

**POLITY AND GOVERNANCE, CONSTITUTIONAL BODIES**

**In News- Approximately 80 more castes in six States are now likely to be added to the Central List of Other Backward Classes (OBCs).**

**About**

- The National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) is already processing the approval for most of them.
- There are currently over 2,650 different communities listed in the Central OBC list for all States and Union Territories, including the 16 communities that were added since 2014.
- In a report released by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE), the government had decided to include 16 communities to the Central list of OBCs from the states like Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir.
- The other states include Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana, from where communities are shortlisted to get included under the central OBC list.
- The Union government also highlighted its recent move to bring the 105th Amendment to the Constitution, which reaffirmed the rights of States to maintain their own OBC lists.

**Origin: OBCs in India**

- First defined in the 1980 Mandal Commission report, OBCs among Hindus were identified based on socio-educational field surveys, lists of OBCs notified by various State governments, the 1961 Census report, and extensive touring of the country.
- Among non-Hindus, the caste system was not found to be an inherent part of the religion.
- However, for equality, untouchables who converted from Hinduism and occupational communities known by their traditional hereditary jobs, such as the Gujjars, Dhobis, and Telis, were also identified as OBCs.

**Other Backward Classes (OBC) status**

- States were empowered to maintain their own list of OBCs to provide necessary benefits. Thus, we have ,
  - ✓ OBC list for reservation in Central government jobs & Central Educational institutions
  - ✓ OBC lists at the State level (varies with each state) for reservation in State government jobs & State Educational institutions.
- The Constitution (102nd Amendment) Act, 2018 granted constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Castes (NCBC). It further inserted: Article 338B, which deals with the structure, duties, and powers of the NCBC.
- It was tasked with monitoring safeguards provided for socially and educationally backward classes, giving advice on their socio-economic development, inquiring into complaints and making recommendations, among other functions.
- Article 342A, which deals with the powers of the President to notify a particular caste as an SEBC and the power of Parliament to change the list.

**Procedure of addition of OBC Communities in Centre List**

- Unlike with the process for adding communities to the SC or ST list, additions to the Central OBC list do not require the concurrence of other authorities or the Office of the Registrar General of India. The Commission is solely responsible for the Central OBC list's additions and updates.
- As per the Procedure for Addition prescribed in the NCBC Act, 1993, the Commission is mandated to constitute a Bench to examine such proposals and then forward their decision to the Union government (with dissent, where applicable).
- Cabinet then needs to approve the additions and bring legislation to this effect, following which the President is empowered to notify the change.
- The Commission, as per its guidelines, considers additions to the Central OBC list based on social, educational and economic indicators suggested by the Mandal Commission established in 1979.

**Supreme Court's observations and 127th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2021**

- Supreme Court in the Maratha Reservation case: Ruled that only the Centre had the power to draw up the OBC list, as per the above interpretation of Constitution (102nd Amendment) Act (Article 342A only mentions President & Parliament with no reference to states).
- To reverse the verdict and to restore the powers of the state governments to maintain state list of OBCs, Parliament passed 127th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2021
- Amendment in Articles 366(26C) and 338B (9), after which states will be able to directly notify OBC and SEBCs without having to refer to the NCBC, and the "state list" was being taken out of the domain of the President and will be notified by the Assembly.

**Constitutional Provisions**

- Article 15 (5): This clause was added in the 93rd amendment in 2005 and allows the state to make special provisions for backward classes or SCs or STs for admissions in private educational institutions, aided or unaided.
- Article 16(4): This clause allows the state to reserve vacancies in public service for any backward classes of the state that are not adequately represented in the public services.
- Article 16 (4A): This allows the state to implement reservation in the matter of promotion for SCs and STs.

- Article 16(4B): This allows the state to consider unfilled vacancies reserved for backward classes as a separate class of vacancies not subject to a limit of 50% reservation.
- Article 340: This Article provides the president the power to Appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes
- Article 338B: This article provides constitutional status for the National Commission for Backward Classes.
- The Constitution (102nd Amendment) Act, 2018: It granted constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Castes (NCBC).

The communities likely to be added to the Central list are from States such as Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana.

- Some of the communities to be included are:
  - ✓ Andhra Pradesh - Turup Kapu community
  - ✓ Himachal Pradesh - Majhra community
  - ✓ Maharashtra - Lodhi, Lingayat, Bhoyar Pawar, Jhandse communities
  - ✓ Punjab - Yadav community
  - ✓ Haryana - Gosai/Gosain community.

**Procedure:**

- These are part of requests that the commission is bound to examine and once it is decided the recommendation is sent to the Cabinet.
- As per the Procedure for Addition prescribed in the NCBC Act, 1993, the panel is mandated to constitute a Bench to examine such proposals and then forward the decision to the Union government (with dissent, where applicable).
- The Cabinet then needs to approve the additions and bring legislation to this effect, following which the President is empowered to notify the change.
- Unlike the procedure to add communities to the SC or ST lists, additions to the Central OBC list do not have to rely on the concurrence of the Office of the Registrar General of India or any authority other than the NCBC.
- The NCBC considers additions to the Central OBC list based on social, educational and economic indicators suggested by the Mandal Commission established in 1979.

**Mandal Commission**

- On January 1, 1979, the Morarji Desai government chose Bindeshwari Prasad Mandal, a former chief minister of Bihar, to head the Second Backward Class Commission.
- Mandal submitted his report in 1980.
- In the year 1990, V.P. Singh decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal report in employment sectors.
- However, his announcement led to massive protests across the country.
- In its report, the Mandal Commission mentioned that India's population consisted of approximately:
  - ✓ 16 per cent non-Hindus,
  - ✓ 17.5 per cent Brahmans and "forward castes,"
  - ✓ 44 per cent "other backward classes," and
  - ✓ 22.5 percent scheduled castes and tribes.
- It recommended that members of OBCs be given 27 per cent reservations for jobs under the Central government and public sector undertakings.
- This would take the total number of reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to 49 per cent.

**GOVERNMENT POLICIES & INTERVENTIONS**

**In Context -The Law Commission recently decided to solicit views from the public on the idea of a uniform civil code.**

**What is UCC?**

- The UCC refers to a common set of laws governing personal matters such as marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance and succession for all citizens, irrespective of religion.

**Constitutional provisions suggesting UCC:**

**Article 44:**

- This Article of the Constitution makes a reference to a UCC and says, "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India."
- This is in the chapter dealing with the Directive Principles of State Policy and is therefore presumed to be advisory in nature.

**Article 37:**

- States that the vision of a Uniform Civil Code (along with other directive principles) is enshrined in the Indian Constitution as a goal towards which the nation should strive, but it isn't a fundamental right or a Constitutional guarantee.
- One can't approach the court to demand a UCC. But that doesn't mean courts can't opine on the matter.

**Arguments in favour of UCC**

- ✚ Uniformity and reduced discord:
  - Common Code would enable uniform civil principles to be applied to the entire Nation.
  - If and when the whole population will start following the same laws, chances are there that it would bring more peace to the living and reduce riots.
- ✚ Secularism and Women's Rights:
  - UCC would help end gender discrimination and overall discrimination on religious grounds and strengthen the secular fabric of the nation.
  - Therefore UCC could bring all communities together to ensure Women the Right to a dignified life and control over their life as well as body.
- ✚ Ending unjust customs and traditions:
  - A rational common and unified personal law will help eradicate many evil, unjust and irrational customs and traditions prevalent across the communities.
- ✚ Ease of Administration:
  - UCC would make it easy to administer the huge population base of India.
- ✚ Historically, not all communities demanded separate laws:
  - Few of the Muslim communities like the Khojas and Cutchi Memons did not want to submit to separate Muslim Personal Law.
- ✚ Global Scenario:
  - The personal laws of minorities were not recognised in any of the advanced Muslim countries.
  - Eg., in Turkey and Egypt, no minority in these countries were permitted to have their own personal laws.
  - Many countries have common civil codes.

#### **Arguments against UCC**

- ✚ Hampering diversity and multiculturalism:
  - Indian society has a unique identity in the form of being diverse and multicultural, and unified law might do away with these unique characteristics of this nation.
- ✚ Violation of fundamental rights:
  - Religious bodies oppose a uniform civil code on the ground that it would be interference in religious affairs which would violate fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 25 of the constitution.
- ✚ May lead to communal unrest:
  - It would be a tyranny to the minority and when implemented could bring a lot of unrest in the country.
  - The All India Muslim Personal Law Board stated that the laws pertaining to marriage and inheritance were part of religious injunctions for ages.

#### **Constitution of the 22nd Law Commission**

##### **Head:**

- The Commission is headed by former Karnataka High Court Chief Justice Rituraj Awasthi.

##### **Function:**

- The Commission, among other things, shall “identify laws which are no longer needed or relevant and can be immediately repealed; examine the existing laws in the light of Directive Principles of State Policy and suggest ways of improvement and reform and also suggest such legislations as might be necessary to implement the Directive Principles and to attain the objectives set out in the Preamble of the Constitution”; and “revise the Central Acts of general importance so as to simplify them and remove anomalies, ambiguities and inequities”.

The Commission is also looking into several significant issues like

- ✓ Implementation of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC).
- ✓ Holding of simultaneous elections.

#### **Issues and criticisms**

- ✚ Decision of 21st Law Commission:
  - The 21st Commission had released a consultation paper in 2018 that categorically said a uniform civil code was “neither necessary nor desirable” at that stage.
- ✚ Reasons cited:
  - In a well-reasoned document, it had then argued that the focus of initiatives to reform the various personal laws should be the elimination of all forms of discrimination rather than an attempt to bring about uniformity in the laws governing various religions.
  - It emphasised non-discrimination over uniformity.
  - It also recognised that there could be diverse means of governing aspects of personal law such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption instead of imposing a single set of rules on society.
  - This, according to the 21st commission, would entail the removal of discriminatory provisions, especially those that affect women, and adoption of some overarching norms rooted in equality.
- ✚ The 22nd Commission:
  - The 22nd Commission has claimed that years have elapsed since similar views were sought by the previous panel on UCC, and that a fresh effort was needed to garner varied opinions.

**Critics:**

- According to critics, the Law Commission's decision to solicit views from the public on the idea of a uniform civil code appears to be a political initiative aimed at bringing the potentially divisive issue under focus.

**Way ahead**

- It is possible that a uniform code may be adopted without offending any religion, but the concept evokes fear among sections of the minorities that their religious beliefs, seen as the source of their personal laws, may be undermined.

**PRELIM FACTS**

**1. Miyazaki Mango**

**Context:** Tripura grows the Miyazaki mangoes. In the international market, the Miyazaki mango is priced at around Rs.2.70 lakh per kg.

Key details:

- The Miyazaki mango was originally grown in Miyazaki city in Japan.
- It is usually over 350g in weight and has 15% or higher sugar content.
- The cultivation of this variety requires long hours of bright sunshine and warm abundant rainfall.
- This ruby red-coloured fruit is also known as "Egg of the Sun" or Taiyo-no-Tamago in Japan.
- Miyazaki is a type of "irwin" mango which is different from the yellow "pelican mango" widely grown in Southeast Asia.
- It contains beta-carotene and folic acid and is considered to be rich in antioxidants.
- Recently, this variety of mango from Japan was also found growing in West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

**2. Non-communicable Diseases in India**

**In News-** Recently, the new national estimates for diabetes and other non-communicable diseases (NCD) were released.

**About the study:**

- The decade-long nationwide study was funded by the Indian Council of Medical Research and Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and co-ordinated by the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation.
- The results of the study are to be published in The Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology journal.

**About Non-communicable diseases (NCDs)**

- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), also known as chronic diseases, are non-transmissible diseases of often long duration.
- NCDs have been one of the major concerns of the Health Ministry. It has identified the four major NCDs cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes.

**Causes:**

- NCDs are driven primarily by behaviors that often start during childhood and adolescence including physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, tobacco use and harmful use of alcohol.

**Impact:**

- The epidemic of NCDs poses devastating health consequences for individuals, families and communities, and threatens to overwhelm health systems.
- The socioeconomic costs associated with NCDs make the prevention and control of these diseases a major development imperative for the 21st century.
- Estimates suggest that approximately 70 percent of the premature deaths that occur among adults stem from health-related behaviors that originate in childhood and adolescence.
- Apart from the lives they take, NCDs take a heavy toll on economies, cutting down people in their most productive years

**Significance of the study**

- Diabetes and other metabolic non-communicable diseases, such as hypertension, obesity and dyslipidemia are much more common than estimated previously in India and ,While currently urban regions had higher rates of all metabolic NCDs than rural areas, with the exception of pre-diabetes, rural India will see a diabetes explosion in the next five years if left unregulated.

**Urgency of policies:**

- While the diabetes epidemic is stabilising in the more developed States of the country, it is still increasing in most of the other States. Thus, there are serious implications for the nation, warranting urgent State-specific policies and interventions to arrest the rapidly rising epidemic of metabolic NCDs in India

**Impact for India:**

- While India in the past four years has substantially added to its burden of diabetics and hypertensive persons with generalised and abdominal obesity, the study gives us an early warning that if not controlled, this population is predisposed to NCDs and life-altering medical conditions including strokes.
- Experts have explained that India is facing the dual problem of malnutrition and obesity.
- There is availability of surplus food, but after being exposed to fast foods, a lack of sleep, exercise and stress creates a perfect setting for NCDs to latch-on.

**Initiatives of India**

- National Health Mission (NHM):
- Ayushman Bharat Health Wellness Centre scheme:

**3. Assam Rifles**



**Context:** For the past 18 days, about seven battalions of the Assam Rifles deployed in south Manipur have not received fresh ration with people in Meitei areas allegedly blocking supplies from reaching the camps of the force.

- Assam Rifles is one of the six central armed police forces (CAPFs) under the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- The other forces being:
  - ✓ the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF),
  - ✓ the Border Security Force (BSF),
  - ✓ the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP),
  - ✓ the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and
  - ✓ The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB).
- It is tasked with the maintenance of law and order in the North East along with the Indian Army and also guards the Indo-Myanmar border in the region.
- The dual control structure- It is the only paramilitary force with a dual control structure.
- While the administrative control of the force is with the MHA, its operational control is with the Indian Army, which is under the Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- This means that salaries and infrastructure for the force is provided by the MHA, but the deployment, posting, transfer and deputation of the personnel is decided by the Army.
- The force is commanded by a Lieutenant General from the Indian Army.
- In some ways, the force is the only central paramilitary force (CPMF), as its operational duties and regimentation are on the lines of the Indian Army.
- However, being a Central Armed Police force under MHA, its recruitment, perks, promotion of its personnel and retirement policies are governed according to the rules framed by the MHA for CAPFs.

**History:**

- Assam Rifles is the oldest paramilitary force raised way back in 1835 in British India with just 750 men.
- Since then, it has gone on to fight in two World Wars, the Sino-Indian war of 1962 and used as an anti-insurgency force against militant groups in the North East.
- Raised as a militia to protect British tea estates and its settlements from the raids of tribes in the North East, the force was first known as Cachar Levy.
- It was reorganised later as Assam Frontier Force as its role was expanded to conduct punitive operations beyond Assam borders.
- Given its contribution in opening the region to administration and commerce, it came to be known as the “right arm of the civil and left arm of the military”.
- In 1917, recognising their work during the Great War, fighting shoulder to shoulder with Rifle Regiments of the regular British Army, the name of the Force was changed to ‘Assam Rifles’.

**Problem areas:**

- Those arguing for administrative control of the MoD say that it would mean better perks and retirement benefits, which are far higher compared to CAPFs under MHA.
- However, Army personnel also retire at 35, while the retirement age in CAPF is 60 years.
- Also, CAPF officers have recently been granted non-functional financial upgradation (NFFU) to at least financially address the issue of stagnation in their careers due to lack of avenues for promotion.
- On the other hand, Army personnel also get one rank one pension which is not available to CAPFs.
- Both MHA and MoD have wanted full control of the force for a long time.

**ANSWER WRITING**

**Q. Has digital illiteracy, particularly in rural areas, coupled with lack of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) accessibility hindered socio-economic development? Examine with justification.**

- Digital literacy is the ability to navigate the digital world. It focuses on using technology – like a Smartphone, PC, e-reader, etc. – to find, evaluate, and communicate information. Digital literacy can play a powerful role in helping people connect, learn, engage with their community, and create more promising futures.
- It has been reported that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in rural areas have slow uptake due to the low to no income, lack of ICT infrastructures, cultural differences, and many other reasons.
- Digital illiteracy in the present time of the pandemic has hindered socio-economic development to a great extent in rural areas. It can be concluded so by:
  - ✓ Children are not able to access quality education or attend virtual classrooms due to issues with internet connectivity coupled with frequent internet/electricity outages.
  - ✓ Lack of digital knowledge among rural youth kept them away from capitalising on myriad of employment and income generation opportunities. For example, e-commerce, IT services, etc.
  - ✓ Emphasis on digitization and computerisation, while ignoring digital literacy, led to inaccessibility of government benefits and schemes to the vulnerable sections.
  - ✓ Digital illiteracy among women and girl-child in rural areas has increased the gender imbalance. Social, cultural, and institutional barriers influence digital inclusion.
- The digital divide is more than just an access issue and cannot be alleviated merely by providing the necessary equipment. The Standing Committee on Information Technology in January, 2019 concluded that the digital literacy efforts of the government are far from satisfactory.

- The government needs to focus on information accessibility, information utilisation and information receptiveness. Various initiatives such as Digital India, Internet Saathi Program, DIKSHA, etc. are commendable steps that are leading to positive socio-economic development in rural areas.

**MCQs**

- Consider the following statements regarding Assam Rifle:
  - It is the only paramilitary force with a dual control structure.
  - Assam Rifles is the oldest paramilitary force raised way back in 1835 in British India with just 750 men.
  - The force is the only central paramilitary force (CPMF), as its operational duties and regimentation are on the lines of the Indian Army.
 Which of the above statement is/are correct?
  - Only 1
  - Only 2
  - All of the above**
  - None
- Consider the following statements regarding Miyazaki Mango:
  - The mango was originally grown in Miyazaki city in Japan.
  - It contains alpha-carotene and folic acid and is considered to be rich in antioxidants.
 Which of the above statement is/are correct?
  - Only 1**
  - Only 2
  - Both 1 and 2
  - Neither 1 nor 2
- With reference to Baikho Puja, consider the following statements:
  - The Baikho is the principal deity of the Rabhas, which is associated with crops.
  - An important aspect of the Baikho puja is the Bar Nak-Kairitual which is a fire test dance.
  - Bar Nak-Kairitual involves running barefoot over burning hot coals as piles of leftover planting materials blaze in the background.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
  - Only one
  - Only two
  - All Three**
  - None
- Consider the following statements regarding NIRF ranking 2023:
  - IIT, Madras secured the top spot in the overall ranking for the fifth consecutive year.
  - There are four distinct additions of 2023 edition of India ranking.
  - The Ministry of Education released the NIRF 2023 ranking.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
  - Only one
  - Only two**
  - All Three
  - None
- Consider the following statements;
  - NCBC recently approves 80 more castes in six states are now to be added in Central list of OBC.
  - NCBC is an Indian constitutional body under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment established through Constitution 101<sup>st</sup> Amendment Act, 2018.
  - According to article 340 of the Constitution, President shall establish a commission to examine the condition of social and backward class.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
  - Only one
  - Only two**
  - All Three
  - None
- With reference to Non-Communicable Disease, consider the following statements:
  - A non-communicable disease (NCD) is a disease that is not transmissible directly from one person to another.
  - The main types of NCD are cardiovascular diseases (such as heart attacks and stroke), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes.
  - NCDs may be chronic or acute.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
  - Only one
  - Only two
  - All Three**
  - None
- Consider the following statements regarding Bangkok Vision 2030:
  - Thailand presented "BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030" aiming to build a Prosperous, Resilient, and Open (PRO) BIMSTEC by 2030.
  - The document aims to promote BIMSTEC as a region of peace, stability, and economic sustainability.
  - The goals found in the vision are also in line with the United Nations Development Programme and Thailand's bio-circular-green economic model.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
  - Only one
  - Only two**
  - All Three
  - None
- In the Balance of Payment framework, Remittances are component of
  - Current account**
  - Capital account
  - Both current and Capital Account
  - None of the Above
- Consider the following statements regarding US-Iran Nuclear Deal:
  - The Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is a landmark accord reached between Iran and several world powers, including the United States, in July 2015.
  - Under its terms, Iran agreed to dismantle much of its nuclear program and open its facilities to more extensive international inspections in exchange for billions of dollars' worth of sanctions relief.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
  - Only 1
  - Only 2
  - Both 1 and 2**
  - None
- With reference to Wilful Defaulter, consider the following statements:
  - According to the RBI, a 'wilful default' happens when a borrower does not repay their loans even though they have the ability to do so.
  - RBI has allowed wilful defaulters and loans accounts involved in frauds to go in for a compromise settlement with banks to settle their dues.
  - A compromise settlement refers to a negotiated settlement between a borrower and a bank in which borrower offers to pay an amount that is less than the total due under the loan contract.
 How many of the above statements are correct?
  - Only one
  - Only two
  - All Three**
  - None