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India's democracy needs different electoral rhythms

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies 2

Salient features of the Representation of People's Act

Why in Focus?

- The **One Nation, One Election (ONOE)** proposal seeks to synchronise **Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections**, but concerns have been raised about its impact on **parliamentary democracy and federalism**.

Key Highlights

- India's parliamentary system allows governments to continue only while they **retain the confidence of the legislature**, making election timings inherently flexible.
- Simultaneous elections were held from **1952 to 1967**.
 - ◆ After this, governments at the **Centre and in the States fell at different times**, breaking the common electoral cycle.
- A fixed electoral calendar could create difficulties when a government **falls before completing its term**, requiring mid-term elections or shortened terms.
- If the **Lok Sabha is dissolved prematurely**,

synchronization could require stable State Assemblies to be dissolved as well, affecting the mandate of State voters.

- Simultaneous elections could make **national issues dominate State elections**, potentially weakening the political space of regional parties.
- Large national parties could gain an advantage because of their **greater financial resources and media presence**.
- Frequent elections do not necessarily cause **governance paralysis**, as the **Model Code of Conduct** does not stop ongoing public works or routine administration.
- Political campaign spending can **generate employment and support the informal sector**, benefiting workers such as **printers, transporters, and artisans**.
- Frequent elections provide a regular mechanism for **political accountability**, requiring **representatives to repeatedly seek public support**.

Implications

- Synchronization could subordinate **State-level political choices** to national electoral dynamics.
- Mid-term elections to complete shortened terms could give voters **less meaningful electoral influence** than a full five-year mandate.
- National campaigns could overshadow **local issues, regional identities, and State-specific concerns**.



- Longer gaps between elections could reduce the frequency with which **governments are directly tested by voters**.
- Fixed electoral cycles could create **short-term or unstable governments** when governments fall before completing their normal terms.
- Claims of major savings must distinguish **official election expenditure** from private campaign spending by political parties.
- Synchronization could create tension between **administrative convenience and democratic responsiveness**.

Way Forward

- Any reform should preserve the **parliamentary principle of legislative accountability** and the constitutional position of the States.
- Ensure that simultaneous elections do not weaken **federalism or regional political representation**.
- Develop a mechanism to address the **premature dissolution of legislatures** without undermining voters' mandates.
- Undertake a careful assessment of the **financial, administrative, and democratic costs and benefits** of ONOE.
- Build a **broad political and constitutional consensus** before implementing such a major electoral reform.

Mains Question

"One Nation, One Election seeks to improve electoral efficiency, but may have significant implications for India's parliamentary system and federal structure." Discuss. (150 Words)

India is losing West Asia, but it is not too late

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Why in Focus?

- Rapid changes in West Asia's security architecture, the **Saudi Arabia–Turkey – Pakistan defence pact**, and **Pakistan's growing diplomatic role** are creating new challenges for India.
- **India needs a more active and independent regional strategy** rather than relying primarily on existing partnerships.

Key Highlights

- India had strengthened its West Asian presence through major initiatives such as **Saudi Arabia's highest civilian honour for PM Modi (2016)**, the **I2U2 grouping (2021)** and the **Chabahar lease agreement** with Iran in 2024.
- The **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries** are increasingly questioning the **reliability of the U.S. security umbrella** amid growing regional conflicts.

Gulf Cooperation Council: Founded in 1981, it is a regional organisation comprising six Gulf countries : Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman for economic, political and security cooperation.

I2U2: Launched in 2021, it is a grouping of India, Israel, UAE and the USA focused on joint projects in areas such as food security, clean energy, technology and infrastructure.

- Gulf states are **divided between engagement with Iran and deterrence, creating space for new regional diplomatic alignments**.
- **Pakistan has gained diplomatic visibility by attempting to mediate between the U.S. and Iran**, improving its regional standing.
- The **Mecca collective defence pact** among **Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan** combines **Saudi financial strength**, Pakistani military capabilities and Turkish defence technology.

Implications for India

- **Greater Turkish support for Pakistan** could **complicate India's security environment**.
- **India could face strategic dilemmas in a future Israel–Pakistan conflict** due to its close ties with Israel.



- **Exclusion** from emerging West Asian security arrangements **could reduce India's regional influence.**
- **Instability around the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb threatens India's energy security** and maritime trade.
- **Shifting U.S. influence creates uncertainty for India's strategic partnerships** and regional interests.
- Balancing ties with Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Turkey will become increasingly challenging.

Way Forward

- **Adopt an active regional political strategy** rather than remaining a passive observer.
- **Re-engage Saudi Arabia and promote trust-building between Arab states and Iran,** beginning with UAE–Iran relations.
- **Strengthen maritime security cooperation with Egypt and other regional partners** to protect India-bound shipping from the Suez Canal to Bab-el-Mandeb.
- **Explore a greater Indian role in UN peacekeeping,** defence cooperation and military exercises with regional countries.
- **Consider a Special Envoy for West Asia to coordinate India's diplomatic, security, economic and maritime interests.**

Mains Question

"India's growing stakes in West Asia require a shift from partnership-based engagement to proactive regional diplomacy. Discuss the challenges and opportunities before India in shaping the emerging West Asian security architecture." (250 Words)

The federal dilemma of delimitation

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Why in Focus?

- The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly has passed a resolution urging the Centre to **retain the existing 543 Lok Sabha seats and their present State-wise distribution.** The demand has renewed the debate on **delimitation, federalism and equitable political representation.**

Key Highlights

- **Delimitation** means fixing the number and boundaries of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. It is carried out by an independent **Delimitation Commission** constituted under an Act of Parliament.
- **Article 81** provides that, as far as practicable, the ratio between the population of a State and its number of Lok Sabha seats should be similar across States. This reflects the principle of **"one person, one vote, one value"**.
- Population growth has been uneven across India. States such as **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan** have experienced higher population growth, while States such as **Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka** have achieved greater population control.
- The **106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023** provides for **one-third reservation of seats for women** in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. Its implementation is linked to delimitation following the relevant Census.
- The Union government had proposed increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha through the **Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026.** The Bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha. There may be future proposals for increasing seats on a **pro-rata basis.**
- Tamil Nadu has demanded that the **543 seats and their present State-wise distribution** be retained. It has also sought preservation of the **2.2:1 ratio between Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha** and implementation of women's reservation from 2029 without waiting for another delimitation.

Implications

- **Unequal political impact** may arise because



States with higher population growth could gain more Lok Sabha seats, while States that successfully controlled population growth may lose their relative political influence.

- **Federal balance** could be affected because the Lok Sabha represents the people, while the Rajya Sabha represents the States. A sharp increase in Lok Sabha seats may strengthen the numerical dominance of larger States.
- **One person, one vote, one value** supports population-based representation. However, applying it strictly may conflict with the principle of **cooperative federalism** and the interests of States with better demographic outcomes.
- A major increase in Lok Sabha seats without a corresponding increase in Rajya Sabha seats could weaken the **Upper House as a check and balance** on the Lower House.
- A larger Lok Sabha may increase the **financial burden on the exchequer** through additional expenditure on MPs, parliamentary infrastructure and MPLADS (Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme).
- Delinking women's reservation from delimitation may help ensure **earlier political representation of women**, but it would require broad political and constitutional consensus.

Way Forward

- Develop a **broad political consensus** among the Union and State governments before undertaking major changes in parliamentary representation.
- Find a balance between **population-based representation and federal interests** so that demographic performance does not become a political disadvantage.
- Consider increasing representation in **State Legislative Assemblies** to address the need for greater representation without disproportionately altering the balance in Parliament.
- Ensure timely implementation of **one-third women's reservation** through a clear and transparent constitutional framework.
- Strengthen parliamentary functioning through **more sitting days, adequate debate time and better committee scrutiny** so that any

increase in representation leads to meaningful deliberation.

Mains Question

The delimitation exercise after 2026 may create tensions between the principles of democratic representation and federal balance. Discuss the challenges and suggest a balanced approach. (15 marks, 250 words)

Understanding Anthropic's move to watermark Claude AI content

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies 3

Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Why in Focus?

- Anthropic is introducing **machine-readable watermarks** in Claude-generated text and provenance metadata in supported files as part of measures linked to the **EU AI Act**.

Metadata is information, such as author, creation date, or file size, that **describes a data point or data set**.

Data provenance is the record of a dataset's **origin and history**, including **who created it, how it was changed, and who made those changes**.

Key Highlights

- Anthropic signed the **EU AI Act's Article 50(2) Code of Practice on Transparency of AI-Generated Content**, prompting the new marking policy.
- Claude will embed **invisible, machine-readable watermarks** in text and **signed provenance metadata** in supported image files such as **.svg, .png, and .jpg**.
- The text watermark will **not be visible to users**

or affect Claude's responses, but may remain when text is copied, pasted, or edited.

- Watermarks will apply to **Claude, Claude API, Claude Code, Claude Cowork, and Claude Tag**, including Claude accessed through **AWS, Google Cloud, and Microsoft Foundry**.
- Anthropic has not yet disclosed the **full technical details** of how the text watermarking system works.
- The company is developing systems that will allow **external parties to detect Claude's AI markings**.
- Anthropic cautions that watermark detection can produce **false positives and false negatives**, so the presence or absence of a watermark does not conclusively prove whether content is AI-generated.
- Factors such as **short text, subsequent editing, metadata removal, and unsupported Claude services** can affect watermark detection.

Implications

- AI watermarks could help **regulators, fact-checkers, and journalists verify the origin of digital content**.
- Watermarking AI-generated text could create difficulties when Claude is used only for **proofreading, translation, or summarisation** of human-created content.
- False positives** could wrongly affect the **reputation or credibility of people** whose original work has been processed using AI.
- Watermarks alone may not effectively prevent **misinformation and deepfakes**, particularly when content is widely circulated online.
- The growing use of **AI detectors and watermark-removal tools** could create new challenges for content verification and digital trust.

Way Forward

- Develop **reliable and transparent AI-content labelling standards** across technology platforms.
- Improve the **accuracy and interoperability of AI watermark detection systems**.
- Establish safeguards against **false accusations based solely on AI-detection results**.

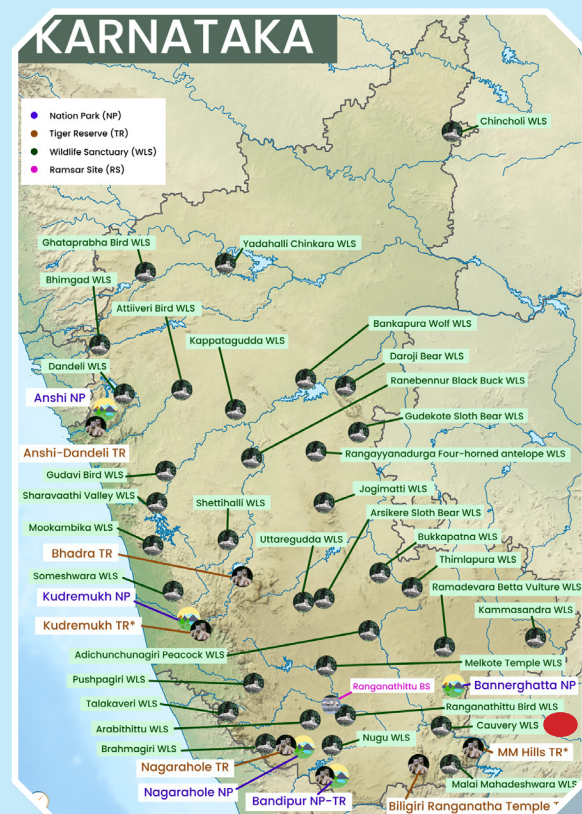
- Strengthen cooperation between **AI companies, regulators, platforms, and fact-checkers** to address AI-generated misinformation.
- Ensure AI transparency measures protect **user rights, content authenticity, and digital trust**.

Mains Question

"AI watermarking can improve transparency in digital content, but its effectiveness depends on reliable detection and safeguards against misuse." Discuss the potential of AI watermarking in addressing AI-generated misinformation and the challenges involved. (150 Words)

Places in News

Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary



- Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary is **located in the Ramanagara, Chamarajanagar and Mandya districts of Karnataka and was established in 1987**.
- It **covers an area of about 1,027 sq. km**

and is situated along the Cauvery River, with Tamil Nadu bordering its eastern and northeastern sides.

- The **sanctuary** mainly comprises **riverine and dry deciduous forests**, along with patches of scrub forest.
- **Important flora** includes **teak, sandalwood, bamboo**, Indian gooseberry and Terminalia arjuna.
- Its **fauna** includes **tigers, leopards, elephants, gaur, sloth bears and sambar**, while over **250 bird species** are found here, including the Malabar Pied Hornbill and Great Hornbill.

Belgium



- **Belgium** is a small and **densely populated country** in **northwestern Europe**.
- It borders the **Netherlands** to the north, **Germany** to the east, **Luxembourg** to the southeast, and **France** to the south.
- Belgium has around **60 km of coastline** along the **North Sea**.
- Belgium has a **temperate maritime climate**, mainly influenced by **Atlantic Ocean air masses**.
- Its major physical regions include the **Ardennes** and the **Ardennes foothills**.

Hara mangrove forests.



- A massive **160 km-long oil spill** caused by the damaged bulk carrier *Minoan Pioneer* off Iran's **Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz** has posed a severe ecological threat to the **Hara mangrove forests**.
- Located in **southern Iran within the Persian Gulf**, this expansive wetland is designated as a **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve** and a **Ramsar Wetland of International Importance**.
- The ecosystem is predominantly made up of the **Grey Mangrove (*Avicennia marina*)**, which features specialized **root filtration mechanisms** that excrete salt and enable survival in **hyper-saline marine conditions**.
- It serves as a vital **blue carbon sink** that sequesters significantly more carbon than terrestrial forests, provides **natural coastal defense against erosion**, and acts as a primary **nursery for commercially important marine species** like shrimp, crabs and fish.
- The forest is an important **avian biodiversity hotspot** situated along international flyways, serving as a key refuge and foraging ground for **migratory waterbirds** such as herons and the **Great Stone-curlew**.

Species In News

Komodo Dragon



- The **Komodo dragon** is the **largest and heaviest lizard** in the world and is known for its **venomous bite**.
- It has a **long tail**, a **strong neck**, **sturdy limbs**, and a **yellow, forked tongue** used to detect smells in the air.
- Adult Komodo dragons are generally **stone-coloured**, while **juveniles** have more **vibrant colours and patterns**.
- Its powerful **jaws, throat muscles, and flexible jaw joints** allow it to swallow large pieces of meat rapidly.
- Komodo dragons are **carnivorous** and feed on animals ranging from **small rodents to large water buffalo**, as well as carcasses.
- They are found mainly on **Komodo Island** and a few neighbouring islands of the **Lesser Sunda Islands in Indonesia**.

Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxii*)



- Blue-footed boobies were recently sighted **outside their typical range near the Panama Canal** due to **El Niño warming**, which disrupted cold, nutrient-rich waters off Peru and Chile and forced the birds to search elsewhere for food.
- They are **strictly marine tropical seabirds**, found along the eastern Pacific coast from **California to Peru**, with about **half of the global breeding population in the Galápagos Islands**.
- The **IUCN classifies them as Least Concern (LC)**. However, some populations, particularly in the **Galápagos**, are declining due to food scarcity linked to **overfishing and intense El Niño events**.
- They are famous for their **bright blue webbed feet**, which play an important role in courtship. Males perform a **high-stepping dance**, and brighter blue feet indicate better health and attractiveness.
- They are **exceptional plunge divers** that hunt during the day and can dive from heights of up to **80 feet** to catch **small fish and squid**.