

GEOGRAPHY**Idukki's Marayoor Jaggery gets GI tag:**

- The Marayoor Jaggery, the traditional and handmade product from Idukki district of Kerala, has received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag from the Central Government.
- The Jaggery is produced in Marayoor, a town in Idukki district of Kerala. It is made from sugarcane and no chemicals are added during the manufacturing process.
- It is not produced in modern factories or using modern equipment. It is prepared in sheds located on the sugarcane farm.

GI Tag: Geographical Indication (GI) is a name or sign used on products which correspond to a specific geographical location or origin. Geographical Indication act as a certification that the product possesses certain qualities, is made according to traditional methods or enjoys a certain reputation, due to its geographical origin.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Model Code of Conduct**

The Election Commission of India has announced dates for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls with the country voting in seven phases from April 11 to May 19 and the with results on May 23. With this the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) has come into effect and has called upon all parties to strictly adhere to the same. The code lays down a list of dos and don'ts for the political parties ahead of elections.

Model Code of Conduct

- It is a set of guidelines issued by ECI to regulate political parties and candidates prior to elections.
- The rules range from issues related to speeches, polling day, polling booths, portfolios, content of election manifestos, processions and general conduct, so that free and fair elections are conducted.
- According to the PIB, a version of the MCC was first introduced in the state assembly elections in Kerala in 1960.
- It was largely followed by all parties in the 1962 elections and continued to be followed in subsequent general elections.
- In October 1979, the EC added a section to regulate the 'party in power' and prevent it from gaining an unfair advantage at the time of elections.
- The MCC comes into force from the date the election schedule is announced until the date that results are out.

Restrictions imposed under MCC: The MCC contains eight provisions dealing with general conduct, meetings, processions, polling day, polling booths, observers, the party in power, and election manifestos.

For Governments

- As soon as the code kicks in, the party in power whether at the Centre or in the States should ensure that it does not use its official position for campaigning.
- Hence, no policy, project or scheme can be announced that can influence the voting behaviour.
- The code also states that the ministers must not combine official visits with election work or use official machinery for the same.
- The ruling government cannot make any ad-hoc appointments in Government, Public Undertakings etc. which may influence the voters.
- Political parties or candidates can be criticised based only on their work record and no caste and communal sentiments can be used to lure voters.

For Political Parties

- The party must also avoid advertising at the cost of the public exchequer or using official mass media for publicity on achievements to improve chances of victory in the elections.
- The ruling party also cannot use government transport or machinery for campaigning.
- It should also ensure that public places such as maidans etc., for holding election meetings, and facilities like the use of helipads are provided to the opposition parties on the same terms and conditions on which they are used by the party in power.

Campaigning

- Holding public meetings during the 48-hour period before the hour fixed for the closing of the poll is also prohibited.
- The 48-hour period is known as "election silence".
- The idea is to allow a voter a campaign-free environment to reflect on events before casting her vote

- The issue of advertisement at the cost of public exchequer in the newspapers and other media is also considered an offence.
- Mosques, Churches, Temples or any other places of worship should not be used for election propaganda. Bribing, intimidating or impersonation of voters is also barred.

Is it legally binding?

- The fact is the MCC evolved as part of the ECI's drive to ensure free and fair elections and was the result of a consensus among major political parties.
- It has no statutory backing. Simply put, this means anybody breaching the MCC can't be proceeded against under any clause of the Code..
- The EC uses moral sanction or censure for its enforcement.

What if violated?

- The ECI can issue a notice to a politician or a party for alleged breach of the MCC either on its own or on the basis of a complaint by another party or individual.
- Once a notice is issued, the person or party must reply in writing either accepting fault and tendering an unconditional apology or rebutting the allegation.
- In the latter case, if the person or party is found guilty subsequently, he/it can attract a written censure from the ECI — something that many see as a mere slap on the wrist.
- However, in extreme cases, like a candidate using money/liquor to influence votes or trying to divide voters in the name of religion or caste, the ECI can also order registration of a criminal case under IPC or IT Act.
- In case of a hate speech, a complaint can be filed under the IPC and CrPC; there are laws against the misuse of a religious place for seeking votes, etc.

Using powers under Art. 324

- The Commission rarely resorts to punitive action to enforce MCC, there is one recent example when unabated violations forced EC's hand.
- During the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, the EC had banned a leader and now party president from campaigning in order to prevent them from further vitiating the poll atmosphere with their speeches.
- The Commission resorted to its extraordinary powers under Article 324 of the Constitution to impose the ban.
- It was only lifted once the leaders apologised and promised to operate within the Code.

What if given Statutory Backing?

- Both the ECI and several independent experts, believe that giving statutory backing to the MCC would only make the job of the Commission more difficult.
- This is because every alleged offence will then have to go to an appropriate court, and right up to the Supreme Court.
- Given the flaws of our legal system, election petitions filed decades ago are still pending before many High Courts it is anybody's guess what that situation might lead to.

INDIAN ECONOMY

White Label ATM

The RBI has relaxed norms for white label ATM (WLA) operators. All guidelines, safeguards, standards and control measures applicable to banks relating to currency handling and cyber-security framework for ATMs shall also be applicable to the WLA operators, the RBI said.

Who are the White Label ATM Operators?

- Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) set up, owned and operated by non-bank entities are called WLAs.
- They provide the banking services to the customers of banks in India, based on the cards (debit/credit/prepaid) issued by banks.
- The WLAO's role is confined to acquisition of transactions of all banks' customers by establishing technical connectivity with the existing authorized, shared ATM and Card Payment Network Operators.

Relaxed norms by RBI

- The RBI has decided to allow WLAs to buy wholesale cash, above a threshold of 1 lakh pieces (and in multiples thereof) of any denomination, directly from the RBI.

- The RBI also permitted WLA operators to source cash from any bank, including cooperatives and regional rural banks.

They are also being allowed to source cash from any scheduled bank, including cooperative banks and regional rural banks and to offer bill payment and Interoperable Cash Deposit services, subject to technical feasibility and certification by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

RBI has also allowed WLA operators to display advertisements pertaining to non-financial products or services anywhere within the WLA premises, including the ATM screen, except the main signboard.

ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES

India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)

India Cooling Action Plan Launched.

Significance:

- India is the first country in world to develop such a document (ICAP), which addresses cooling requirement across sectors and lists out actions which can help reduce the cooling demand.
- The overarching goal is to provide sustainable cooling and thermal comfort for all while securing environmental and socio-economic benefits for the society.
- The goals emerging from the suggested interventions stated in ICAP are:
 - Reduction of cooling demand across sectors by 20% to 25 % by year 2037-38.
 - Reduction of refrigerant demand by 25% to 30% by year 2037-38.
 - Reduction of cooling energy requirements by 25% to 40% by year 2037-38.
 - Training and certification of 100,000 servicing sector technicians by the year 2022-23, in synergy with Skill India Mission.
 - Recognize “cooling and related areas” as a thrust area of research under the national S&T Programme.
- The broad objectives of the India Cooling Action Plan include:
 - Assessment of cooling requirements across sectors in next 20 years and the associated refrigerant demand and energy use.
 - Map the technologies available to cater the cooling requirement including passive interventions, refrigerant-based technologies and alternative technologies such as not-in-kind technologies.
 - Suggest interventions in each sector to provide for sustainable cooling and thermal comfort for all.
 - Focus on skilling of RAC service technicians.
 - Develop an R&D innovation ecosystem for indigenous development of alternative technologies.
- The following benefits would accrue to society over and above the environmental benefits:
 - Thermal comfort for all – provision for cooling for EWS and LIG housing.
 - Sustainable cooling – low GHG emissions related to cooling.
 - Doubling Farmers Income – better cold chain infrastructure – better value of products to farmers, less wastage of produce.
 - Skilled workforce for better livelihoods and environmental protection.
 - Make in India – domestic manufacturing of air-conditioning and related cooling equipment's.
 - Robust R&D on alternative cooling technologies – to provide the push to innovation in a cooling sector.

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

National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage

The Union Cabinet has approved setting up of National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage to drive clean, connected, shared and sustainable mobility initiatives in the country. It also approved a Phased Manufacturing Program to support large-scale, export-competitive integrated batteries and cell-manufacturing giga plants in India, to localize production across the electric vehicles value chain.

About the Mission

- It entails creation of a phased manufacturing programme (PMP) valid for five years till 2024 to support setting up of a few large scale, export competitive integrated batteries and cell manufacturing Giga plants in India.

- To implement gigawatt-scale battery manufacturing, a National Storage Mission will initially focus on large-scale module and pack assembly plants during the fiscal year that starts next month, followed by integrated cell manufacturing by 2021-22.
- It will prepare a roadmap for India to leverage its size to produce innovative, competitive multi-modal mobility solutions to be deployed globally.

Why such move?

- India has a significant market potential for batteries and electric vehicles.
- Electric vehicles are creating a big demand and due to this demand, the cost of batteries will further come down.
- IESA estimates the market for energy storage would grow to over 300 GWh during 2018-25.
- It is working with various EV and charging infrastructure companies through its MOVE – Moving Onwards with Vehicle Electrification – initiative to catalyze the adoption, through indigenous manufacturing, of EV components.
- Currently, more than ten companies are engaged in module and li-ion pack assembly in India and we expect four to five large companies to enter cell manufacturing in the next two to three years.
- With appropriate policy support through this mission, Indian companies will be able to diversify into energy storage business.

Terms of reference

- The programme will provide a plan which will send a clear signal to the industry to make the necessary investments in capacity to localize the value chain.
- The creation of a PMP would localize production along the entire electric vehicles value chain.
- The mission will have an inter-ministerial steering committee chaired by NitiAayog CEO Amitabh Kant.
- The mission will also coordinate with key stakeholders in ministries/ departments and states to integrate various initiatives to transform mobility in India.

India Urban Observatory & Video Wall

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has launched the state-of-the-art India Urban Observatory and Video Wall.

Urban Observatory

- It is a platform that uses data from different sources to enable analysis and visualization over a geospatial platform can make this possible.
- The concept of Urban Observatories was formally initiated at the UN Habitat-II Conference in 1997 in Istanbul.
- Some examples of well-established Urban Observatories are the Global Urban Observatory network, the Dublin Dashboard and the City Dashboard of London.
- Such platforms churn out interesting analyses and visualizations by collating massive datasets.

India Urban Observatory

- It is an important component of the recently launched DataSmart Cities strategy that envisions creating a ‘Culture of Data’ in cities, for intelligent use of data in addressing complex urban challenges.
- Making cities ‘DataSmart’ is key to realizing the full potential of technology interventions and innovation ecosystems in cities.
- The Data Smart Cities Policy allows cities to open their data to public view, such as number of hospitals, gardens, people, public toilets and other city management, the official added.
- It will be a separate portal for Smart Cities under the data.gov website.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“I fear not the man who has practiced 10000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10000 times.”

Bruce Lee