

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

❖ **On reservation for women in politics**

➤ **CONTEXT:** A day before her appearance in front of the Enforcement Directorate in the Delhi liquor policy case, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader K. Kavitha launched a six-hour hunger strike on March 10 seeking early passage of the long-pending Women's Reservation Bill.

➤ **What has been the history of political reservation for women?**

- The issue of reservation for women in politics can be traced back to the Indian national movement. In 1931, in their letter to the British Prime Minister, submitting the official memorandum jointly issued on the status of women in the new Constitution by three women's bodies, leaders Begum Shah Nawaz and Sarojini Naidu wrote, "To seek any form of preferential treatment would be to violate the integrity of the universal demand of Indian women for absolute equality of political status."
- The issue of women's reservation came up in Constituent Assembly debates as well, but it was rejected as being unnecessary. It was assumed that a democracy would accord representation to all groups.
- However, in the following decades, it became clear that this was not to be the case. As a consequence, women's reservation became a recurrent theme in policy debates. For instance, the Committee of the Status of Women in India, set up in 1971, commented on the declining political representation of women in India.
- Though a majority within the Committee continued to be against reservation for women in legislative bodies, all of them supported reservation for women in local bodies. Slowly, many State governments began announcing reservations for women in local bodies.
- The National Perspective Plan for Women recommended in 1988 that reservation be provided to women right from the level of the panchayat to that of Parliament. These recommendations paved the way for the historic enactment of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution which mandate all State governments to reserve one-third of the seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and one-third of the offices of the chairperson at all levels of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, and in urban local bodies, respectively.
- Within these seats, one-third are reserved for Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe women. Many States such as Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Kerala have made legal provisions to ensure 50% reservation for women in local bodies.

➤ **What is the Women's Reservation Bill?**

- After local bodies, the next step was to ensure reservation in Parliament, but this has been a difficult fight. The Women's Reservation Bill proposes to reserve 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women.
- It was first introduced in the Lok Sabha as the 81st Amendment Bill in September 1996 by the Deve Gowda-led United Front government. The Bill failed to get the approval of the House and was referred to a joint parliamentary committee which submitted its report to the Lok Sabha in December 1996. But the Bill lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha.
- In 1998, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government reintroduced the Bill in the 12th Lok Sabha. After the Law Minister M. Thambidurai introduced it, an RJD MP went to the well of the House, grabbed the Bill and tore it to bits. The Bill failed to get support and lapsed again. The Bill was reintroduced in 1999, 2002 and 2003. Even though there was support for it within the Congress, the BJP and the Left parties, the Bill failed to receive majority votes.
- In 2008, the Manmohan Singh-led United Progressive Alliance government tabled the Bill in the Rajya Sabha and it was passed with 186-1 votes on March 9, 2010. However, the Bill was never taken up for consideration in the Lok Sabha and lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha.
- At the time, the RJD, the JD(U) and the SP were its most vocal opponents. They demanded 33% reservation for backward groups within the 33% quota for women. JD(U) leader Sharad Yadav infamously demanded to know how short-haired women could represent "our women" (women from rural areas). In 2014, the BJP promised 33% reservation for women in its manifesto and repeated the promise in its 2019 agenda. But there has been no movement from the government in this regard.

➤ **What are the arguments for the Bill?**

- Proponents of the Bill argue that affirmative action is imperative to better the condition of women since political parties are inherently patriarchal.
 - ✓ Second, despite the hopes of the leaders of the national movement, women are still under-represented in Parliament.
 - ✓ Reservations, proponents believe, will ensure that women form a strong lobby in Parliament to fight for issues that are often ignored.
 - ✓ There is now evidence that women as panchayat leaders have shattered social myths, been more accessible than men, controlled the stranglehold of liquor, invested substantially in public goods such as drinking water, helped other women express themselves better, reduced corruption, prioritised nutrition outcomes, and changed the development agenda at the grassroots level.
 - ✓ In States such as West Bengal and Rajasthan, while women leaders were often rubber stamps of their husbands or fathers, they were more likely to invest in goods that were important to the interests of women.

- ✓ Today, India has a high percentage of crimes against women, low participation of women in the workforce, low nutrition levels and a skewed sex ratio. To address all these challenges, it is argued, we need more women in decision-making.
- ✓ Third, proponents such as Brinda Karat argue that the discussion is not about a Bill alone, but about changing powerful, entrenched interests in India's polity.
- **What are arguments against the Bill?**
 - That opponents of reservation for women argue that the idea runs counter to the principle of equality enshrined in the Constitution. They say that women will not be competing on merit if there is reservation, which could lower their status in society.
 - Second, women are unlike, say, a caste group, which means that they are not a homogenous community. Therefore, the same arguments made for caste-based reservation cannot be made for women.
 - Third, women's interests cannot be isolated from other social, economic and political strata.
 - Fourth, some argue that reservation of seats in Parliament would restrict the choice of voters to women candidates. This has led to suggestions of alternate methods including reservation for women in political parties and dual member constituencies (where constituencies will have two MPs, one of them being a woman).
 - But some parties have pointed out that even these may not work as parties may field women candidates in unwinnable seats, or women may contest the elections but not get voted to power, or they may get relegated to a secondary role.
 - Fifth, as men hold primary power as well as key positions in politics, some have even argued that bringing women into politics could destroy the "ideal family".
- **How many women are in Parliament?**
 - Only about 14% of the members in Indian Parliament are women, the highest so far. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, India has a fewer percentage of women in the lower House than its neighbours such as Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh — a dismal record.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

- ❖ **Australia to get nuclear-powered submarines under AUKUS partnership**
- **CONTEXT: Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States recently unveiled plans to provide Australia with conventionally armed, nuclear-powered attack submarines in the early 2030s to counter China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. The arrangement was made through the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) enhanced security partnership.**
 - Under this deal, the United States intends to sell Australia three US Virginia class nuclear-powered submarines built by General Dynamics in the early 2030s, with an option for Australia to buy two more if needed.
 - However, the multi-stage project will culminate with British and Australian production and operation of a new submarine class (SSN-AUKUS) a trilaterally developed vessel with the best technologies and capabilities of all three countries.
 - ✓ China has reacted strongly to the naval deal. Its foreign ministry accused the three nations of "walking further and further down the path of error and danger."
- **What is AUKUS?**
 - AUKUS is a 2021 defence deal between Australia, the UK and the US, which was struck to help Australia deploy nuclear-powered submarines in the Pacific region. Officially, the deal was made to emphasise upon the countries' "shared commitment to a free-and-open Indo-Pacific region". In effect, it seeks to combat China's ambitions in the region.
 - China has been an aggressive player in the South Pacific and Indian Oceans, staking territorial claims across the resource-rich region which also hosts some of the world's busiest shipping lanes. China's increasing aggression against Taiwan and in the South China Sea has been of particular note.
 - While China's territorial ambitions have elicited strong reactions from across the West, Australia, a traditional centre of influence in the Pacific, has been most directly impacted. Crucially, unlike Australia, China has multiple nuclear-capable submarines.
 - Thus, the AUKUS partnership was signed to bolster Australia's naval heft in the region. The then Australian PM Scott Morrison, at the time, described AUKUS as a "partnership where our technology, our scientists, our industry, our defence forces are all working together to deliver a safer and more secure region that ultimately benefits all".
- **What does the latest announcement say?**

In a fact sheet released by the White House, an "optimal pathway" for Australia to acquire nuclear-power submarines, "while setting the highest nuclear non-proliferation" was outlined. The plan involves a phased approach which will culminate in the production and operation of SSN-AUKUS. The phases are,

 - **Embedded Personnel and Port Visits.** Beginning in 2023, the Australian military and civilian personnel will embed with the US Navy, the UK Royal Navy and within the countries' submarine industrial bases. This will accelerate the training and development of Australian personnel to handle nuclear-powered submarines.
 - **Submarine Rotational Forces.** As early as 2027, the UK and the US plan to establish a rotational presence of one UK Astute class submarine and up to four US Virginia class submarines at HMAS Stirling near Perth, Western Australia.

- **Sale of US Virginia Class Submarines.** Beginning in the early 2030s, the US intends to sell Australia three Virginia-class submarines, with the potential to sell two more if needed. This will not only give Australia much-needed experience in operating nuclear-powered submarines, it will also be a stop-gap measure to shore up Australia's ageing fleet of conventional submarines till SSN-AUKUS is inducted by the 2040s.
- **SSN-AUKUS.** With the combination of the UK's submarine design and advanced United States technology, SSN-AUKUS will be the future attack submarine for both Australia and the UK. Both countries intend to build the sub in their domestic shipyards before the end of this decade with the UK expected to receive its first SSN-AUKUS in the late 2030s and Australia expected to receive the submarine in the early 2040s.

Notably, while Australia will receive nuclear-powered submarines, these will not be equipped with nuclear warheads. The newly announced deal includes "clear commitments" to the countries' respective nuclear non-proliferation obligations, the White House fact sheet says. It also includes commitments to improve infrastructure and industrial capacities as well as provisions for greater integration of the countries' submarine forces.

➤ **How will nuclear submarines help Australia?**

- Conventional diesel-engine submarines have batteries that keep and propel the vessel underwater. The life of these batteries can vary from a few hours to a few days. While newer Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) submarines have additional fuel cells that increase the submarine's endurance, these are used only at strategic times and can only be replenished in port. Both conventional and AIP subs need to come to the surface to recharge their batteries using the diesel engine.
- Nuclear-powered submarines, on the other hand, have an internal nuclear reactor, giving them near infinite endurance to operate and stay submerged – effectively, a nuclear submarine only needs to port/surface when it is out of food and other essential supplies for the crew. Typically, nuclear subs are also faster than conventional submarines.
- This allows them to reach far out into the ocean and launch attacks on the enemy, an important capability for blue water navies. Virginia class submarines and SSN-AUKUS will give the Royal Australian Navy the capability to go into the South China Sea to protect its assets and conduct patrols, a capability which it currently does not possess.

PRELIMS

1. Smart Cities Mission

➤ **CONTEXT:** As the June 2023 deadline for completing the Smart Cities Mission approaches, the government has asked 20 of the worst-performing cities (ones that have completed the fewest projects under the mission) to buck up.

- Among the laggards are six cities from the Northeast, five Union Territories, and three state capitals. "The cities have been instructed and offered guidance to complete the projects within the stipulated time frame."

➤ **What is the Smart Cities Mission?**

- The Smart Cities Mission is an initiative of the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry that was launched by Prime Minister of India on June 25, 2015. Cities across the country were asked to submit proposals for projects to improve municipal services and to make their jurisdictions more liveable.
- Between January 2016 and June 2018 (when the last city, Shillong, was chosen), the Ministry selected 100 cities for the Mission over five rounds.
- The projects were supposed to be completed within five years of the selection of the city, but in 2021 the Ministry changed the deadline for all cities to June 2023, which was earlier the deadline for Shillong alone.

➤ **What kinds of projects were proposed?**

- After the Ministry gave broad guidelines to the participating cities, the project proposals ranged from making certain stretches of roads more accessible and pedestrian-friendly to more capital-intensive ones like laying water pipelines and constructing sewage treatment plants.
- All 100 cities have also constructed Integrated Command and Control Centres to monitor all security, emergency and civic services. During the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, these centres were converted into emergency response units by many of the cities.

➤ **What is the status of the projects?**

- As of March 3, the 100 cities have issued work orders for 7,799 projects worth Rs 1.80 lakh crore, the government told Parliament recently. Out of these, 5,399 projects worth Rs.1.02 lakh crore have been completed, and the rest are ongoing.
- Only around 20 cities are likely to meet the June deadline; the rest will need more time. Cities selected in January and June 2018 have achieved 44% of their targets, while those selected in 2016 in the second round are not much farther ahead with 46% completion.
- Shillong has completed just one of its 18 proposed projects.

2. McMahon Line

➤ **CONTEXT:** Two United States Senators, a Republican and a Democrat, have introduced a bipartisan resolution in the upper chamber of Congress reiterating that the US recognises the McMahon Line as the international boundary between China and India in Arunachal Pradesh.

- The resolution reaffirms India's well-known and established position that Arunachal Pradesh, which China calls 'South Tibet', is an integral part of India.

- Bill Hagerty, the Republican junior Senator added “At a time when China continues to pose grave and gathering threats to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, it is critical for the United States to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our strategic partners in the region, especially India.
- ✓ This bipartisan resolution expresses the Senate’s support for unequivocally recognising the state of Arunachal Pradesh as an integral part of India, condemning China’s military aggression to change the status quo along the Line of Actual Control, and further enhancing the US-India strategic partnership and the Quad in support of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific.
- **What is the McMahon Line?**
- The McMahon Line serves as the de facto boundary between China and India in the Eastern Sector. It specifically represents the boundary between Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet, from Bhutan in the west to Myanmar in the east.
- China has historically disputed the boundary and claims the state of Arunachal Pradesh as part of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR).
- **Under what circumstances was it drawn?**
- The McMahon Line was drawn during the Simla Convention of 1914, officially described as the Convention Between Great Britain, China, and Tibet. China was represented at the convention by the government of the Republic of China, which was in power in the mainland from 1912 to 1949, when its leaders were driven to the island of Taiwan during the civil war that established the communists in Beijing and led to the proclamation of the People’s Republic.
- The McMahon Line delimited the respective spheres of influence of Tibet and British India in the eastern Himalayan region in what is today India’s Northeast and northern Myanmar. The border in this region was undefined prior to the signing of the convention.
- After the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26), the British gained almost complete control over the Assam Valley. From there, the British expanded their influence outwards in the predominantly tribal lands across the Northeast. For long, these tribal lands acted as a buffer between British India and Tibet.
- By the time the 20th century dawned, Chinese influence over Tibet had significantly waned and the British were wary about Tibet falling into the Russian sphere of influence. In an effort to preclude Russian influence, the British led an expedition into Tibet and signed the Convention of Lhasa in 1904.
- At the same time, alarmed at Britain’s growing influence in the region, China, at the fag end of Qing rule, also invaded, taking control of the southeastern Kham region. Notably, the Chinese campaign encroached upon the tribal regions north of the Assam Valley, pushing British officials to advocate extending British jurisdiction into the tribal territory.
- **What happened at the Simla Convention of 1913-14?**
- The convention attempted to settle the question of Tibet’s sovereignty and avoid further territorial disputes in the region. The Tibetan government in Lhasa was represented by its plenipotentiary Paljor Dorje Shatra, and Britain by Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, foreign secretary of British India at Delhi. The Chinese plenipotentiary was Ivan Chen.
- The treaty divided the Buddhist region into “Outer Tibet” and “Inner Tibet” – the former would “remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government at Lhasa under Chinese suzerainty”, though China was not allowed to interfere in its affairs. The latter would be under the direct jurisdiction of the newly formed Republic of China. In its annexes, it also determined the border between China proper and Tibet as well as Tibet and British India.
- The latter of these newly decided boundaries would later be called the McMahon Line after McMahon, the chief British negotiator. While a draft convention was agreed upon by all three countries on April 27, 1914, China immediately repudiated it.
- The final convention was only signed by McMahon on behalf of the British government and Shatra on behalf of Lhasa. Ivan Chen did not consent to the convention, arguing that Tibet had no independent authority to enter into international agreements.
- **How was the border between British India and China decided?**
- The 890-km border from the corner of Bhutan to the Isu Razi Pass on the Burma border was drawn largely along the crest of the Himalayas, following the “highest watershed principle”. This principle, considered to be the most logical way of drawing borders in mountainous regions by the British, basically drew the border along the highest ridge between two river plains.
- However, exceptions were made. Notably, Tawang, which would have been a part of Tibet had this principle been uniformly implemented, was included in British India due to its proximity to the Assam Valley.
- As the War of 1962 would show, capturing Tawang would give an invading Chinese army easy access to the valley in the south, affirming McMahon’s decision to include Tawang under British jurisdiction. This inclusion was contested by Tibet for years, even though the border remained porous, and Lhasa still held some sway in the region.
- **What has the status of the McMahon line been since 1914?**
- While there were disputes regarding the McMahon line from the very beginning, after the communists took power in 1949, they pulled China out of all international agreements and the so-called “unequal treaties” that had been imposed on it during its “century of humiliation”, and demanded a renegotiation of all its borders.

- During the 1962 Sino-Indian War, China was able to quickly overpower India and make deep inroads into Indian territory across the McMahon Line. However, its forces retreated to pre-war positions after the unilateral ceasefire was announced on November 21.

ANSWER WRITTING

Q. "India's relations with West Asia, which it regards as its extended neighbourhood, have undergone a transformation in the last few decades." Comment.

The strategic location of the Middle East and India's multiple linkages from the past to the present make it immensely important for India's pursuit of power. India shares historical relations with West Asia; and has huge economic, energy, political, security and strategic stakes in the region. While, during the last decade, the Arab unrest brought considerable challenges to India's policy in the region, India has persevered in its engagements and has been successfully navigating the turbulence in the Arab world.

India's Shift from Strategic Restraint to Strategic Recalibration in West Asia:

- More strategically autonomous: India has managed a successful balancing act in a tripolar West Asia. Now, the restructuring of West Asia's geopolitical landscape has allowed India to engage with West Asian states with even less political manoeuvring. E.g., In 2019, India voted in support of Israel at the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to deny observer status to a Palestinian human rights organisation named 'Shahed'.
- De-hyphenation of Israel and Palestine: Historical baggage over keeping Israel and Palestine hyphenated has ended. In 2017, the Prime Minister's visit to Israel led to the breaking of a decades-long self-inflicted embargo on Indian foreign policy. However, prior to the historic visit, India also hosted Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in a balancing act to reaffirm India's commitments towards the cause of the Palestinians.
- From Idealism to Pragmatism: Indian foreign policy has changed from the ideologically driven Non-Aligned Movement to a policy based on greater pragmatism to suit the evolving needs and conditions of global politics. The "Abraham Accord" between the two allies, Israel and UAE is an endorsement of the balanced "Look West" policy of India for peace and stability in the region. India's participation in the I2U2 summit – with Israel, the US, and UAE – marks a more confident engagement with the region.
- Relations beyond hydrocarbon economy: India today is the world's third-largest economy in per capita purchasing power (PPP) terms. Saudi Arabia today is our 4th largest trade partner (after China, the USA and Japan). The United Arab Emirates has committed investments of \$100 billion in India in manufacturing, infrastructure, and services.
- Key trading partner for Gulf Arab countries: Over recent years, India has become a key trading partner for Gulf Arab countries. India and the UAE have signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, allowing most of India's exports duty-free access to the UAE. CEPA is expected to increase bilateral trade in goods, which currently stands at \$60 billion annually, to up to \$115 billion in the next five years.
- New Defence Cooperation: With the US minimising its security role in the Middle East, India is trying to fill the vacuum and increase its defence cooperation with Gulf countries. India has strengthened defence, security and strategic ties with several countries in the region. Indian forces have participated in various joint exercises with the military forces of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. INS Trikand has docked at Mina Salman seaport in Bahrain to participate in the International Maritime Exercise/ Cutlass Express 2023, which is being held in the Gulf region.

India and West Asia are working together to expand their cooperation in areas such as renewable energy, investments, technology and agriculture. This is significant because the USA is focusing more on the Indo-Pacific region and China is increasing its presence in the region. India should pursue the path of multilateralism and work with other countries to become a credible power in the region.

MCQs

1. Consider the following statements with reference to MacMohan line
 1. MacMohan line defines borders between North East India and Tibet (now an autonomous region of Republic of China).
 2. Shimla Accord, 1914, which decided the MacMohan Line, was signed by Henry MacMohan, then Governor General of British India and representative of Tibetan Government.
 3. MacMohan Line is accepted as legal border by India, while China rejects it.

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

- a) **1 and 3 only**
 - b) 1 and 2 only
 - c) 2 and 3 only
 - d) 1,2 and 3
2. Isu Razi Pass sometimes seen in news is between which of the following countries?
 - a) India and Bhutan
 - b) China and Bhutan
 - c) **China and Myanmar**
 - d) India and Myanmar

3. With reference to Smart Cities Mission, consider the following statements:
1. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
 2. There is no standard definition or template of a smart city.
 3. The implementation of the Mission at the City level will be done by Urban Local Bodies.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

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

4. With reference to Nuclear-powered Submarines of India, consider the following statements:
1. INS Chakra was the first Nuclear-powered Submarine of India.
 2. India is the only country outside the P-5 to possess a nuclear-powered submarine.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2**
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

5. Consider the following statements:

1. Indian Parliament has a fewer percentage of women in the lower House than its neighbours such as Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh
2. In Panchayats, seats are reserved for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women but not for Backward Classes of citizens.

Which of the statements given above is / are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2**
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

6. Yaoshang festival recently seen news is celebrated in which of the following state?

- a) Assam
- b) Manipur**
- c) Jharkhand
- d) Karnataka

7. With reference to the 'INS-2B' satellite recently seen in news consider the following

1. It is ISRO's first nanosatellite for Bhutan.
2. The satellite could capture images of Bhutan for mapping forests, urban settlements, and landslide-prone areas and can enable amateur ham radio text messaging services.

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only**
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

8. The term "Insoluble Prussian Blue" often mentioned in news, is related to which of the following statement?

- a) It a blue whale species recently discovered from Sea of Okhotsk, eastern coast of Russia.
- b) It is an anti-cancer medicine recently discovered.
- c) It is new form of artificial metal created in lab.
- d) It is used to remove certain radioactive materials from the body after radiation exposure.**

9. ATL Sarthi initiative recently launched by which of the following Ministry or Organisation?

- a) Ministry of Home Affairs
- b) RBI
- c) NITI Ayog**
- d) Ministry of Finance

10. Programmes of "Niladri Nilaya" and "Ekamra Nilaya" are in operation in cities like Puri and Bhubaneswar in state of Odiha is related to which of the following?

- a) To making these cities Beggar free**
- b) To install Mobile sanitation van in various places in these cities
- c) Sanitation worker immunisation plan
- d) Transgender rehabilitation