

### RECOGNISED POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIA: HOW IS A 'NATIONAL PARTY' IN DEFINED

#### Why in News?

- The Election Commission (ECI) recognised the **Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)** as a **national party**, while revoking that status of the All-India Trinamool Congress, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Communist Party of India (CPI).
- The Commission also revoked the state party status granted to RLD in UP and granted recognised **state political party status** to the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) in Nagaland.

#### What is a National/State Political Party?

- The ECI has laid down the technical criterion for a party to be recognised as a national/state party in the **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order 1968**, as amended from time to time.
- A party **may gain or lose national/state party status** from time to time, depending on the fulfilment of the below mentioned conditions.

#### Criteria for a Political Party to be Recognised as a National Party:

- A political party would be considered (if it satisfies any of the below conditions) a **national party** if:
  - it is 'recognised' in **four or more states** as a state party; or
  - if its candidates polled **at least 6% of total valid votes** in any four or more states in the last Lok Sabha or Assembly elections and has at least four MPs in the last Lok Sabha polls; or
  - if it has won **at least 2%** of the total seats in the Lok Sabha from not less than three states.
- The BJP, Congress, CPI(M), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), National People's Party (NPP) and the AAP are the national parties now.
- The AAP satisfied the first criteria as it is recognised as a state party in **Delhi, Punjab, Goa and Gujarat**.

#### Criteria for a Party to be Recognised as a State Party:

- To be recognised as a **state party**, a party need –

- **At least 6% vote-share** in the last Assembly election and have at least 2 MLAs; or
- **have 6% vote-share** in the last Lok Sabha elections from that state and at least one MP from that state; or
- **At least 3% of the total number of seats** or three seats, whichever is more, in the last Assembly elections; or
- **At least one MP for every 25 members** or any fraction allotted to the state in the Lok Sabha; or
- **Have at least 8% of the total valid votes** in the last Assembly election or Lok Sabha election from the state.
- DMK in Tamil Nadu, BJD in Odisha, YSRCP in Andhra Pradesh, RJD in Bihar, TRS in Telangana are the names of some of the state political parties.

## **What Benefits do Recognised Parties Enjoy under the Representation of the People Act 1951?**

- If a party is recognised as a **State Party**, it is entitled for **exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates** in the State in which it is so recognised.
- If a party is recognised as a **National Party**, it is entitled for **exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates** throughout India.
- Recognised 'State' and 'National' parties **need only one proposer** for filing the nomination.
- They are also entitled for **two sets of electoral rolls free of cost** at the time of revision of rolls and their candidates get **one copy of electoral roll free of cost** during General Elections.
- Further, they get **broadcast/telecast facilities** over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections.
- A recognised National or State party can have a **maximum of 40 "Star campaigners"** and a registered unrecognised party can nominate a maximum of 20 "Star Campaigners".
- However, the **travel expenses** of star campaigners are not to be accounted for in the election expense accounts of candidates of their party.

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## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY RULES**

### **Context**

- On April 6, 2023, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) notified the **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules 2023** to amend the IT Rules 2021.
- This amendment authorises the central government to designate a "fact check unit" to identify "**fake or false or misleading**" information in respect of "**any business of the central government.**"

### Introduction to IT Rules, 2023

- Initially, this amendment only contained provisions for regulating online gaming companies. But later MeitY published a new draft that included "**fact-checking powers.**"
- As per the new rules, the government's fact-check unit will have the power to flag any "**government-related**" content as "**fake or false or misleading.**"
- The flagged content must be removed by all intermediaries.
  - These intermediaries include internet service providers (ISPs) and file hosting companies as well.
- If any intermediary fails to comply, they will be at risk of losing protections guaranteed by "**Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000**" – **Safe harbour.**

- **Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000** absolves intermediaries of liability for content posted by its users.

### Concerns over IT Rules 2023

- The IT Rules 2023 do not define **what constitutes "fake or false or misleading.**
- The rules contain detailed criteria for **self-regulatory organizations**; gaming platforms.
  - These MeitY-certified self-regulatory bodies are given protections such as qualification criteria and pre-decisional hearings.
  - These protections do not exist for "fact check units."
- These rules **violate the Supreme Court's Shreya Singhal vs Union of India (2013) judgement**, which laid down strict measures for blocking contents.
  - The SC determined that in order for intermediaries to be in compliance with Section 79 and the IT Rules, they **must have real knowledge of the unlawful activities** via a court order or notification from the relevant authorities.

- These are reasonable restrictions under **Article 19(2)** of the Constitution. However, Article 19(2) does not contain the phrases “fake or false or misleading”.
- The government has empowered itself to bypass the **Section 69A** (of IT Act 2000) **process for blocking content**.
- The fact check unit will be empowered to issue a takedown order to all intermediaries across the internet stack, potentially bypassing the process statutorily prescribed under Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000.
- These new rules pose a **challenge to Freedom of Speech**. The government could flag any news or article that is **critical to the government** policies as fake, false, or misleading.

### **Criticism from the industry**

- The Editors Guild issued a statement stating that “**determination of fake news cannot be in the sole hands of the government.**”
- Editors Guild stated that “**What is further surprising is that the Ministry has notified this amendment without any meaningful consultation that it had promised.**”
- Indian Newspaper Society argued that the amendments would allow the government to “**proscribe any criticism of its actions.**”

### **Criticism to the previous amendments to IT Rules 2021**

- The IT Rules 2021 have undergone an amendment every year.
- The Bombay HC observed that these changes could “**starve people of the liberty of thought,**” while the Madras HC noted that “**a wink or a nod from appropriate quarters may result in the platform being inaccessible to a citizen.**”
- The Union government contested these cases and sought their transfer to the SC.
- The government introduced further amendments, creating grievance appellate committees that allow social media users to appeal content moderation decisions of the government.

### **Conclusion**

- With this amendment in IT Rules 2021, the government has given itself the power to determine what the truth is.
- Without defining what constitutes “fake, false, or misleading,” IT Rules 2023 will have serious implications.

## VIBRANT VILLAGE PROGRAMME

Recently, Union home Minister launches vibrant villages program on China border in Arunachal Pradesh.

### About Vibrant Village Programme:

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme implemented over **financial Years 2022-23 to 2025-26**.
- The programme will provide funds for **development of essential infrastructure and creation of livelihood opportunities** in 19 Districts and 46 Border blocks of 4 states and 1 UT along the northern land border of the country - **Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and UT of Ladakh**.
- The programme will help in improving the quality of life of people living in identified border villages and encourage people to stay in their native locations thereby **reversing the outmigration from these villages** and adding to security of the border.
- Focus Areas: **Road connectivity, drinking water, electricity including solar and wind energy**, mobile and internet connectivity and healthcare infrastructure and wellness centers etc.
- Vibrant Village Action Plans will be created by the **district administration with the help of Gram Panchayats** and 100 % saturation of Central and state schemes will be ensured.
- There will **not be overlap with Border Area Development Programme**.

## INTERNATIONAL PRIZE IN STATISTICS

Recently, Indian-American mathematician CR Rao awarded International Prize in Statistics, 2023.



### About International Prize in Statistics:

- The International Prize in Statistics is awarded **every two years** by a **collaboration among five leading international statistics organisations**.
- The prize recognises a major achievement by **an individual or team in the statistics field**.

- The prize is modelled after the Nobel prizes, Abel Prize, Fields Medal and Turing Award and called as **Math's Nobel**.

## Who is C. R. Rao?

- Rao, a prominent **Indian-American mathematician and statistician** was born to a Telugu family in **Hadagali, Karnataka**.
- He is currently a professor emeritus at Pennsylvania State University and Research Professor at the University at Buffalo.
- Rao has received many honours, like-**Padma Bhushan (1968) and Padma Vibhushan (2001)**.
- In his remarkable **1945 paper** published in the Bulletin of the Calcutta Mathematical Society, Rao demonstrated **three fundamental results** that paved the way for the modern field of statistics and provided statistical tools heavily used in science today.
- The **first**, known as the **Cramer-Rao lower bound**, **2<sup>nd</sup>** known as the **Rao-Blackwell** and the **third result** provided insights that pioneered a new interdisciplinary field that has flourished as “**information geometry**.”
- Combined, these results help scientists more efficiently extract information from data.

## Applications of his theories:

- The Cramer-Rao lower bound is of great importance in such diverse fields as **signal processing, spectroscopy, radar systems**, multiple image radiography, risk analysis, and **quantum physics**.
- The Rao-Blackwell process has been applied to stereology, particle filtering, and **computational econometrics**.
- Information geometry has recently been used to aid the understanding and optimization of **Higgs boson measurements at the Large Hadron Collider**.
- It has also found applications in recent research on **radars and antennas** and contributed significantly to advancements in artificial intelligence, **data science, signal processing**, shape classification and image segregation.

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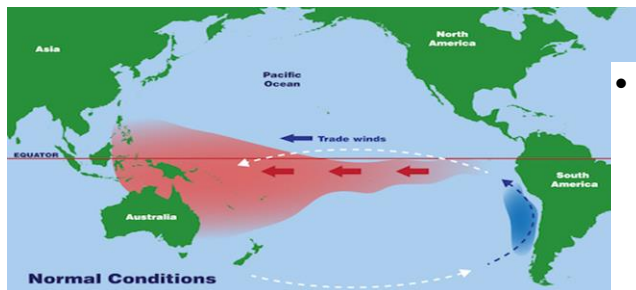
[EL NINO: WILL THERE BE AN EL NINO IN 2023 AND WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?](#)

## Why in News?

- Meteorologists have forecasted 50% chances of El Nino occurrence later in 2023.

## What are the Normal Climatic Conditions?

- **Weather depends a lot on ocean temperatures** and where the ocean is warm, more clouds form and more rainfall in that part of the world.
- **In the Pacific Ocean**, near the equator, the Sun makes the water especially warm on the surface.
- **Normally**, a surface low pressure system forms in northern Australia and Indonesia and a high-pressure system develops off the coast of Peru.
- As a result, the **trade winds blow strongly from east to west** over the Pacific Ocean, transporting warm surface waters westward.
- This leads to convective storms (**thunderstorms**) to Indonesia and coastal Australia.



## What is El Nino and La Nina?

- **El Nino and La Nina** are two opposing climate trends that deviate from the normal conditions and normally run nine to twelve months, but can often extend.
- These events occur every two to seven years on average (El Nino is more frequent than La Nina), but not on a regular basis and together are referred to as the **El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO)** cycle by scientists.
- El Nino is typically known as the **warm phase** (a band of warmer water spreading from west to

east in the equatorial Pacific Ocean) and La Nina is identified as the **cold phase** (a band of cooler water spreads east-west) of ENSO.

## EL NINO AND LA NINA

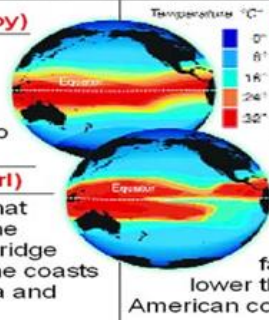
Forecasters say EL Nino weather pattern may develop later this year

### EL NINO (the boy)

An irregular event of warming of Pacific waters. Occurs at intervals of two to seven years

### LA NINA (the girl)

A cold episode that usually follows the warm equatorial ridge cools between the coasts of South America and Oceania



### Effects on climate

The warm currents flow towards the east displacing the cooler currents to Oceania. Rainfall occurs over Central and eastern Pacific, and drought in Indonesia and Australia

Currents contribute to form a warm pool in Oceania, increase rainfall in Asia and Australia, lower the temperature on the American coasts and increase aridity

- Both El Nino and La Nina can have global effects on **weather, wildfires, ecosystems and**

economics.

## Indian Monsoon during the Previous Years and the Recent Trends:

- India has had **four consecutive years of good monsoons** and overall rainfall from 2019 to 2022, receiving an average area-weighted rainfall of 1,268 mm annually.
- **The surplus precipitation** (more than the “normal”) has helped deliver **higher agricultural growth** - an average of 4.3% per year during 2019-20 to 2022-23.
- The bountiful rainfall during 2019-22 has been significantly attributed to **La Niña**.
- The most recent **Oceanic Niño Index** (ONI) value - a three-month running-average sea surface temperature (SST) deviation from the normal in the east-central equatorial Pacific - **was minus 0.4 degrees Celsius for January-March 2023**.
- Since La Niña is characterized by a negative ONI exceeding or equal to minus 0.5 degrees, it means that the so-called ENSO (El Niño-Southern Oscillation) cycle has entered a “**neutral**” phase.

## The El Niño Threat:

- According to the US NOAA, ENSO-neutral conditions are likely to persist through the **Northern Hemisphere early summer 2023**.
- However, a transition to **El Niño is favoured by July-September 2023**.
- To sum up, **2023 could well end the run of good rainfall years since 2019**.
- Therefore, **everyone from policymakers to tractor companies** has to brace themselves for a not-too-great monsoon this time.
- In an election year leading up to the National Lok Sabha polls in April-May 2024, the resulting **political challenges** would be equally difficult.

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## LASER INTERFEROMETER GRAVITATIONAL-WAVE OBSERVATORY (LIGO)

### Why in News?

- The Central government has given the final go-ahead to India’s Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory or LIGO-India project.



## What is LIGO?

- LIGO stands for "Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory".
- It is an **international network of laboratories** that detect the ripples in spacetime produced by the movement of large celestial objects like stars and planets.
- LIGO's two observatories (both in US - Hanford, Washington and Livingston, Louisiana) consists of two widely-separated interferometers each - operated in unison to **detect gravitational waves**.
- Such signals come from massive objects in the universe, such as black holes and neutron stars, and provide astronomers with an entirely new window to observe cosmic phenomena.

## Historical Background:

- LIGO's underlying mechanisms rely on the work of the famous physicist **Albert Einstein**.
- Einstein in his **Theory of Relativity** predicted the **existence of gravitational waves, analogous to electromagnetic waves, more than a century ago**.
- Einstein believed that such waves were too weak to ever be feasibly detected.
- Beginning in the 1960s and 70s, the researchers-built prototype gravitational wave detectors using free-hanging mirrors that bounced a laser between them.
- If a gravitational wave passed through the apparatus, it would wiggle the fabric of space-time and cause the mirrors to move ever so slightly.
- This device, known as an **Interferometer**, is still the basic unit inside today's gravitational wave detectors.
- Though those early models didn't have the sensitivity necessary to capture a gravitational wave signal, progress continued for several decades.

## Introduction of LIGO:



In 1990, the US-based National Science Foundation approved the assembly of two LIGO detectors.

- **Construction of both detectors was completed in 1999** and the search for gravitational waves began a few years later.

- For more than a decade, the detectors continued to come up empty, as physicists learned how to handle the highly sensitive instruments.
- LIGO was completely redesigned for greater sensitivity between 2010 and 2014 and within days of the instruments being turned on in September 2015, the observatory began picking up the signature of its first gravitational waves.
- LIGO had detected the collision of two black holes 29 and 36 times more massive than the sun, respectively, that occurred nearly 1.3 billion years ago.

### What is LIGO-Virgo?

- Apart from the two Interferometers based in the US, there is a third interferometer as well.
- It is located in **Santo Stefano, Italy** and known as **LIGO-Virgo**.
- Working in collaboration, the three facilities help confirm that any signal one facility picks up is a true gravitational wave detection and not random noise.
- In January 2020, LIGO-Virgo detected a collision between a black hole and a neutron star.

### LIGO KAGRA:

- KAGRA is a gravitational wave detector, located underground in Gifu Prefecture, **Japan**.
- It is Asia's first gravitational wave observatory.

### About LIGO-India Project:

- LIGO-India received the Central government's in-principal approval in February **2016**.
- Since then, the project reached several milestones towards selecting and acquiring a site and building the observatory.
- LIGO-India will be located in **Hingoli district of Maharashtra**, about 450 km east of Mumbai, and is scheduled to begin scientific runs from **2030**.
- The project will be built by the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** and the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)**, Government of India, with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the **National Science Foundation (NSF)**, USA.
- Recently, the Union Cabinet gave the final approval and cleared the **Rs 2,600-crore project**.