



VAJIRAM & RAVI
Institute for IAS Examination

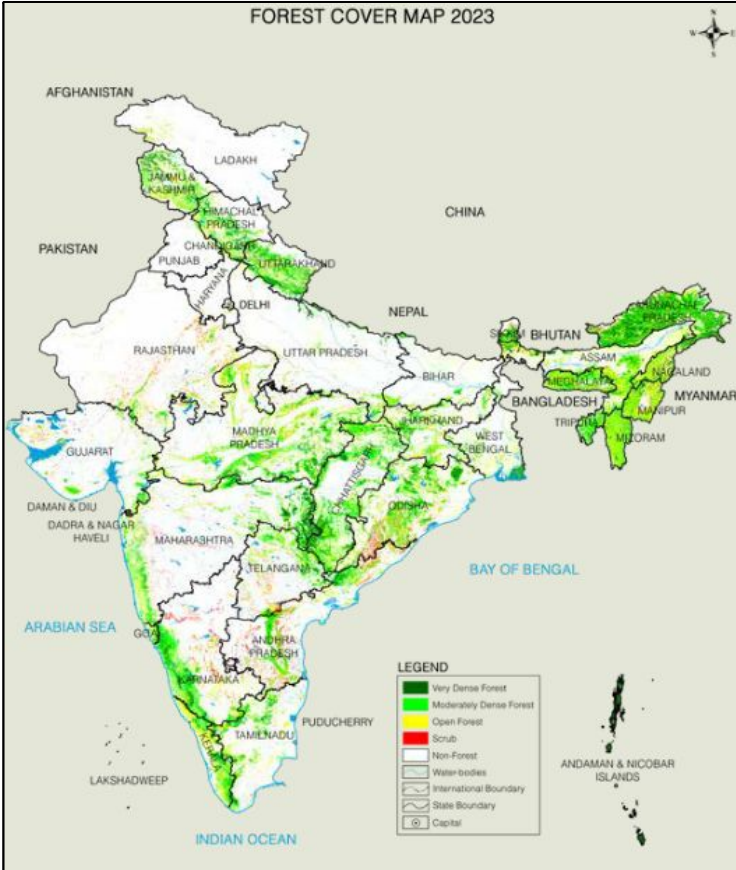
The Analyst

CURRENT AFFAIRS Handout

22nd December 2024



CONTEXT: India's forest and tree cover has reached 25% of the country's total geographical area.



India State of Forest Report 2023



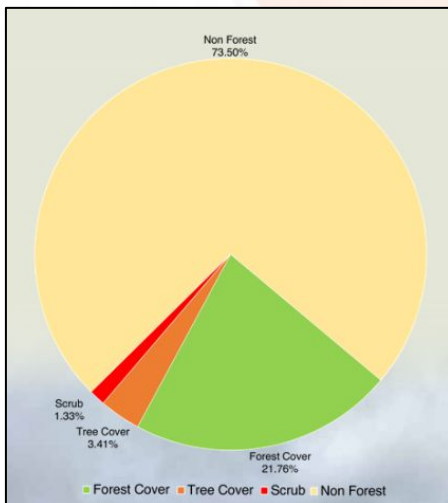
The total area covered is **8,27,357 sq km**, which constitutes **25.17% of India's geographical area**



This includes **7,15,343 sq km** of forest cover (**21.76%**) and **112,014 sq km** of tree cover (**3.41%**)



Increase of **1,445 sq km** in total forest and tree cover since last assessment in 2021



India State of Forest Report 2023

- Forest Cover - all lands >1 hectare, tree canopy > 10 %, regardless of its ownership, legal status and includes orchards, bamboo and palm

- Tree Cover - area covered by trees outside recorded forest areas
- Classification based on canopy density
 - Very Dense Forest
 - Moderately Dense Forest
 - Moderately Dense Forest
- Increase in Forest & Tree Cover - Chhattisgarh > UP > Odisha > Rajasthan
- Increase in Forest Cover - Mizoram > Gujarat > Odisha
- Largest forest and tree cover - MP > Arunachal Pradesh > Maharashtra
- Largest forest cover - MP > Arunachal Pradesh > Chhattisgarh
- Percentage of Forest Cover - Lakshadweep > Mizoram > A&N
- Bamboo area increase 5k sq km
- Mangroves Gain - Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh
- Additional Carbon sink - 2.29 bn tonnes



CONTEXT: India's forest and tree cover has reached 25% of the country's total geographical area.

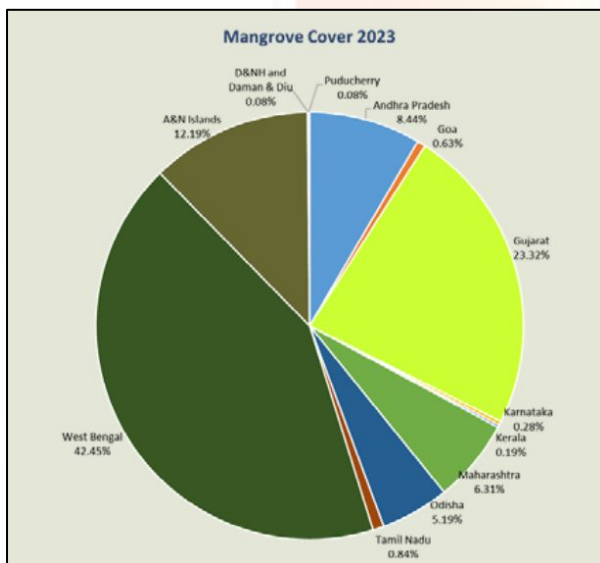
Observations in the Report

Negative Changes can be due to the following reasons:

- Harvesting of short rotation plantations or other forms of logging
- Shifting cultivation practices
- Human activities, such as encroachment, etc.
- Natural Calamities like storms, floods, and landslides
- Titles given to beneficiaries under the Forest Rights Act (2006)

Positive Changes can be due to the following reasons:

- Natural growth of vegetation, often due to conservation efforts
- Establishment of new vegetation through afforestation initiatives
- Improved protection measures in plantation and traditional forest areas
- Increase in trees growing outside designated forest areas
- Regeneration of areas under shifting cultivation



Verdict on woods

Some of the observations made by the SC over the pleas challenging the 2023 amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980



■ The "all-encompassing" dictionary meaning will continue to hold field until the States and Union Territories prepare a consolidated record of forest lands

■ Environment Ministry should issue a circular in this regard to the States and Union Territories

■ Establishment of "zoos or safaris" must have the final approval of the top court

Impacts of Loss of Forests

Loss of Biodiversity

Water Cycle Disruption

Soil Erosion

Faster Global Warming

Livelihoods Lost - Baigas in MP

Disruption in Local Climate

Increased Flood Risk - Kerala 2018

Air Pollution

Concerns

- Mangroves Loss - Gujarat, A&N
- Western Ghats - 58 sqkm since 2013
- North East - Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya
- Moderately Dense Forest, OF
- Canopy degradation - Mizoram > Raj > Telangana
- Plantations included
- TN Godavarman Judgment



India State of Forest Report 2023

22nd December 2024

CONTEXT: India's forest and tree cover has reached 25% of the country's total geographical area.

Steps Taken

- Indian Forest Act, 1927 - declaration
- Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 - diversion
- Forest Rights Act, 2006 - Niyamgiri Hills
- National Forest Policy, 1988
- Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), 1994
- National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 - compensation
- The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

The India State of Forest Report 2023 highlights the trends related to forest cover. Discuss the key concerns arising from the report regarding the degradation of India's forests. What steps has the Government taken to address these concerns?

Conservation Initiatives and Measures



Mangrove Planting and Regeneration

Integrating scientific knowledge, tourism management strategies, and social awareness programmes to ensure the sustainable development of the coast.



Integrated Coastal Zone Management

Several NGOs, communities and government projects are focused on planting mangroves to restore degraded sites.



Ecotourism

Mangroves forests can provide a sustainable source of income through ecotourism, inspiring environmental protection and positively influencing the local community.



Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Income (MISHTI)

MISHTI envisage to comprehensively explore the possible area for development of Mangrove covering approximately 540 km² spreading across 11 State and 2 UTs during five years commencing FY 2023-24 onwards.



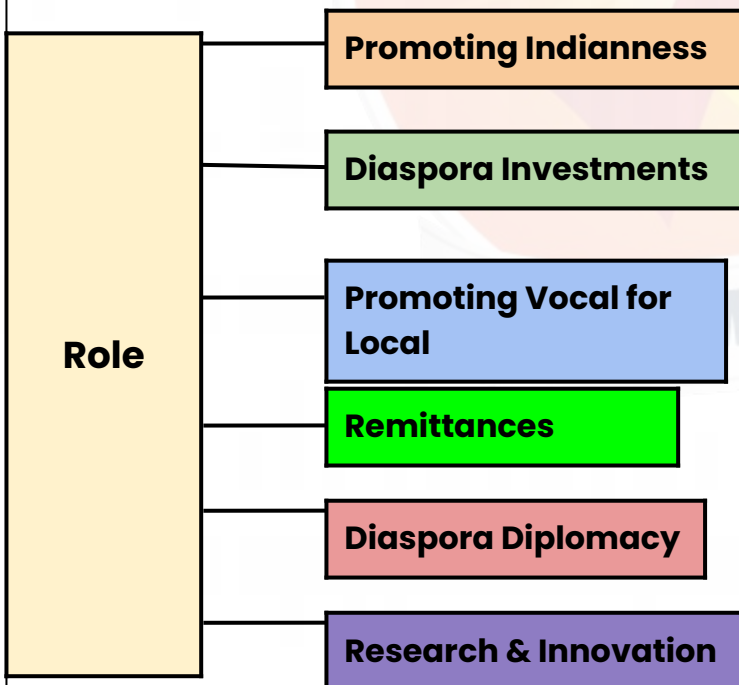
CONTEXT: PM Modi's visit to Kuwait

Significance of the visit:

- Diplomatic Milestone
- Historical Context & Trade relations
 - INR legal tender until 1961
 - Exports \$2bn
 - Investments \$10bn
 - 3% of India's crude needs
- Strengthen Bilateral Ties
- Discussion on BIT, Defence cooperation pact
- Diaspora Engagement
- Boosting GCC relations
- Labour welfare emphasis
- Extended Neighbourhood



Indian Diaspora:



Challenges:

- Heterogeneous Nature with Differential needs
- Regulatory cholesterol
- Protectionism in host countries - Nitaqat
- Sectarian conflicts
- Discrimination, Isolation, Exploitation - Kafala
- Recruitment in conflict zones



Kuwait & Indian Diaspora

22nd December 2024

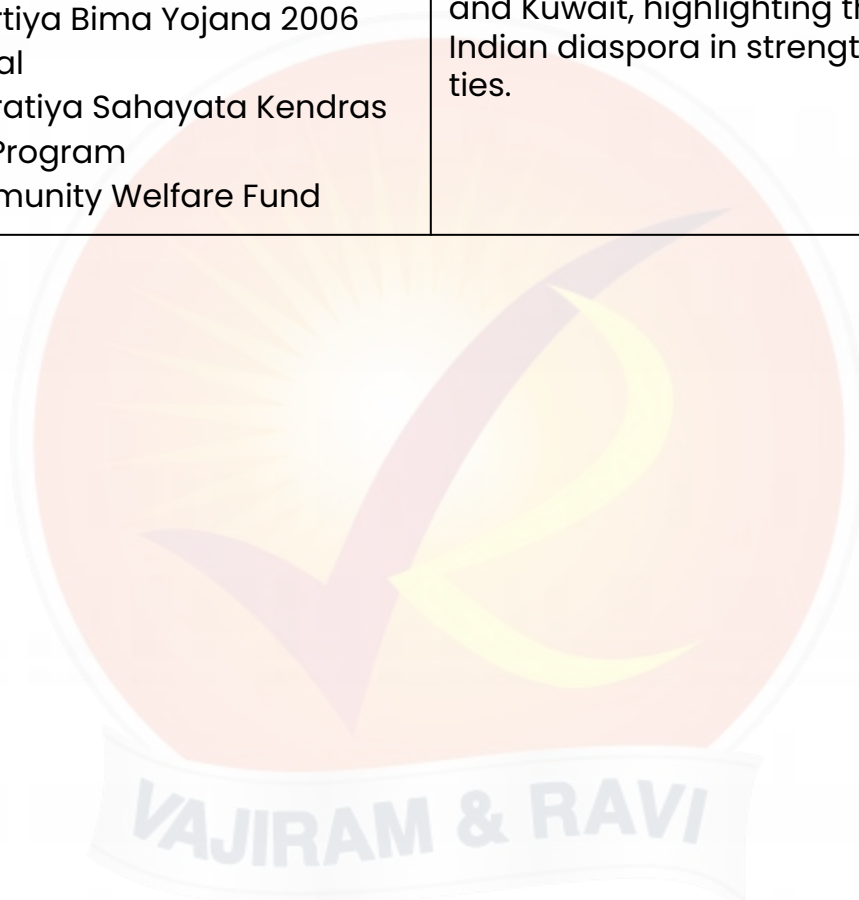
CONTEXT: PM Modi's visit to Kuwait

Steps Taken for Diaspora

- Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) Scheme, 2005
- Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas
- Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana 2006
- MADAD portal
- Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendras
- Know India Program
- Indian Community Welfare Fund

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

Kuwait holds significant strategic, economic, and cultural importance for India. Discuss the significance of the multifaceted relationship between India and Kuwait, highlighting the role of the Indian diaspora in strengthening bilateral ties.



SYLLABUS: GS Paper 3: Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment; Newspaper: The Indian Express; Page No: 10

Basics

- Direct Tax
- Wealth Tax Act, 1957
- EU Tax Observatory

Arguments in Favor

- Reduce inequality in wealth
- Funding Public Expenditure
- Discourage hoarding
- Responsibility of the rich to contribute

Arguments against

- Flight of HNW individuals
- Compliance costs - abolished in 2015
- Disputes in asset valuation
- Existing tax rates for super rich
- Efficiency of other taxes
- Harming consumption

TAXING WEALTH is not a recent phenomenon. The canton of **Basel City in Switzerland had introduced such a tax way back in 1840***. The Netherlands began to impose the tax in 1892. Sweden in 1911. In **India**, T T Krishnamachari, minister of finance, **introduced the wealth tax in 1957**. Several other countries also levied the tax.

But, somewhere along the way, the wealth tax went out of vogue. **The number of OECD countries levying the tax fell from 12 in 1990 to four in 2017. And in India, the wealth tax was abolished in 2015.**

In recent years, however, there appears to be a **renewed conversation on taxing wealth**. Soaking the rich, after all, has enduring appeal. More so when estimates point towards the growing concentration of wealth and income in the hands of a few.

In their recent study on India, **Thomas Piketty and his co-authors have documented a sharp rise in inequality in India over the past decades – a rise that appears to be more pronounced post 2014-15. As per their analysis, the top 1% accounted for 22.6% of income and 40.1% of wealth in 2022-23.** These estimates place the in-

Piketty and his co-authors have argued in favour of imposing a 2% annual tax on net wealth exceeding Rs 10 crore and a 33% inheritance tax on estates in excess of Rs 10 crore.

However, there are several problems with imposing such taxes, as India's own history with both the wealth and the inheritance tax have shown.

Such taxes are **difficult to implement. They entail high administrative costs, can lead to excessive litigation and tend to raise very little revenue** – the rich have

always found **creative ways of gaming the system**. In fact, the problems with such taxes have been acknowledged by finance ministers from both sides of the political spectrum.

In **1985, when V P Singh abolished the estate duty, or the inheritance tax** as it was then known, he **acknowledged that the cost of administering it was "relatively high" and the revenue collected was "only about Rs 20 crore"**. Singh, who was finance minister in the then Rajiv Gandhi led Congress government, further noted that the tax had **"not achieved the twin objective with which it was introduced, namely to reduce unequal distribution of wealth and assist the states in financing their development schemes"**.

Similar views were echoed by Arun Jaitley three decades later, when he abolished the wealth tax. In his 2015 Budget speech, Jaitley said: "The total wealth tax collection in the country was Rs 1,008 crore in 2013-14. Should a tax which leads to high cost of collection and a low yield be continued or should it be replaced with a low cost and higher yield tax?" In that year, total collections through the tax

are insightful for they detail not only the myriad ways in which rulers have always tried to extract resources from the people, but also the ingenious ways in which people try to evade paying taxes.

In today's globalised world, with **few restrictions on the mobility of capital**, there is also the very real possibility that **high rates of taxation will simply result in the rich leaving the country, opting instead to settle and conduct their business from cities such as Dubai**. This will have implications for the country's economy.

The risk of capital flight is not an exaggerated, trivial concern. Various **reports suggest that after Norway increased its wealth tax, many high net worth individuals left the country. India has also been experiencing a flight of the rich. In 2023, around 5,100 Indian millionaires relocated abroad as per a report by international investment migration advisory firm Henley & Partners. Among the various reasons why people choose to migrate are financial considerations and tax benefits. A wealth or an inheritance tax may aggravate this.** Moreover, a large part of wealth



SYLLABUS: GS Paper 3: Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology; Indigenization of Technology; Newspaper: The Hindu; Page No: 11

Mission, said India plans to launch a quantum satellite in "2-3 years for quantum communications".

What is the National Quantum Mission?
The **National Quantum Mission** (NQM) is a Department of Science & Technology programme to accelerate the use of quantum physics to develop advanced communications and sensing systems.

The development of computers changed the course of human history from the mid-20th century onwards. Advances in this sector gave humankind satellites, telecommunications, weather forecasts, drug-discovery programmes, etc.

But these advances are reaching a saturation point because the physics phenomena on which they are based, called classical physics, are hitting a performance upper-limit. So scientists around the world are developing new technologies to solve the same problems but using phenomena of quantum physics. Because the rules of quantum physics allow for the outcomes of classical physics as well as new 'bonus' ones, the new devices are expected to

communications satellite that uses quantum physics to secure its signals.

Communications is a broad term that refers to technologies that send and receive signals. An important part of these technologies is security: preventing bad actors from intercepting a message being transmitted across large distances, through multiple networks.

The advent of quantum computers threatens the technologies currently being used to secure messages. Fortunately, quantum physics has also paved the way for new forms of protection, and quantum satellites are expected to facilitate them.

How are messages secured?

National Quantum Mission (NQM)

- DST - April 2023
- Quantum physics for next-gen communication & sensing systems
- Move beyond classical physics' performance limits
- Develop quantum computers, communication systems, and sensors
- Foster innovations in telecommunications, AI, and drug discovery
- Promote quantum satellites for secure communications

Quantum Satellite

- A communications satellite using quantum physics for security
- Secures signals against interception
- Facilitates quantum cryptography and quantum key distribution (QKD)

This security paradigm is called **cryptographic security**. It works by hiding the secret code, or key, behind an extremely difficult mathematical problem. A bad actor like Kaushik can solve the problem with a powerful computer to reveal the code – but the harder the problem, the more time (and/or more computing resources) he will need.

Even the most powerful supercomputers have difficulty cracking the best Advanced Encryption Standard ciphers in use today – but quantum computers may be able to do better.

How can quantum physics protect messages?

Quantum cryptography uses the tenets of quantum physics to secure messages. Its most famous type is quantum key distribution (QKD).

In the example before, Anil used a key to encrypt his message and Selvi, who knew the key, used it to decrypt the message. QKD is concerned with sharing this key with both Anil and Selvi such that if Kaushik is eavesdropping on the transmission, everyone will find out and

the sharing will be aborted.

Quantum physics can protect against eavesdropping in different ways. One is quantum measurement – the act of measuring the properties of a quantum system, like a photon (the particle of light). According to the rules of quantum physics, a quantum measurement changes the state of the system. If information about the key is encoded in a stream of photons and Kaushik traps and measures them to look for it, the state of the photons will change and Anil and Selvi will know the key has been compromised.

Another way is to use quantum entanglement: when two photons are entangled, any change to one particle will instantaneously change the other. (This is a simplistic description.)

Securing Messages

- Messages encrypted using secret codes (e.g., WhatsApp)
- Encryption hides message content using complex algorithms
- Quantum computers could potentially crack current encryption methods

Quantum Cryptography & Security

- QKD for sharing secure keys
- Detects eavesdropping through quantum measurement
- Quantum entanglement



Quantum Satellite

22nd December 2024

SYLLABUS: GS Paper 3: Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology; Indigenization of Technology; Newspaper: The Hindu; Page No: 11

Does QKD have drawbacks?

QKD on paper can be different from that in the real-world. This is why the U.S. National Security Agency has recommended the use of post-quantum cryptography rather than quantum cryptography. Its criticism is focused on five technical limitations: "QKD does not provide a means to authenticate the QKD transmission source"; "since QKD is hardware-based", QKD networks can't be upgraded or patched easily; "QKD increases infrastructure costs and insider threat risks" that "eliminate many use cases from consideration"; "the actual security provided by a QKD system is not the theoretical unconditional security from the laws of physics... but rather the more limited security that can be achieved by hardware and engineering designs"; and since eavesdroppers can cause a transmission to stop, they can deny the use of a transmission by its intended users (a.k.a. a denial-of-service attack).

The no-cloning theorem of quantum physics also disallows quantum information from being amplified to compensate for losses during transmission.

QKD Implementation

- China's QKD network: largest in the world with 3 quantum satellites
- Ongoing efforts to extend QKD distance
- Indian Astronomical Observatory, Hanle, identified as ideal for satellite-based QKD

Drawbacks of QKD

- Lack of transmission source authentication
- Hardware-based, difficult to upgrade or patch
- Increased infrastructure costs and insider threats
- Security limited by hardware and engineering designs, not purely by quantum laws
- Vulnerable to denial-of-service attacks

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SYLLABUS: GS Paper 2: Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate;

Newspaper: The Indian Express; Page No: 5

Internal Justice Council

- UNGA established
- ensure independence, professionalism and accountability in the administration of justice system of UN
- 5 members
 - staff representative
 - management representative
 - 2 distinguished external jurists, one nominated by the staff and one by management
 - chaired by a distinguished jurist chosen by consensus by the 4 other members
- IJC members appointed by Secretary General.
- search for suitable candidates for the positions of judges - UNDT and UNAT

The Internal Justice Council comprises five members appointed by the Secretary-General. The other four members on the list are Carmen Artigas (Uruguay), Rosalie Balkin (Australia), Stefan Brezina (Austria) and Jay Pozenal (United States of America).

They would be responsible for handling the administration of the UN's internal justice system, which includes the Office of Staff Legal Assistance (OSLA), the UN Dispute Tribunal (UNDT) and the UN Appeals Tribunal (UNAT).

OSLA

- legal advice and representation to staff, former staff, and dependents of UN
- who wish to appeal an adverse decision taken by their employer or who are subject to disciplinary action
- Qualified attorneys and courtroom advocates

UN Disputes Tribunal

- First Instance court
- 9 permanent judges - 3 full time @ Geneva, Nairobi, NY
- single non-renewable term of 7 years
- binding judgments relating to the administrative decision being challenged



SYLLABUS: GS Paper 2: Appointment to various Constitutional Posts, Powers, Functions and Responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies;
Newspaper: The Hindu; Page No: 8

- 2004
- Article 338A - 89th Amendment
- NCSC bifurcated
- Composition
 - 3 year term
 - Chair
 - Vice Chair
 - Members

Functions - Article 338A(5)

- To Monitor safeguards provided for STs under the Constitution or under other laws;
- To inquire into specific complaints relating to Rights & Safeguards of STs;
- To advise in the Planning Process relating to Socio-economic development of STs;
- To submit report to the President annually and other times on welfare Measures required related to Socio-economic development of STs;
- To discharge such other functions in relation to STs as the President may by rule specify

la, the most common complaint poor people from ST communities have had is with regard to forest pattas and land issues, followed by service matters," Mr. Nayak said. But in his visits, Mr. Nayak has given special attention to checking whether temple managements across these States are following mandated rules on reservation and addressing complaints of ST employees working

demands to allow SCs and STs to be considered for religious posts in the temples, adequately inform SCs and STs about stipend scheme of the TTD for those studying the Vedas, lack of reservation in shop and hawker licence allotments, and a near absence of a grievance redress mechanism for SC/ST staffers.



Amendment in Conduct of Election Rules

22nd December 2024

SYLLABUS: GS Paper 2: Elections;
Newspaper: The Hindu; **Page No:** 1

New changes

The Centre has amended Conduct of Election Rules to restrict public access to a section of poll documents

- The Election Commission says the rule mentions election papers and does not specifically refer to electronic records. In order to remove this ambiguity, the rule has been amended to safeguard misuse of CCTV footage from inside the polling stations
- The move comes after a recent direction to the EC by the Punjab and Haryana High Court to share all documents related to Haryana Assembly Elections, including CCTV footage



Rule 93(2)(a) of the 1961 Conduct of Election Rules had earlier stated that “all other papers relating to the election shall be open to public inspection”.

After the amendment, it reads, “all other papers as specified in these rules relating to the election shall be open to public inspection”.

Mr. Nayak said that given the controversy over voter turnout in recent Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, access to the Presiding Officers' diaries which contain detailed data of voter turnout at different points of time throughout the polling day and the number of tokens they distribute to voters who are in the queue at the hour scheduled for closing of polling are not mentioned specifically in the Conduct of Election Rules. “Yet access to such documents is crucial to assess the fairness of elections.”

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22nd December 2024

Q1. Regarding the India State of Forest Report 2023, consider the following statements:

1. Forest cover includes all lands greater than 1 hectare in size with tree canopy density of more than 10%, including bamboo and palm plantations.
2. The state with the largest forest and tree cover in India is Madhya Pradesh.
3. Mizoram recorded the highest increase in tree cover, followed by Uttar Pradesh and Odisha.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding the merits and demerits of a wealth tax:

1. It encourages wealth accumulation and incentivizes unproductive asset hiding.
2. Wealth tax has a negligible impact on fiscal revenues in most economies

Which of the statements given above is/are NOT correct?

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

Answer: a

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the National Quantum Mission:

1. The mission focuses on applications in communication, health, and financial modelling.
2. It is implemented under the Department of Space.
3. India is the first country in the world to launch a dedicated National Quantum Mission.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only One
- b) Only Two
- c) All Three
- d) None

Answer: a

Q4. Regarding the United Nations Disputes Tribunal (UNDT), consider the following statements:

1. It serves as the first instance court for resolving disputes within the UN internal justice system.
2. The Tribunal consists of nine permanent judges.
3. Judges of the UNDT are appointed for a renewable term of seven years.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only One
- b) Only Two
- c) All Three
- d) None

Answer: b

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST):

1. NCST was established under Article 338A of the Constitution.
2. It has the power to summon any person and examine them on oath, similar to a civil court.
3. NCST submits its annual report directly to the Prime Minister of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: a





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