WHO states that lifestyle changes such as eating a healthier diet, quitting tobacco and being more active can help lower blood pressure. Some people may need medicines that can control hypertension effectively and prevent related complications.

Hypertension in India

Hypertension is the most important risk factor for death and disability in India, according to a paper in The Lancet, regional health (South-east Asia), published late last year.

It adds that less than one-fourth of hypertensive patients in India had their blood pressure under control during 2016–2020.

It also states that the 2019–2020 National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) reported a hypertension prevalence of 24% in men and 21% among women, an increase from 19% and 17% respectively from the previous round (2015–16).

India runs the India Hypertension Control Initiative programme which is a large-scale hypertension intervention under the National Health Mission and has been recognised for its positive work done within the country’s existing primary healthcare system.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

AZERBAIJAN LAUNCHES OPERATION IN KARABAKH

CONTEXT: Azerbaijan on Tuesday launched a military operation against the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region, warning it would “continue until the end” in the territory, over which it has fought two wars with neighbouring Armenia.

The Nagorno-Karabakh region has long been at the centre of tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia, leading to two wars for its control. It is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan.

The last large-scale conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh lasted for six weeks in 2020 before a Russian-brokered truce. The ceasefire saw Armenia cede swathes of territory it had controlled since the 1990s.

The two sides have since been unable to reach a lasting peace settlement despite mediation by the European Union, Russia and the United States



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SOCIAL JUSTICE

FACILITATING DEGREES WITHIN A DEGREE

CONTEXT: The University Grants Commission (UGC) has recently introduced the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) to address confusion around higher education qualifications.

The NHEQF

The NHEQF seeks to bring changes in the education system right from the school to the higher education levels. Under the NHEQF, higher education qualifications such as a certificate, diploma, and degree will be awarded based on the demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes and academic standards expected of graduates of a programme of study.

The framework intends to provide a “nationally accepted and internationally comparable and acceptable qualifications framework to facilitate transparency and comparability of higher education qualifications at all levels”.

The purpose of the framework to recognize and accredit qualifications offered by different types of institutions engaged in higher education, including vocational education and training, and technical/professional education in India as envisaged in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It also aims to provide points of reference when setting and assessing academic standards, designing curricula, teaching-learning-assessment strategies, and periodic review of programmes.

Issues

Globally, higher education qualification frameworks include details of the definition and requirements of credits. The UGC has chosen to prescribe two separate frameworks — the NHEQF and the National Credit Framework. Higher educational institutions are separately required to implement the Academic Bank of Credits as a mandated modality for recognising, accepting, and transferring credits across courses and institutions. Additionally, there are many other regulations that impinge on higher education qualifications. All of these could have been integrated into the NHEQF. This defeats the purpose of prescribing a qualification framework. After all, a qualification framework must minimise ambiguities in comprehending qualifications in a cross-cultural context.

By definition, a national higher education qualification must encompass all disciplines and must clearly provide for the eligibility conditions for the entry into, and completion of, all programmes of studies. The NHEQF does provide exit

requirements, but eligibility conditions and pathways through which a student can enter a programme at a particular level are alluded to vaguely.

Besides, higher education qualifications awarded by disciplines such as agriculture, law, medicine, and pharmacy are conspicuous by their absence.

This document draws copiously from the Bologna process that led to the European Qualifications Framework and the Dublin descriptors. The higher education system in India is far more diverse and complex than the European Higher Education Area. It warrants much wider and more intense consultations with the States. Doing this could have substantially enriched the NHEQF.

The document fails to recognise that learning and knowledge must go beyond earning a livelihood. If it does recognise this, it does not sufficiently highlight it. Education is not only about an individual’s learning capacities and capabilities; sociocultural and politico-economic factors also determine learning.

The overall framework appears to facilitate ‘degrees within a degree’. Those who hold four-year undergraduate degrees with a minimum CGPA of 7.5 are eligible for admission to PhD programmes. This will make the higher education system elitist. After all, merit is a social construct; the academic performance of students is invariably mediated by their socioeconomic conditions.

The framework equates postgraduate diplomas with four-year undergraduate programmes. This poses a problem in determining the level of such undergraduate degrees that are pursued after another undergraduate degree, like B.Ed. Further, the idea that a B.Ed could be completed in one, two or four years is confusing.

The credit framework document of the UGC mandates that each semester must have a minimum of 20 credits. This document suggests that one credit must comprise 15 hours of direct and 30 hours of indirect teaching. This means that students are required to study for a minimum of 900 hours per semester or close to 10 hours a day. This is ambitious even for fully residential higher educational institutions. Higher educational institutions with minimal infrastructure and meagre faculty resources may find this daunting.



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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

CENTRE FLOATS NEW SCIENCE AWARDS

The Union government is set to institute the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar (RVP)— 56 prizes to felicitate scientists, technologists, and innovators.

Akin to the prestigious Padma awards, these awards will not include any cash component; instead, they will likely bestow a certificate and a medallion on the awardee.

According to the proposal seen by The Hindu, which is yet to be made public, the RVP will comprise three Vigyan Ratna, 25 Vigyan Shri, 25 Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar and three Vigyan Team awards.

These prizes will be awarded annually for physics, chemistry, biological sciences, mathematics and computer science, earth science, medicine, engineering science, agricultural science, environmental science, technology and innovation, atomic energy, space science and technology, and a 13th category, simply called “others”.

The 56 proposed awards are a stark reduction from the almost 300 science prizes that used to be given by Union Ministries.

The awards will be announced annually on May 11, which is National Technology Day, and will be awarded on National Space Day, August 23. These are the days on which India successfully conducted its second nuclear test in 1998, and then catapulted the Chandrayaan-3’s Vikram lander on the moon this year.

The RVP awards, which will commence from 2024, will be given by the President or the Vice President, according to the proposal.

A committee will be constituted every year, comprising the Secretaries of six Science Ministries, up to four presidents of science and engineering academies, and six distinguished scientists and technologists from various fields.

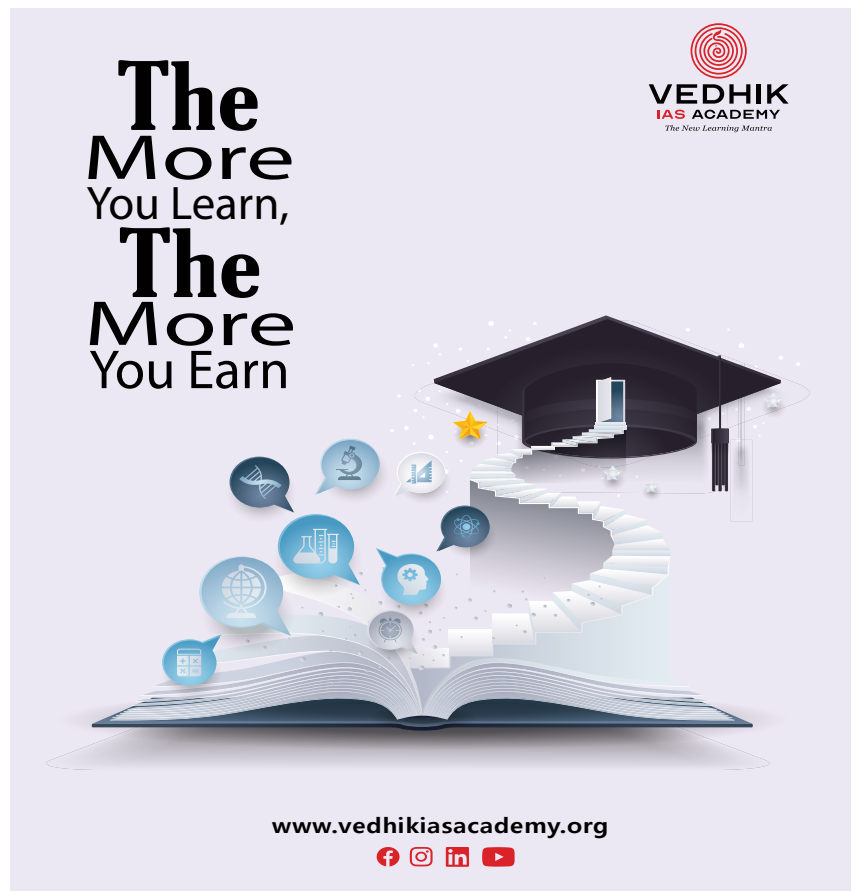
The CSIR will coordinate the administration of the awards process for two years, after which it will be taken over by the proposed National Research Foundation.



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