

**CONSTITUTION AND POLITY****Supreme Court seeks EC response on plea against voter prosecution**

The Supreme Court has sought a response from the Election Commission on a plea seeking abolition of a provision in election rules that provides for prosecution of an elector if a complaint alleging malfunctioning of EVMs and VVPATs turns out to be false.

**Rule 49MA:**

- A petition alleged that Rule 49MA of 'The Conduct of Elections Rules' was unconstitutional as it criminalizes reporting of malfunctioning of Electronic Voting Machines and Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails.
- Under the rule, where printer for paper trail is used, if an elector after having recorded his vote under rule 49M alleges that the paper slip generated by the printer has shown the name or symbol of a candidate other than the one he voted for, the presiding officer shall obtain a written declaration from the elector as to the allegation, after warning the elector about the consequence of making a false declaration.
- The rules outline that if after investigation, the allegation of EVM malfunctioning is found to be false or incorrect, then the complainant can be prosecuted under Section 177 of the Indian Penal Code for "furnishing false information".
- In such a case, a jail term of six months or a fine of Rs 1,000 or both is guaranteed.

**Arguments and demands by the petitioner:**

- The obligation of proving an allegation cannot be on the voter when machines used for voting showed 'arbitrary deviant behaviour'.
- Putting the responsibility on the elector in cases of arbitrary deviant behavior of machines used in the election process, infringes upon a citizen's right to freedom of expression under the Constitution.
- When an elector is asked to cast test vote as prescribed under Rule 49MA, he may not be able to reproduce the same result which he was complaining about, one more time in a sequence, because of the pre-programmed deviant behavior of the electronic machines.
- Therefore, the plea argued that holding an elector accountable for deviant behaviours of EVMs and VVPATs could deter them from coming forth and making any complaint, which is essential for improving the process.
- Since only an elector could be a witness to the secrecy of his vote cast, it would violate Article 20(3) of the Constitution which says that no person accused of an offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.

**Need of the hour:** The plea sought a direction to the EC to register a complaint of any deviant behavior of equipment used in the election process. The petition said that presently, the burden of proof rests on the elector for reporting any deviant behaviour of EVMs and VVPATs, who will face criminal charges irrespective of whether the complaint was truthful and honest.

**ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES****Committee constituted to oversee clean air programme**

The MoEFCC has constituted a committee to implement the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), which aims to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20%-30% in at least 102 cities by 2024.

**National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**

- The NCAP unveiled in January is envisaged as a scheme to provide the States and the Centre with a framework to combat air pollution.

- The NCAP is envisioned as a five-year action plan with 2019 as the first year. There would be a review every five years.
- For achieving the NCAP targets, the cities would be expected to calculate the reduction in pollution, keeping 2017's average annual PM levels as the base year.
- The NCAP requires cities to implement specific measures such as:
  - Ensuring roads are pothole-free to improve traffic flow and thereby reduce dust" (within 60 days) or
  - Ensuring strict action against unauthorized brick kilns (within 30 days)
  - It doesn't specify an exact date for when these obligations kick in.
  - Experts have criticised the lack of mandatory targets and the challenge of inadequate enforcement by cities.

#### Committee to implement NCAP

- The committee will be chaired by the Secretary, Union Environment Ministry and has among its members the Joint Secretary (Thermal), Ministry of Power; Director-General, The Energy Resources Institute (TERI) etc.
- The committee would be headquartered in New Delhi and its remit includes ensuring "inter-ministerial organisation and cooperation, sharing information and resolving issues that could arise between ministries.
- The committee would also give overall guidance and directions to effectively implement the programmes.

#### Why such move?

- The World Health Organization's (WHO) database on air pollution over the years has listed Tier I and Tier II Indian cities as some of the most polluted places in the world.
- In 2018, 14 of the world's 15 most polluted cities were in India.

#### **Ishad Mango is under the threat of becoming rare**

A local mango variety called Ishad is facing the threat of becoming rare in its homeland, Ankola of Uttara Kannada district.

#### Ishad Mango

- The mango has two variants — Kari Ishad, which has thin skin, more pulp and is sweeter, and BiliIshad, which has thick skin and has less pulp and sweetness.
- Some farmers did try to grow it outside Ankolataluk, but failed.
- It is delicate to handle given its short shelf life. Hence, the fruit cannot be transported to faraway places.
- The pulp of this mango has been extracted for over a century for making value-added products.
- Oriental Canneries and Industries set up a unit in Ankola in 1908 to extract pulp from Ishad for making value-added products.
- The then Bombay government supported it by supplying wood.
- The pulp is used for making 48 recipes. It was being used in the United States, Australia and Sri Lanka.

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

#### **Technical Textiles**

A Seminar was recently organized by Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation on "Use of Technical Textiles in Water Resources Works".

#### What are technical textiles?

- Technical Textiles are defined as Textile material and products manufactured primarily for their Technical performance and functional properties rather than aesthetic and decorative characteristics.
- Technical textiles include textiles for automotive applications, medical textiles (e.g., implants), geotextiles (reinforcement of embankments), agrotextiles (textiles for crop protection), and protective clothing (e.g., heat and radiation protection for fire fighter clothing, molten metal protection for welders, stab protection and bulletproof vests, and spacesuits).

#### Significance and potential applications:

- Technical Textiles are being used globally for last several decades. These materials have provided innovative
- engineering solutions for several applications in civil and geotechnical engineering, for infrastructure water resources projects.
- Even while Technical Textiles have been extensively used in developed as well as many developing countries, India has yet to capitalise the technical, economical and environmental benefits on large scale.
- Various parts of India are subjected to floods and environmental degradation. In some of the terrains, the flood management and control can rely on Technical Textiles tubes, containers and bags. Technical Textiles have been found to perform better than concrete as water protection component because of permeability, flexibility and ease of underwater placement.

### **DEFENCE**

#### **Army invokes emergency powers for missiles deal**

The Army is in the process of procuring Spike-LR Anti-Tank Missiles from Israel and Igla-S Very Short Range Air Defence Systems (VSHORAD) from Russia through a set of new financial powers for emergency procurements sanctioned by the Defence Ministry earlier this month.

#### Emergency financial powers to Army

- After the Pulwama attack, the government has given emergency powers to the armed forces for buying equipment to enable them to fight wars on the western border with Pakistan.
- Under the latest emergency financial powers, armed forces have been given a free hand to procure equipment worth upto Rs. 300 crore on a priority basis.
- The government also relaxed certain rules to cut delays in military purchase like allowing the three services to procure required weapons and equipment from a single vendor.
- Entirely new systems not in use can also be procured under the new powers.
- For the procurement under the emergency orders, the forces need not even take concurrence of the Integrated Financial Advisor from the defence finance department.
- The defence Ministry feels that since the forces have to fight wars, they should decide on their requirement and priority in the acquisition and buy that equipment.

### **QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**Fall Seven times, Stand up Eight.**