

ECI ANNOUNCES LOK SABHA ELECTION 2024 SCHEDULE

Why in News?

Kicking off the world's largest election exercise, the Election Commission of India (ECI) announced that the **18th Lok Sabha elections would be held in 7 phases** from April 19 to June 1, with counting of votes on June 4.

With the announcement, the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into force**, bringing announcements of new schemes by the government and use of government machinery for electioneering by ministers to a halt.

Announcement of the Lok Sabha Election 2024 Schedule:



ELECTION PHASE	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4	PHASE 5	PHASE 6	PHASE 7
POLL DATE	19 APRIL	25 APRIL	7 MAY	13 MAY	20 MAY	25 MAY	1 JUNE
SEATS	102	80	94	96	42	57	57

COUNTING OF VOTES ON **4TH JUNE**

The exercise will stretch for **81 days**, which was concluded in 75 days in 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

- The ECI also announced the schedule for the **Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim Assembly elections**, where polling would be held on the same day as the Lok Sabha polling.
- The EC also announced **bye-elections to 26 Assembly seats across states**.
- According to the CEC, while all political parties in **J&K** asked for the Assembly elections to be held simultaneously with Lok Sabha, it was **not possible due to administrative reasons**.
 - Owing to the security concerns in J&K, each candidate would have to be provided with security.

Number of Voters, Polling Stations and Officials:

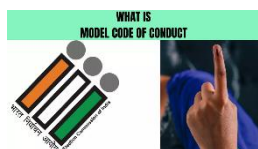
- A **total of 96.8 crore voters**, of which 49.7 crore are male and 47.1 crore are female, including 88.4 lakh persons with disabilities, 48,000 transgender voters and 19.1 lakh service electors, will be eligible to cast their votes.
- There are **1.8 crore first-time voters** who are 18 to 19 years old, and 19.74 crore in the age group 20-29 years.

- In other words, **those under 30 make up a fifth of the total voters.**
- Young voters and women voters, who outnumber men in 12 states, were well represented in the electoral roll.
- **The number of polling stations increased to 10.48 lakh** (up from 10.35 lakh in 2019) and would involve **1.5 crore polling and security officials**, 55 lakh EVMs and 4 lakh vehicles.

The ECI Faces the Following Challenges and Has Taken the Following Steps:

- According to the CEC, the ECI faces four challenges - **4Ms (muscle, money, misinformation and MCC violations).**
- Asked why the elections spread across seven phases (in 2024 as was the case in 2019 as well), the CEC highlighted the -
 - **Historical and geographic situation** of the country,
 - **Weather (extending into the peak summer months), festivals, examinations and movement of security forces**, as some of the challenges.
- The ECI is establishing **24/7 integrated control rooms** in districts and **webcasting in sensitive booths** and a minimum of 50% of all polling stations. On some international borders, **there will be drone-based checking too.**
- Addressing political parties, the CEC said **the ECI would not tolerate MCC violations** and would have a “**calibrated approach**”.
- Asked if voting in a peak summer month **would affect voter turnout**, the official said that **by the 7th phase, only 57 seats would be left.**
 - All southern states and a state like Rajasthan where maximum temperatures go very high would have finished their voting by then.

WHAT IS MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT?



Chief Election Commissioner of India asked all political parties to strictly adhere to the Mode Code of Conduct (MCC).

Model Code of Conduct traces its origins back to the assembly elections in Kerala in 1960.

- It serves as a set of **conventions unanimously** agreed upon by all stakeholders involved in the electoral process.
- Its primary objective is **to ensure that campaigns, polling** and counting proceed in an orderly, **transparent and peaceful manner**.
- Additionally, it serves as a mechanism to curb any misuse of state machinery and financial resources by the ruling party.
- It does **not possess any statutory backing** but has been upheld by the Supreme Court on multiple occasions.

What Activities Are Prohibited After Implementation of MCC?

- Ministers and other authorities are **barred from announcing any financial grants** or making commitments once the elections are announced, as per the guidelines of the election panel.
- Once the dates for the Lok Sabha elections are announced, Ministers and other authorities are also restricted from laying foundation stones or initiating projects or schemes of any kind, except civil servants. No project or scheme that may sway voters in favor of the ruling party can be announced after the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct.
- Additionally, ministers are **prohibited from using official machinery** for campaign purposes. Official visits must not be combined with any electioneering activities after the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct.
- Furthermore, the use of official machinery or personnel for electioneering purposes is strictly forbidden.
- Government accommodations should not serve as campaign offices or be used for holding public meetings for election propaganda by any party.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) **prohibits the issuance of advertisements** at the cost of the public exchequer in newspapers and other media during the election period.
- The misuse of official mass media for partisan coverage of political news and publicity regarding achievements to favor the ruling party should be strictly avoided.

WHAT IS RICE BRAN?

The Central Government has extended the ban on exports of de-oiled rice bran by another four months.



About Rice Bran:

- It is one of the main **byproducts** in the process of **rice milling**. It is the **outer brown layer of brown rice** and is separated during the milling process.
- The bran fraction **contains 14-18% oil**.
 - Rice bran oil is **popular as a "healthy oil"** in Japan, Asia, and particularly India.
 - It is a **pale yellow, odourless, nutty-flavoured oil** with a sweet taste.
 - It is a good **source of unsaturated fats, vitamin E** and other important nutrients.
- The nutrient composition of rice bran depends on the rice variety and the efficiency of the milling system. It is currently **mostly used as animal feed**. The oily nature makes bran an excellent binder for animal feeds.
- **Health Effects:**
 - It has **anti-diabetic, lipid-lowering, hypotensive, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects**, while its consumption also improves bowel function.
 - It contains substances that might **decrease how much cholesterol the body absorbs**. It might also decrease calcium absorption, which might help prevent certain types of kidney stones from forming.

GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL ASSESSMENT INDEX

The Ministry of Home Affairs has consistently ranked amongst the top 10 Ministries in 2023-24 in the grievance redressal assessment index (GRAI).



Grievance Redressal Assessment Index was conceptualised and designed by the **Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG)**, Government of India.

- **Objective:** To present an organisation-wise comparative picture and provide valuable insights about strengths and areas of improvement regarding the grievance redressal mechanism.
- It is based on a comprehensive index in the dimensions of Efficiency, Feedback, Domain and Organisational Commitment. It uses data from the **Centralised Public Grievance Redressal and Management System (CPGRAMS)**.

Key facts about CPGRAMS

- It is an **online platform available** to the citizens 24x7 to lodge their grievances to the public authorities on any subject related to service delivery. It is a **single portal connected** to all the Ministries/Departments of Government of India and States.
- The status of the grievance filed in CPGRAMS can be **tracked with the unique registration ID** provided at the time of registration of the complainant.
- It also provides an appeal facility to the citizens if they are not satisfied with the resolution by the Grievance Officer.

ULLAS INITIATIVE

The Ministry of Education is set to conduct the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT) as part of the ULLAS - Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram.

Ministry of Education
Government of India



• The **Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society (ULLAS)** initiative is poised to revolutionise education and **literacy across the nation.**

- It is done by **fostering a learning ecosystem** that reaches every individual, bridging the gaps in basic literacy and critical life skills.
- It imparts basic education, digital and financial literacy and critical life skills to citizens **aged 15 and above** who lost on the opportunity to go to school. It is being implemented through volunteerism.

- Its objective is to impart not only Foundational Literacy and Numeracy but also to cover other components which are necessary for a citizen of 21st century such as
 - **Critical Life Skills** (including financial literacy, digital literacy, commercial skills, health care and awareness, child care and education, and family welfare);
 - **Vocational Skills Development** (with a view towards obtaining local employment);
 - **Basic Education** (including preparatory, middle, and secondary stage equivalency)
 - **Continuing Education** (including engaging holistic adult education courses in arts, sciences, technology, culture, sports, and recreation, as well as other topics of interest or use to local learners, such as more advanced material on critical life skills).
- The ULLAS app can be used for registration of learners and volunteers either through self-registration or by surveyors. It will serve as a digital gateway for learners to engage in diverse learning resources through the DIKSHA portal of NCERT.

WHAT IS THE HEMOGLOBIN A1C (HBA1C) TEST?

According to a nationwide study, India is estimated to have 10.13 crore people with diabetes and another 13.6 crore people who are pre-diabetic.



Hemoglobin A1C (HbA1C) Test is one of the most commonly-used tests to **diagnose pre-diabetes and diabetes** (both type 1 and type 2) and to help manage diabetes. It is also known as the **glycated haemoglobin or glycosylated haemoglobin test**.

- It is an important blood test that gives a good indication of how well your diabetes is being controlled.
 - Hemoglobin is the part of your red blood cells that carries oxygen from your lungs to the rest of your body.

How does the test work?

- Sugar enters your bloodstream from the food you eat. The sugar or glucose, attaches to the haemoglobin in your red blood cells. Haemoglobin is a protein that transports oxygen to all the cells of your body.
- Everybody has some sugar attached to their haemoglobin. Those with pre-diabetes and diabetes, however, have more. The HbA1C test measures the **percentage of your red blood cells** that have **sugar-coated, or glycated, haemoglobin**.

What is Diabetes?

- It is a chronic disease that occurs when the pancreas **can no longer make insulin**, or the body cannot make good use of the insulin it produces.
 - Insulin is a hormone that regulates blood glucose.
- Not being able to **produce or use insulin effectively leads** to raised glucose levels in the blood, known as hyperglycaemia.
- Over the long-term high glucose levels are associated with damage to the body and failure of various organs and tissues. Diabetes is a major cause of **blindness, kidney failure, heart attacks**, stroke, and lower limb amputation.

UN RESOLUTION ON MEASURES TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA

Why in news?

India abstained from voting on a UN General Assembly resolution on Islamophobia, calling out the prevalence of "religiophobia" against Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and other faiths.

The resolution was introduced on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia by Pakistan and co-sponsored by China.

Religiophobia

- Religiophobia represents an irrational or obsessive fear or anxiety of religion, religious faith, religious people or religious organisations.

- Global counter-terrorism strategy of UN recognises different types of religiophobia such as Islamophobia, Christianophobia and anti-Semitism.
- Off late, analysts have started a discussion around the **need to recognise new phobias, hatred or bias against other major religions of the world.**
 - The emergence of contemporary forms of religiophobia, especially anti-Hindu, anti-Buddhist and anti-Sikh phobias is a matter of serious concern.

International Day to Combat Islamophobia

- In 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted a Pakistan-sponsored resolution to declare **March 15 as International Day to Combat Islamophobia.**
 - The resolution, introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), was adopted by consensus.
 - It was backed by 57 members of OIC and eight other countries, including China and Russia.
- The resolution was adopted in the wake of attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019

UN resolution on measures to combat Islamophobia

- **Adopted by the UNGA**
 - The 193-member General Assembly adopted the resolution ‘Measures to combat Islamophobia’, introduced by Pakistan.
 - 115 nations voted in favour, none against and 44 abstentions, including India, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Ukraine and the UK.
- **Resolution**
 - The resolution criticized the encouragement of unfair treatment, aggression, or violence towards Muslims, shown by more incidents of:
 - disrespecting their holy book, attacking mosques, sites, shrines, and
 - other acts of religious intolerance, negative labelling, hate, and violence against Muslims.

India's stand on the resolution

- **Other forms of religiophobia must be acknowledged**
 - India asserted that the prevalence of religiophobia against Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and other faiths facing violence and discrimination must also be acknowledged rather than singling out just one religion.
 - As per India, it is crucial to acknowledge that such phobias extend beyond Abrahamic religions.
- **Highlighted the incidents of other forms of religiophobia**
 - Indian representative at the UN noted that Hinduism has more than 1.2 billion followers, Buddhism more than 535 million and Sikhism more than 30 million and are all subject to religiophobia.
 - She said the contemporary forms of religiophobia are evident in:
 - increasing attacks on religious places of worship such as gurudwaras, monasteries and temples,
 - The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, violations of gurudwara premises, massacres of Sikh pilgrims in gurudwaras, attacks on temples, and the glorification of breaking idols in temples all contribute to the rise of contemporary forms of religiophobia against non-Abrahamic religions.
- **Concerns about UN Resolution**
 - India emphasized that passing the resolution should not set a precedent leading to many resolutions focused on fears linked to particular religions.
 - India is worried that this could split the United Nations into religious groups.
 - Hence, India called on all member states to consider the broader scope of religious discrimination that persists globally.
 - Allocating resources solely to combat Islamophobia, while neglecting similar challenges faced by other faiths, might inadvertently perpetuate a sense of exclusion and inequality.