

### WHAT IS INDELIBLE INK - THE CLASSIC SYMBOL OF INDIAN POLLS?

**What Makes the Ink Indelible?** Indelible (that cannot be removed or washed out) ink contains **silver nitrate**, which is a colourless compound which becomes visible when exposed to ultraviolet light, including sunlight. The higher the silver nitrate's concentration (say ~20%), the higher will be the ink's quality. **For up to 72 hours after application** it can remain resistant to soap, liquids, home-cleansing, detergents, etc. This water-based ink also contains a solvent like **alcohol** to allow its faster drying.

**Who Makes the Indelible Ink for Indian Elections?** It was first manufactured at the ECI's request by the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR). Then, **Mysore Paints & Varnish Ltd.** - a Karnataka Government Undertaking, has been licensed to manufacture the ink. **Since 1962**, it has been the **sole manufacturer** of the ink in India. **Around 26.5 lakh phials** or small bottles (each with a capacity of 10 ml and sold at a fixed rate of Rs 174) will be made for this election cycle.

**Is There Any Legal Backing for the Use of Indelible Ink?** **Section 61 of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1951** states that rules may be made under the Act for the marking with indelible ink of the thumb or any other finger of every elector when they cast their vote.

**What is the Significance of the Indelible Ink?** It has been used since the first general elections (1951-52). Currently, it is **exported to more than 25 countries**. However, the procedure of application can differ.

### WHAT IS THE NATIONAL SECURITY GUARD (NSG)?



**National Security Guard (NSG)** is a special force in India that has primarily been **utilised for counter-terrorism activities**. It is an elite force providing a second line of defence for the nation.

- The NSG members are also **known as Black Cats** because of the black drill cotton coveralls and balaclavas, or helmets, they wear.
- **Establishment:**
  - It was **raised in 1984**, following Operation Blue Star and the assassination of Indira Gandhi.
  - It was created by the Cabinet Secretariat **under the National Security Guard Act** of the Indian Parliament in 1986.
  - It was modelled on the pattern of the SAS of the UK and the GSG-9 of Germany.
- The **Union Ministry for Home Affairs** exercises administrative and operational control over NSG.
- **Motto:** Sarvatra Sarvottama Suraksa.
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi.
- **Director General (DG):**
  - The head of the NSG, designated as **Director General (DG)**, is **selected by the Home Ministry**.
  - All the selected DGs have been **officers from the Indian Police Service (IPS)**.
- The NSG's **specific goals include:**
  - Neutralization of terrorist threats
  - Handling hijacking situations in the air and on land.
  - Bomb disposal (search, detection, and neutralisation of IEDs).
  - PBI (Post Blast Investigation)
  - Hostage Rescue
  - VIP Security
- It is designed to be employed as a specialised counter-terrorism force "**only in exceptional situations,**" **not to take over "functions of the State Police Forces** or other paramilitary forces."
- The teams of NSG work on a basic philosophy of swift and speedy strike and immediate withdrawal from the theatre of action.

- The force is task-oriented and has **two main elements** in the form of the Special Action Group (SAG), comprising Army personnel, and the Special Ranger Group (SRG), comprising personnel drawn from the Central Armed Police Forces and State Police Forces.
  - The NSG also **has a National Bomb Data Centre (NBDC)** that maintains a centralised database of bombing activities reported in India and abroad.
    - The NBDC collects, collates, analyses, and evaluates all terrorist bombing activities and disseminates relevant information to concerned law enforcement agencies.
- 

## WHAT IS VASUKI INDICUS?

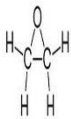


Researchers recently reported the discovery of fossils of one of the largest snakes that ever existed, which has been named Vasuki Indicus.

- The fossils of Vasuki indicus were found in **Kutch, Gujarat**. Vasuki refers to the mythical snake often depicted around the neck of the Hindu god Shiva.
- It lived in the **Middle Eocene period** (roughly **47 million years ago**) in **India**.
  - The organism lived at a time when **temperatures were relatively warm**, at roughly 28 °C.
- It belonged to the now-extinct **Madtsoiidae snake family** but represents a unique lineage from India.
  - Madtsoiidae are **Gondwanan terrestrial snakes** that lived between the **Upper Cretaceous** (100.5 million to 66 million years ago) and the **Late Pleistocene** (0.126 million years ago to 0.012 million years ago).
  - These snakes spread from India through southern Eurasia and into north Africa after the Indian subcontinent collided with Eurasia about 50 million years ago.
- **Features:**

- It likely had a **broad and cylindrical body**, hinting at a robust and powerful build, and was as **big as Titanoboa**, a massive snake that once roamed the earth and is reportedly the longest ever known.
- It was a **slow-moving** ambush predator that would subdue its prey through constriction, like anacondas and pythons.

## ETHYLENE OXIDE



The Centre for Food Safety in Hong Kong recalled Everest Fish Curry Masala from India alleging the presence of a pesticide called ethylene oxide at levels exceeding permissible limit.

**Ethylene oxide** is a flammable gas with a somewhat sweet odor. It **dissolves easily in water**. It appears as a clear colorless gas with an ethereal odor. It is a **man-made chemical** that is used primarily to make ethylene glycol.

- **Applications:** A small amount (less than 1%) is used to **control insects** in some stored agricultural products and a very small amount is used in **hospitals to sterilize medical equipment** and supplies.
- **Health impacts:** It mainly impacts **human central nervous system** depression and irritation of the eyes and mucous membranes. Chronic exposure to ethylene oxide in humans can cause **irritation of the eyes, skin**, nose, throat, and lungs, and damage to the brain and nervous system.

## ISRAEL 'TARGETS' IRAN AND SYRIA

### Why in News?

- Conflicts in the Middle East deepened as Israel “launched attacks” on targets in Syria and Iran.

### Why has Israel Carried Out Strikes Now?

- Israel's latest strike **follows Iran's retaliatory drone and missile attack on Israel** after it blamed Tel Aviv for an airstrike on the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus on April 1.
- For context, **Israel has accused Iran of supporting the Palestinian Hamas militant group** which carried out the October 7 attack on the Jewish nation and triggered months of Israeli invasion and offensive in Gaza.

### Israel Strikes Syria Too:

- Israel carried out a missile strike in Syria too. The state-run SANA news agency, quoting a military statement, said that Tel Aviv targeted an air defense unit in its south and caused material damage.
- That area of Syria is directly west of Isfahan (Iran), some 1,500 kilometers away, and east of Israel.

### Countries Issues Advisory for their Citizens:

- **The US Embassy** in Jerusalem restricted US government employees from travel outside Jerusalem, greater Tel Aviv and Beersheba.
- **Australia asks citizens to evacuate from Israel**, as there's a high threat of military reprisals and terrorist attacks against Israel and Israeli interests across the region.
- **The Indian Ministry of External Affairs** advised all Indians not to travel to Iran or Israel till further notice.
  - All those who are currently residing in Iran or Israel are requested to get in touch with Indian Embassies there and register themselves.

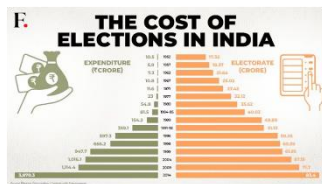
### What Needs to be Done to Deescalate Confrontation in the Middle East?

- It is imperative that **coordinated international action** be taken to stop such an escalation in light of its grave consequences on the region and the globe.
- **The United States, Russia, China, and the European Union** - each with significant strategic interests and influence in the region - **must prioritise diplomacy and collective action.**

- The goal should be not merely crisis management but the establishment of a **durable framework for peace that addresses the core issues** driving hostility and competition in the region.
- The big and powerful countries, often seen as competitors vying for dominance, need to recognise that in a globalised world, stability in one region contributes to global stability.
- Additionally, the role of international organisations like the **United Nations** in facilitating dialogue and negotiations is crucial.
- However, the UN’s effectiveness rests on the unity and cooperation of its member states, particularly the Security Council’s permanent members.
  - Therefore, **they must overcome their rivalries** to prevent the catastrophic loss of regional unity that would result from a conflict.

## HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO CONDUCT THE POLL?

### What was the Cost of Conducting Previous General Elections in India?



When India conducted its **first** election in 1951-52 (in 68 phases), it cost the country **Rs 10.5 crore** to organise the Lok Sabha election.

Since then, **the cost of the poll has increased significantly** (except the 1957 election that saw a drop in the costs). **For example**, Rs 3,870 crore in 2014 and ~Rs 50,000 or \$7 billion in 2019 (> \$6.5 billion that was spent during the 2016 US presidential election). This means, **the ECI spent 6 paise per elector in 1951 and that increased to Rs 46 in 2014.**

**What Exactly Does the ECI Spend on During Polls?** There are a myriad of expenses they make from **deploying officials and armed personnel, to setting up polling booths, procuring EVMs** (which is a significant part [~ Rs 2500 crore for 2024 elections] of expenses), on edible ink and running awareness programmes.

**Who Shoulders this Total Expense?** As per the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Law and Order in 1979, **the Centre bears the cost of the Lok Sabha election fully.** Similarly, the cost of

state Assembly elections are completely borne by the state government. However, if the elections to state and Lok Sabha are being conducted simultaneously, the cost is borne by both the state and the Centre equally.

**What is the Expected Cost of the 2024 Elections?** This time along with the Lok Sabha polls, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Odisha will also go to the polls. If we go by the previous years, then 2024's election would approximately cost double (Rs 10,00,00 crore) of the last election.

## WORLD CRAFTS COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL

**The World Crafts Council International (WCCI) has picked Srinagar for mapping its craft clusters before its final nomination as the World Craft City (WCC) from India this year.**



**World Crafts Council International** is a Kuwait-based organisation working on recognition and preservation of **traditional crafts across the globe.**

- It was founded by Ms. Aileen Osborn Vanderbilt Webb, Ms. Margaret M. Patch, and **Smt Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay** at the 1st World Crafts Council General Assembly in New York on June 12, 1964.
- Since its inception, the World Crafts Council AISBL has been **affiliated with UNESCO** under Consultative Status for many years.
- **Objective:** The main objective of the World Crafts Council AISBL is to **strengthen the status of crafts** in cultural and economic life.
- **Aim:** It aims to promote fellowship among crafts persons by offering them encouragement, help and advice.
- It fosters and assists cultural exchange through conferences, international visits, research study, lectures, workshops, exhibitions and other activities.

**Key facts about the World Craft City Programme:**

- It is a groundbreaking initiative **launched in 2014** by the World Crafts Council AISBL (WCC-International) in recognition of the pivotal role local authorities, craftspeople, and communities play in cultural, economic, and social development worldwide.
- It establishes a dynamic network of craft cities across the globe, aligning with the principles of the creative economy.
- It responds to the increasing acknowledgment of the valuable contributions made by local entities to the multifaceted dimensions of development.
- Under this initiatives **Jaipur** (Rajasthan), **Mammalapuram** (Tamil Nadu) and **Mysore** have been added already as craft cities from India.

### Key facts about Kashmir Craft:

- Kashmir's craft is mostly influenced by Central Asian countries, which are in the list of the WCC.
- The distinction of being included in the WCC list will put a spotlight on Srinagar's craft scene and introduce the centuries-old processes to the global stage.

## NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION 2024

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) recently released the National Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education 2024 titled 'Aadharshila'.



- Aadharshila (translated as foundation stone) is a **detailed 48-week curriculum** meant for learning in the age group of **three to six-year-olds in anganwadis**.
- It has been **finalized by an internal committee** comprising representatives from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Department of School Education and Literacy, the Ministry of Education, the NCERT, the Institute of Home Economics, Delhi University and civil society organisations.



## Features:

- The curriculum includes a **weekly based play calendar** with four weeks of initiation that include academic activities which help children transition from home to anganwadi centre by engaging them in fun and free play.
- The **next 36 weeks** are spent **exploring, free play, conversation, creation and appreciation**, reflection that involves various activities, including storytelling, singing rhymes, art and craft, and so on.
- Storytelling themes revolve around conflict resolution, taking responsibility, and working with and helping others.
- Children **learn about colours, shapes, numbers**, the use of senses, body parts, family and friends, listening and responding to instructions, basic counting, imitating and recognizing sounds, themes like seasons, festivals, food and so on.
- The last eight weeks are spent in recap and reinforcing the learnings of previous weeks with worksheets and observation of kid's performance.
- **Activities and time table are segregated age-wise, with detailed requirement** of materials needed, **age-appropriate specifications**, variation, notes for teachers, targeted curricular goals and competency that children achieve, and observing children's interests.
- Children from the age three to six attend anganwadi in what is a mixed crowd. The curriculum targets at least 48 weeks of learning in the duration of three years.
- The curriculum helps in developing listening skill, vocabulary building, boosting imagination, narration, following instructions, creativity, social development, developing self-expression and self-esteem, which will **help a child to easily transition into Grade 1**.
- The national framework for three to six years will **serve as a base for States** to develop their own culturally appropriate curriculum seen as a solution to tackle later school challenges of children.