

# Topics

- Oath taking Rule
- Spiral galaxy
- NDMA Guidelines on crowd management
- Factory accident
- French president Election
- Clean sea initiative
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- **Mains**



By saurabh Pandey





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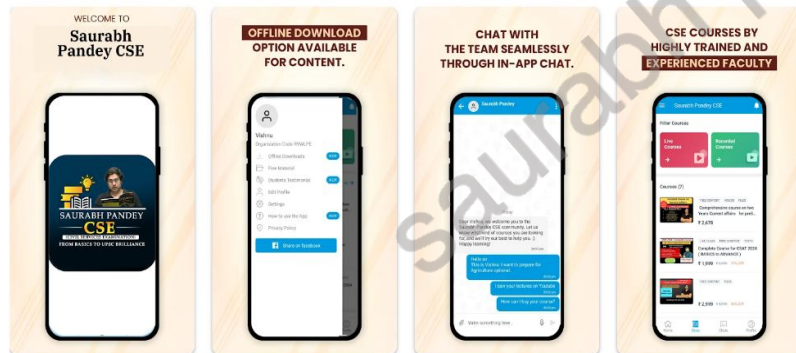
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# Speaker forms committee to frame rules on oath-taking of members

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has constituted a committee to frame rules for "oath-taking and affirmation" of MPs, so that any deviations can be punished, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said at a press conference here on Wednesday at the end of the first session of Parliament after the new Lok Sabha was constituted.

There were several instances of members raising slogans while taking oath as MPs. Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi raised a slogan hailing Palestine, while Chhatra Pal Singh Gangwar, Bharatiya Janata Party MP for Bareilly, ended his oath with "Jai Hindu Rashtra".

"Oath or affirmation is a constitutional process, and there is no scope of politicising it. It is a solemn occasion, and there is a prescribed format to be followed. But this time, we saw several violations," Mr. Rijiju said.

He criticised the opposition for shouting slogans during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech in the Lok Sabha. "Interjections between a speech is fine, but constant heckling is not. The Congress should think that the Prime Minister is the leader of the country, they should respect the chair," he said.

There is no call yet on election of a Deputy Speaker, Mr. Rijiju said.



# Oath taking

- The Speaker has made an amendment to Rule 389 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha (Seventeenth Edition).
- According to the amendment, a “member shall make and subscribe oath or affirmation, as the case may be, in accordance with the form set out for the purpose, in the Third Schedule to the Constitution of India and shall not use any word or expression or make any remark as a prefix or suffix to the form of oath or affirmation.”

- According to the amendment to 'Direction 1', as reported by news agency PTI, the new clause 3 states that a member shall take and subscribe to the oath or affirmation without using any words or expressions as prefixes or suffixes to the prescribed form.

# India to host 46th UNESCO heritage panel session

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The 46th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, being hosted by India from July 21-31, will be held at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.

The event will be attended by over 2,500 delegates from State Parties, advisory bodies, senior diplomats, heritage experts, scholars, and researchers from 195 countries, a senior official said. State Parties are countries which have adhered to the World Heritage Convention.

Sources said the event, being organised by the Archaeological Survey of India, is likely to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. UNESCO has already released a provisional agenda and timetable for the meeting.

The World Heritage Committee has representatives from 21 State Parties to the World Heritage Convention (1972) elected by the General Assembly.



# In News

**The 46th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, being hosted by India from July 21-31, will be held at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi**

saurabh pandey upsc

# Spiral galaxies evolved 4 billion years sooner than expected

An important idea in astronomy is that as the young universe cooled, it accumulated hot gas that clumped and gravitated to form galaxies. As these early galaxies cooled, they formed hot, thick disks that ultimately became thinner and formed spiral arms. A new finding mucks up this theory

Debdutta Paul

**A** new study has revealed more spiral galaxies in the universe's youth than astronomers had expected.

The universe is about 13.8 billion years old and is home to different kinds of galaxies, from spiral to elliptical and those with or without bulges. Astronomers previously believed spiral galaxies formed about 6 billion years ago, but a new study by a group of astronomers from the University of Missouri in the U.S. has called this belief into question. It was published on June 11 in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

While the universe's younger galaxies have tended to be spiral, the older ones have a variety of shapes. Astronomers study them to understand how they formed and evolved. But studying the older galaxies is more difficult because the light from them is fainter.

## Not just hot air

An important idea in astronomy is that as the universe cooled down from a dense plasma state, it contained more and more hot gas. They formed clumps of matter that eventually gravitated to become galaxies. These early galaxies had irregular shapes and lacked disks. But as they cooled as well, they formed hot, thick disks that later became thinner and finally spiral 'arms' – a process that took billions of years.

This theory is now suspect. "Our work shows that this cooling down and spiral formation occur around the same cosmic time," said Vicki Kühn, a graduate student at the University of Missouri and a member of the study.

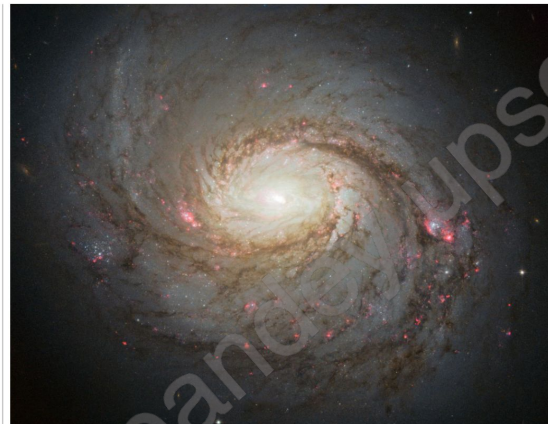
Astronomers routinely see stars forming in real-time but since all the galaxies have already formed, they use a sort of astronomical archaeology to study them. "We don't see proto-galaxies," said Girish Kulkarni of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, who was not involved in the study. "What we do then is study how the galaxies evolve. The spiral galaxy fraction is one way to do this biography."

## Seeing further into the past

The first step is to use light of the infrared and optical wavelengths to detect galaxies in the early universe. Since older galaxies are harder to detect, we need powerful telescopes. Usually, astronomers would like to observe light emitted when the universe was around 500 million years old, when the galaxies were thought to be forming.

NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, launched in 2021, has helped astronomers gaze much deeper into the universe's past than before. The University of Missouri team used the telescope to study a cohort of 373 galaxies individually and identified at least 216 spiral galaxies. Some of them dated to 1.5 billion years after the universe's birth.

For the study, all six authors went through each image to classify it as spiral or non-spiral. Prerana Biswas, a postdoctoral researcher at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru, who wasn't involved in the study, said the method is crude but shows the result is free of human bias. Abhijit Borkar, a research scientist at the Astronomical Institute of the Czech Academy of



A Hubble Space Telescope image of the spiral galaxy Messier 77. NASA

Sciences in Prague, agreed. He wasn't involved in the study either.

But while Dr Biswas said future studies should use artificial algorithms to spot spiral galaxies, Dr Borkar said there are few alternatives to this sort of verification. "Given [the] involvement of machine learning or neural networks, this is the first step. The only way to improve is to have a larger number of 'astronomers' going through the data."

## As underestimate comes to light

The researchers then compared the number of spiral galaxies to the total number of galaxies. They found that between 3 billion and 7 billion years after the Big Bang, the fraction of galaxies with spiral shapes increased from about 8% to 48%. Previous observations had indicated an increase from 5% to 30% instead. "It's much greater than what was known before," Dr. Kulkarni said.

Dr. Borkar was in fact taken aback by the fact that spiral-armed galaxies were fully formed so early. The new observation shows the number of spiral galaxies is high as well as that they increased in number as the universe evolved.

Dr. Kulkarni explained how astronomers study the formation of galaxies. They develop mathematical models on powerful computers and let them evolve with time. While dark matter and gravity exert dominant influences on the universe's evolution, they aren't enough to produce galaxies. So astrophysicists include hot, dense gases in the simulation. These simulations have thus far matched what astronomers have observed.

As the universe ages, the gases cool and clump together, and stars form. As



Astronomers would like to observe light emitted when the universe was 500 million years old, at the point when the galaxies were thought to be forming.

the stars evolve, they give rise to supernovae, which create most of the elements we have on the earth today. Some black holes are formed, too, and a few of them sit at the centres of galaxies and exert their own influence.

## From simplistic to complicated

Given the uncertainty in many of these models' parameters, astrophysicists also use observations to refine them – and such refinements are often crucial.

The Hubble Space Telescope is famed for its clear images of distant celestial objects and astrophysicists have used it to refine many models. But then some studies found signs that the early universe had many galaxies with disks.

Astronomers think such galaxies were actively forming new stars. The authors of the present study didn't compare their observations with the simulations, however, which has puzzled Dr. Kulkarni.

He also said the link between these sophisticated simulations and the present data may not be easy to decipher. All experts agreed astronomers must carefully reexamine the existing framework of observational data and theoretical studies.

"The earlier scenario was more simple," Dr. Borkar said. Now "the

theories need to be made more complicated." He added that it's possible that while stars are formed in some regions of galaxies, hot gases could be present simultaneously in other regions.

## 'No one knows'

The new findings could also affect what astronomers understand about the rate of the formation of stars in the universe. For earth-like planets to form around stars, spiral galaxies should host a sufficient amount of elements heavier than iron in their spiral arms. When heavier stars die and blow up as supernovae, they throw out these elements into the arms. But if something else gets in the way of star formation – such as the influence of black holes – then not enough stars will form in the first place.

As the universe aged, spiral galaxies became more populous even around the time star formation peaked. Over time, spiral gases have less and less gas in their spiral arms, slowing the formation of more stars. But collisions between galaxies, like the one predicted to occur between our Milky Way and its neighbouring Andromeda in about 5 billion years, could restart this process into a second life while also creating an elliptical galaxy.

Overall, our view of the universe's cycle of forming galaxies, stars, and earth-like planets seems to be getting more complicated. What does it imply for our understanding of galaxy formation? Dr. Biswas said, "I can safely say that no

one knows."

(Debdutta Paul is a science writer at the International Centre for Theoretical Sciences, Bengaluru, and a freelance science journalist.)

# Spiral galaxies

- **Spiral galaxies are twisted collections of stars and gas that often have beautiful shapes and are made up of hot young stars. Most of the galaxies that scientists have discovered so far are spiral galaxies, as opposed to the other two main categories of galaxy shapes — elliptical and irregular.**
- **The Milky Way – the galaxy that includes Earth and our solar system – is an example of a spiral galaxy.**
- **Spiral galaxies make up roughly 72 percent of the galaxies that scientists have observed,**

- **Most spiral galaxies contain a central bulge surrounded by a flat, rotating disk of stars. The bulge in the center is made up of older, dimmer stars, and is thought to contain a supermassive black hole.**
- **Approximately two-thirds of spiral galaxies also contain a bar structure through their center, as does the Milky Way.**
- **One of the largest known spiral galaxies is NGC 6872, which is 522,000 light-years across from the tips of its outstretched spiral arms — that's about 5 times the size of the Milky Way.**
- **In 2017, astronomers discovered an 11-billion-year-old ancient spiral galaxy called A1689B11. Its discovery will help scientists understand how galaxies transition from "highly chaotic, turbulent discs" to more organized and thinner discs, like that of the Milky Way.**

# Hathras stampede toll hits 121; organiser pins blame on ‘anti-social elements’

**Ishita Mishra**  
HATHRAS

With the death toll in the Hathras *satsang* stampede touching 121, Sooraj Pal Singh, alias Narayan Sakar Vishwa Hari, the self-styled godman who was heading the prayer meeting, said a ruckus was created by “anti-social elements” after he left the event.

“I express deepest condolence to the families of the deceased and pray to god for the speedy recovery of the injured,” Mr. Pal Singh said, adding that he will take legal action against the “anti-social elements”.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who on Wednesday visited the spot, ordered a judicial probe into the incident. He did not rule out the possibility of a “conspiracy” behind the stampede, and said the accused will be punished.

“A judicial probe by a retired High Court judge will be conducted into the incident,” Mr. Adityanath said after meeting the injured and the kin of the deceased. The Chief Minister asked if the stampede was not an accident, then “whose conspiracy is this?”

## FIR against aide

The police have filed an FIR against a close aide of Mr. Pal Singh but did not name the godman as an accused. The FIR said followers of the preacher had thrown away slippers and other belongings of the victims in nearby farmlands to destroy evidence.

On why Mr. Pal Singh, also known as Bhole Baba, was not named as an accused by the police, Mr. Adityanath said *prima facie*, the case has been filed against those who had ap-



**Struck by grief:** A villager who lost his mother, wife and daughter in the stampede being consoled after their burial at Hathras in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday. R.V. MOORTHY

plied for permission for the event. “All those who are guilty will be punished,” he said.

On the Opposition’s allegations that the law and order situation in the State has deteriorated and the government is trying to hide the death toll, Mr. Ad-

ityanath said, “Some people have a tendency to dig up politics in such tragic incidents. Everyone knows with whom that gentleman has a photo and who are his political connections. I think it is necessary to get to the bottom of it.”

Several BJP affiliates

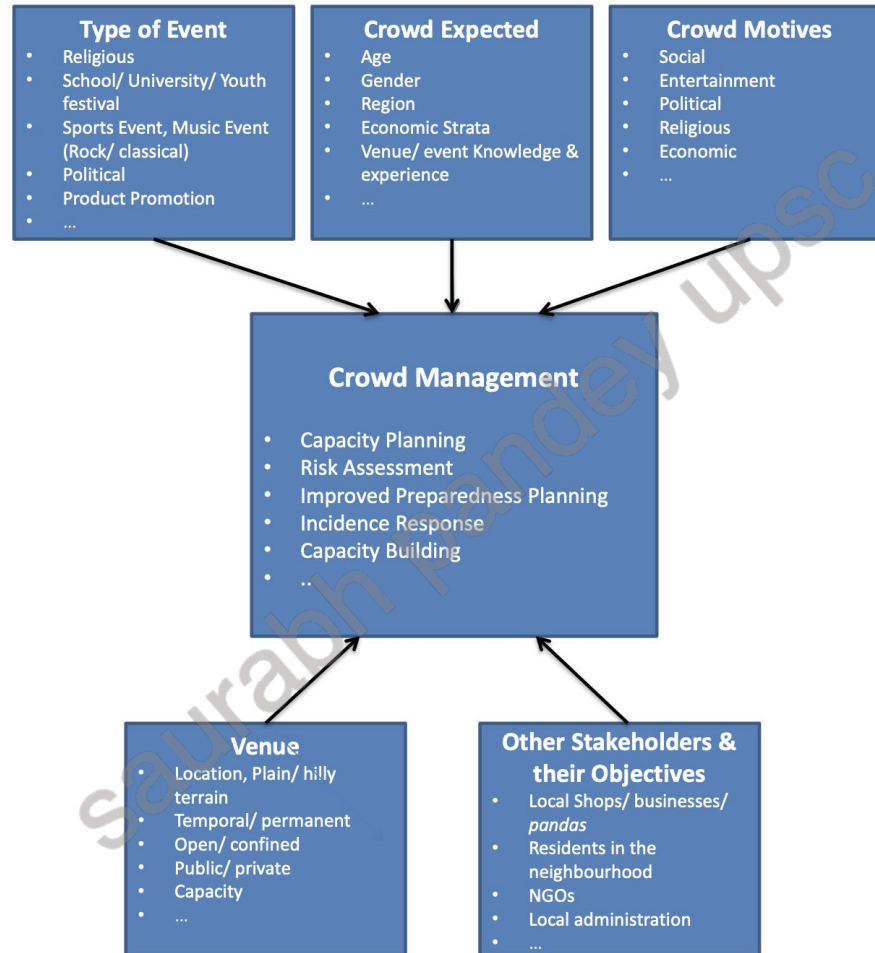
have shared photographs of Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav participating in previous meetings of the godman.

**KIN CONTINUE SEARCH**

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**AVOIDABLE TRAGEDY**

» PAGE 8



### 2.2.3. Crowd Control

- More than anticipated crowd at store/mall/political rallies/ examinations/ religious gatherings/ public celebrations
- Underestimation of audience, staffing, services
- People allowed in excess of holding capacity due to overselling of tickets for an event
- Limited holding area before the entrance
- Lack of access control
- Closed/locked exit
- Sudden opening of entry door
- Reliance on one major exit route
- Uncontrolled parking and movement of vehicles
- Callous indifference in regulating traffic
- Lack of adequate and strong railings to marshal the queue.
- Lack of sectoral partitions to segregate assembled crowd
- Lack of proper public address system to control crowd



#### 2.2.4. Crowd Behaviour

- A wild rush to force the way towards entrance/exits
- Crowds attempting to enter a venue after the start/closing time
- A collision between large inward flows and outward flows
- Rush during distribution of disaster relief supplies
- A large number of pilgrims trying to board a ferry for a sacred island site
- Free distribution of gifts/toys/food/Prasad/alms/blankets/cash/clothes triggering a surge and crush
- Tussle to catching a glimpse/autograph of a celebrity
- A large (much more than expected) anxious and competitive crowd gathering because of limited period promotional events at malls
- Rush to get covered/free/unnumbered seats at the venue
- Scramble to get event tickets
- Crowds trying to re-enter the venue (flows inward/outward flows mixed)



# Factory accidents, a pointer to rusty inspection reform

**A**n explosion of a reactor in a chemical factory in the Dombivli Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) area in May 2024 resulted in the loss of lives and injuries to workers and people. It also caused damage to factories, shops and residences in the neighbourhood. The Maharashtra government announced compensation to the kin of the deceased and funds for the treatment of the injured.

Newspaper reports show that fatal industrial accidents were frequent in 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2023. The Maharashtra government is guilty of not relocating 156 chemical factories in the Dombivli MIDC area even after “deciding” in 2022 to relocate them to Patalganga. It is now known that the boiler in the chemical factory was not registered under the Indian Boiler Regulations, 1950.

## Poor inspection

In 2021, in Maharashtra, 1,551 of 6,492 hazardous factories were inspected, i.e., a 23.89% inspection rate. And, 3,158 out of 39,255 registered factories were inspected, i.e., an 8.04% inspection rate. The situation is no better in two other top industrial States. In Tamil Nadu, the general inspection rate was 17.04% and the hazardous factories inspection rate was 25.39%. In Gujarat, it was 19.33% and 19.81%, respectively. The all-India figure, of 14.65% and 26.02%, respectively, is not surprising (the data are from the Directorate General Factory Advice Service & Labour Institutes report, 2022).

The poor inspection rates could also be due to a shortage of personnel among other reasons. In Maharashtra, the appointment rate is just 39.34%; 48 out of the 122 sanctioned officers were appointed. The numbers are better in Gujarat (50.98%) and Tamil Nadu (53.57%). The all-India figure was 67.58%. Even the sanctioned posts relative to the number of registered factories have



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The recurrence of the same kind of industrial disasters highlights the need for more meaningful reforms in the inspection process

been inadequate to ensure that every factory is inspected in a year. For example, for an all-India reach, each of the 953 sanctioned inspectors would have had to inspect 337 registered factories in a year, in 2021. The inspection rates are poor because of the heavy workload of the inspectors. An inspector in Maharashtra must inspect 818 factories in a year; 589 in Gujarat; 532 in Tamil Nadu, and 499 at the all-India level.

The prosecution rate, i.e., the number of prosecutions decided as a percentage of total prosecutions (including pending cases) was 6.95% in Gujarat; 13.84% in Maharashtra, and 14.45% in Tamil Nadu. As a result, inspections lose their “deterrent effect”.

From the data, it is clear that labour market governance through the labour inspection system is weak and does not perform efficiently. However, employers call it pejoratively as “inspector-raj”, implying harassment and prevalence of compromising practices such as bribes.

## Need for the right reforms in inspection

The criticism is not without merit. Given the vast universe of inspection, the inspectors may “target” and “harass” several factories/establishments, exhibiting state power and also attempting to secure bribes. But this cannot be universal as the statistics are telling. The president of the Maharashtra Industry Development Association has admitted, in a media report in May 2024, that in many cases, safety inspection and certification were done “on an “understanding” between the auditors and factory owners or managers”. Employers are as guilty as the labour inspectors, and tackling the “supply side” of “rent seeking” is as important as reforming the “demand” side.

Reforms of the inspection system are necessary but not of the kind initiated in most States in response to employer criticism.

Self-certification, randomised inspections, online inspections, and third-party certification have been introduced by ruling political parties at the all-India level and in many States. These changes violate several articles in the International Labour Organization’s Labour Inspection Convention (O81), 1947.

According to the Convention, there must be sufficient qualified and well-provided inspectors and they shall enter the establishments freely and without prior notice at any time to secure due compliance of the labour laws, among others. Instead of liberalising the inspection system, governments must ensure a strong labour market governance by implementing the provisions of the ILO Convention. Given the fast-paced changes taking place in technology, and the use of hazardous and chemical substances, the increased need for inspection is felt. Inspectors can both “inspect” and “facilitate” due compliance of laws by providing suitable advice to employers and unions. This is recognised by the ILO Convention.

## Penalties for the enforcer

If a firm or a trade union does not comply with laws, they are prosecuted by the state. If the state fails in its governance what is the penalty the state, viz. the government and the labour department officials pay? Simple and meagre compensation to the victims and their families? No. There must be a penal system for the enforcers also which will pave the way for complete legal compliance.

The recurrence of the same kind of industrial disasters shows a lack of learning by the government. In the name of reforms and a lean government, the state cannot abrogate its fundamental duty – to ensure a safe working and living environment. It should carry out meaningful reforms to ensure an “efficient” and “ethical” labour inspectorate.

# Factory accidents

- **According to the Convention, there must be sufficient qualified and well-provided inspectors and they shall enter the establishments freely and without prior notice at any time to secure due compliance of the labour laws, among others.**
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- **The recurrence of the same kind of industrial disasters shows a lack of learning**
- **the state cannot abrogate its fundamental duty — to ensure a safe working and living environment.**

# An overview of the French elections

Why did French President Emmanuel Macron decide to dissolve parliament and call for snap elections? How did the far-right National Rally become so popular?

How are the two rounds of elections conducted in France? Why have left-wing parties also formed a bloc?

## EXPLAINER

Joan Somy Cherian

### The story so far:

The first phase of the French elections conducted on June 30, after President Emmanuel Macron's sudden decision to dissolve parliament, has placed the far-right National Rally (RN) and its allies in the lead with a 33% vote share. The New Popular Front, a left-wing coalition, came second with 28%, while Mr. Macron's centrist bloc got only 20.7% of the vote share. The second phase will be held on July 7.

### Why elections now?

On June 9, Mr. Macron stated that he was dissolving parliament, three years too soon, observing that "France needs a clear majority if it is to act in serenity and harmony". This announcement came after his bloc's devastating defeat at the hands of the RN in the European Parliament elections. While the decision came as a shock to most of his party members and allies, Marine Le Pen, the RN leader, welcomed the decision, claiming, "we're ready for it".

Experts say Mr. Macron's decision was an attempt to stop the rise of the RN. His gamble was that the French public, faced with the choice of having a far-right party in power, would consolidate against the right-wing wave. However, if that was indeed the reasoning, it seems as if Mr. Macron placed the wrong bet. Almost all opinion polls by major outlets were predicting a lead for the RN (but short of an absolute majority), while Mr. Macron's approval ratings hit rock-bottom to 36%, as per a Toluna Harris Interactive poll.

The sudden call for elections and the high stakes involved in the race has energised the electorate, with the Interior Ministry stating that 59.4% of registered voters had cast a ballot as of 5 p.m. on June 30, as compared to the 39.4% at the same time two years ago.

### How are elections in France conducted?

There are 577 seats in the French parliament, which include 13 overseas districts and 11 constituencies that represent French citizens abroad. So to hold an absolute majority in parliament, a party needs 289 seats.

The first phase of the elections is equivalent to a qualifying round wherein candidates must at least get 12.5% of locally registered votes in order to stay in the race and not get eliminated. If a candidate gets more than half of the total votes cast in the first round itself, they will automatically win. If not, candidates who have met the qualifying criteria will move on to the second phase. At this stage of the elections, "horse-trading" is a common practice wherein parties form blocs among themselves and drop candidates in constituencies which may split the vote and favour a rival party alliance.

The 2024 snap elections are mainly a three-way battle between the RN and its allies, the New Popular Front, the left-wing coalition which includes the Socialists, the Greens, the Communists and France Unbound, and Ensemble, which is Mr. Macron's bloc.

### What is at stake?

The RN, founded as the National Front (FN), was established by Ms. Le Pen's father, Jean Marie Le Pen. The FN was an offshoot of a fascist organisation created as a reaction against the Algerian war, the formation of the Fifth French republic and the protests of May 1968 in France.



**A polarised nation:** People hold up a sign which reads "All anti-fascist" as a protest against the National Rally party, following partial results in the first round of the elections at the Place de la République in Paris, France on June 30. REUTERS

However, under Ms. Le Pen, the party has undergone a significant rebranding wherein she has sought to whitewash the party's fascist roots as well as her father's Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism. By changing the name of the party from FN to RN, Ms. Le Pen also softened the organisation's once hardcore policies such as leaving the EU and opting out of the euro, the region's currency. Additionally, ever since the Russia-Ukraine war and the subsequent energy crisis, the party has actively distanced itself from Russian President Vladimir Putin with whom Ms. Le Pen once kept close ties.

However, in other aspects, the RN is as far-right as it always was. The policy of "national priority", which the RN espouses, gives French citizens the first choice when it comes to social housing, employment and social benefits – a scheme which goes against the French Constitution. Similarly, the RN is completely opposed to immigration. It calls for the deportation of all "illegal" immigrants and strict border controls, and characterises immigrants as destroying the "European way of life". The party has also promised to abolish citizenship by birth to children born to parents of foreign descent.

Thus, the RN has risen to popularity within the French republic due to fears of culture clashes, a cost-of-living crisis and Mr. Macron's unpopular policies such as increasing the age of retirement. It increased its seat share in the French

parliament from seven to 89 in 2022 and now hopes for it to jump as high as anywhere between 240 to 300 seats. Moreover, the party has also been able to tap into the electorate in the provincial towns and villages of southern France, mostly composed of blue-collar workers who have often felt neglected by the political elites of Paris.

Mr. Macron's political gamble could potentially lead to France being ruled by a far-right party for the first time since the end of the Second World War. Already there have been reports of a rise in racist attacks, along with anti-far-right protests in many parts of Paris on June 30, some of which ended in violence and arson. The political uncertainty has stoked fear in immigrants and minority communities, particularly among Muslim groups who have often been attacked by the RN.

### What happens next?

As the date for registering the final list of candidates who will be contesting from various constituencies is over, more than 200 candidates from the centre and left alliances have dropped out of the race in order to consolidate votes against the RN.

The sudden formation of the New Popular Front (a reference to the 1936 Popular Front where Socialists and Communists allied against far-right rioters), is part of a practice known as the "republican front", wherein centrist and left parties team up to keep right-wing parties out of power. However, whether the front will hold this time is

questionable, especially considering the presence of leftist leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a controversial figure who was accused of anti-Semitism by his rivals.

The president of the RN and its Prime Ministerial candidate, Jordan Bardella, has stated that he won't enter into an alliance with any of the other blocs. He said he didn't want to be the "President's assistant" and that he would rather be a cohabitation Prime Minister as accorded by the French Constitution. A cohabitation is where the President is part of one party and Parliament is ruled by a party not of the President's. Here, domestic policy is governed by the Prime Minister and his Cabinet while defence and foreign policy are handled by the President's office. Mr. Bardella, like his patron Ms. Le Pen, promises that he would prioritise French citizens and bring more purchasing power into their hands by reducing VAT on essential products such as food, fuel, etc.

The last time a snap election was called was in 1997, when centre-right President Jacques Chirac dissolved the National Assembly to consolidate his party's dominance after a slew of unpopular policies surrounding fiscal austerity. However, his gamble backfired as a new left-wing government came to power inadvertently entering him into a cohabitation alliance. By next week, one would know whether Mr. Macron's decision will also go the same way, and whether his party will be, as Ms. Le Pen

## THE GIST

▼ The first phase of the French elections conducted on June 30, after President Emmanuel Macron's sudden decision to dissolve parliament, has placed the far-right National Rally (RN) and its allies in the lead with a 33% vote share.

▼ The RN has risen to popularity within the French republic due to fears of culture clashes, a cost-of-living crisis and Mr. Macron's unpopular policies such as increasing the age of retirement.

▼ As the date for registering the final list of candidates who will be contesting from various constituencies is over, more than 200 candidates from the centre and left alliances have dropped out of the race in order to consolidate votes against the RN.



## Who can vote?

The President is elected by direct universal suffrage:

- Universal:** all French citizens aged 18 and over can vote, whether residing in France or not
- Direct:** votes are directly attributed to the candidates

## What are the main stages in the election?

**7 weeks before the second round/21 March**  
**The official list of candidates is published**

To officially be a candidate, contenders must, among other things, be nominated by at least 500 elected representatives (e.g. mayors, deputies).

**4 weeks before the second round/10 April**  
**Official electoral campaign**

- There is an upper limit on spending which is monitored by a committee
- Once the official campaign has begun, each candidate must have strictly the same amount of airtime on TV and radio.

**2 weeks before the second round/23 April**  
**1st round of the election\***

The French people go to the polls: if no candidate wins over 50% of the vote, a second round is organized.

**Second round/7 May**  
**2nd round of the election\***

Only the two candidates with the most votes qualify for the 2nd round.  
The candidate with the absolute majority of votes cast is elected.  
Blank or spoilt votes are not taken into account.

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The President is elected following the announcement of the results by the Constitutional Council within 10 days.  
The five-year term is renewable once.

\*In the Americas, the 1st and 2nd rounds take place a day earlier



Members of the Arctic Challenge team practise in simulated circumstances at a training centre in Dubai. AFP

## Rowers to brave the Arctic to shed light on plastic pollution

**Agence France-Presse**  
DUBAI

At an indoor pool in Dubai, three rowers battle artificial rain and simulated waves as they train for an Arctic voyage intended to highlight the perils of marine pollution.

From the United Arab Emirates, notorious for its sweltering heat to one of the coldest regions in the world, their quest will take the team from one extreme to the next. For leader Toby Gregory, it is a chance to sound the alarm about the scourge of plastic waste in the world's oceans, a mission he took on after a 2023 Atlantic Ocean rowing trip during which he saw "a lot more plastic than I ever imagined". The UN says plastics account for 85% of all marine trash. Last year Mr. Gregory founded The Plastic Pledge, which tries to educate students about plastic disposal.

The "Arctic Challenge" will see Mr. Gregory, 46, his fellow Briton Andrew Savill, 39, and Irish Orlagh Dempsey, 30, embark on a 1,500-kilometre voyage late this month. They will set off from the city Tromsø in northern Norway and head for Longyearbyen, capital of the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. They plan to row for roughly three weeks aboard an eight-metre boat flying the UAE flag, and with no sail or engine.

By leaving in summer, a time of non-stop sunshine in the polar region, they can use solar panels to maximum effect to power navigation and communications equipment. Undertaken in partnership with the UN Environment Programme Clean Seas initiative, theirs is set to be a milestone mission, with the group becoming the first three-person team to row the Arctic Ocean and Ms. Dempsey the first woman to do so.

# Clean sea Initiative



- Through the Clean Seas platform, UNEP is connecting and rallying individuals, civil society groups, industry and governments for catalyzing change and transforming habits, practices, standards and policies around the globe to dramatically reduce marine litter and its negative impacts.
- Since its launch in 2017, the campaign has become a catalyst for change, transforming habits, practices, standards and policies around the globe.
- To date, 69 countries have joined, making the Clean Seas Campaign the biggest, most powerful global coalition devoted to ending marine plastic pollution.



**Commitments by signatory countries now cover more than 76 per cent of the world's coastlines.**

**Land locked countries are also coming on board, seeing the value of its source to sea approach.**

**Countries, businesses and individuals have pledged to turn the tide on plastic waste.**

**The Clean Seas campaign contributes to the goals of the [Global Partnership on Marine Litter](#), a voluntary open-ended partnership for international agencies, governments, businesses, academia, local authorities and non-governmental organizations to cooperate and innovate on tackling marine litter and plastic pollution.**

# Smart Cities Mission period extended till March 2025

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Centre has extended the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) under the Union Urban Development Ministry till March 31, 2025.

Under the SCM, launched in June 2015, 100 cities were chosen through a competition to be developed as smart cities. The mission envisions developing areas within selected cities in the country as model areas based on an area development plan, which is expected to have a rub-off effect on other parts of the city and nearby cities and towns.

More than 8,000 multi-sectoral projects are being developed by the 100 cities amounting to around ₹1.6 lakh crore under the SCM.

As on July 3, the 100 cities have completed 7,188 projects (90% of total pro-



Under the SCM, 100 cities were chosen through a competition to be developed as smart cities.

jects) amounting to ₹1,44,237 crore as part of the mission.

The balance 830 projects amounting to ₹19,926 crore are also in advanced stages of completion, an official statement said on Wednesday.

The mission has an allocated a budget of ₹48,000 crore for the 100 cities. As on date, ₹46,585 crore or 97% of the allocated budget has been released.

Out of these funds released to the cities, 93% have been utilised as on date.

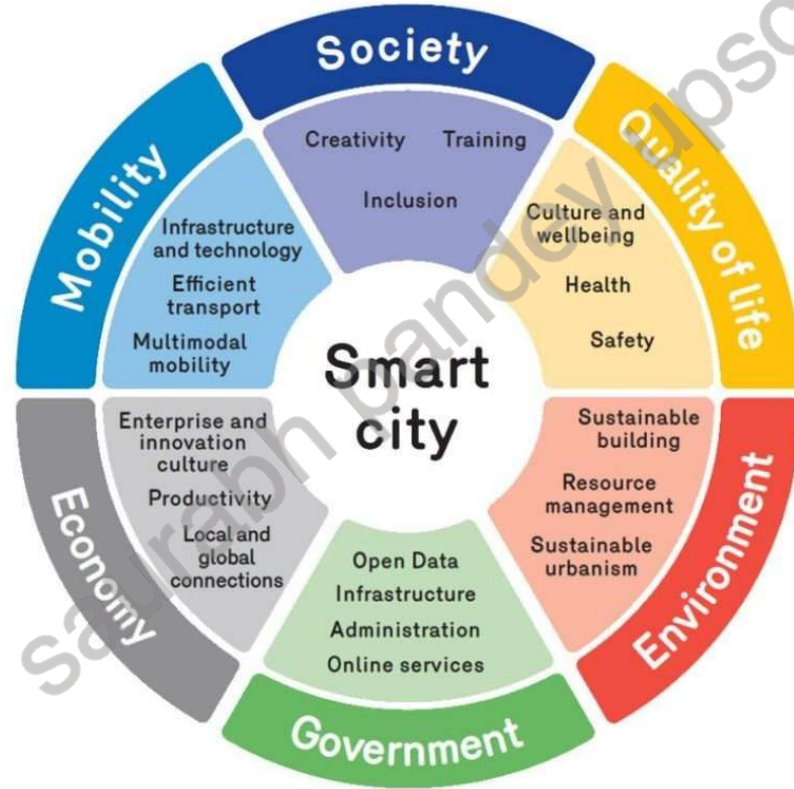
“The mission has been getting multiple requests from some States/city government representatives to grant some more time to complete the balance 10% projects. These balance ongoing projects are in advanced stage of implementation and got delayed due to various on-ground conditions. Taking cognisance of these requests, the Government of India has extended the mission period up to March 31, 2025 to complete these balance 10% projects,” the statement said.

This extension has been informed to the cities that it would be without any additional cost, beyond the already approved financial allocation under the mission.

## Smart Cities Mission (SCM)

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- The mission envisions developing areas within selected cities in the country as model areas based on an area development plan, which is expected to have a rub off effect on other parts of the city and nearby cities and towns.

# Smart City Mission India



## Community at the core



Communities at the  
core of planning and  
implementation

## More from Less



Ability to generate greater  
outcomes with the use of  
lesser resources

## Coorporative & Competitive Federalism



Cities selected through  
competition; flexibility to  
implement projects

## Integration, Innovation, Sustainability



Innovating methods;  
integrated and  
sustainable solutions

## Technology as means, not the goal



Careful selection of  
technology, relevant to  
the context of cities

## Convergence



Sectorial and  
Financial  
Convergence

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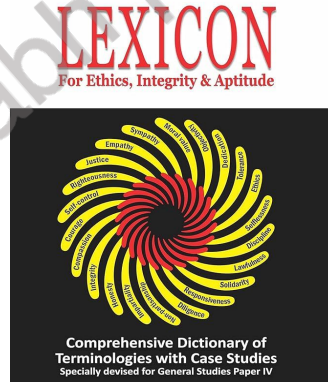
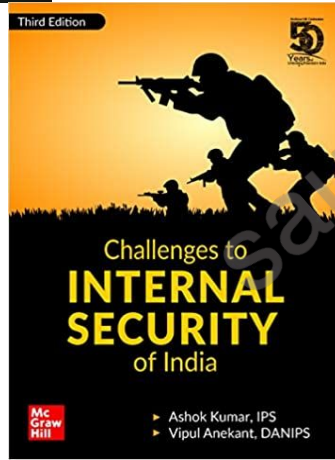
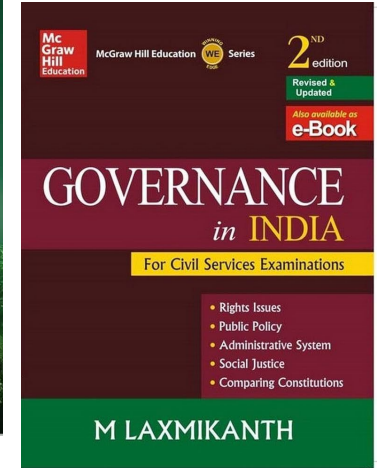
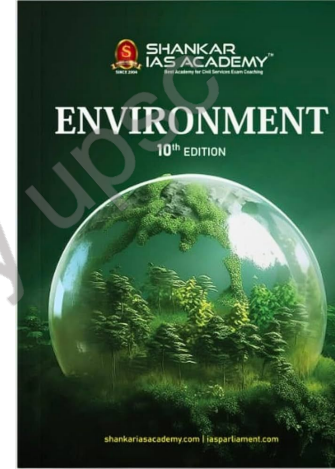
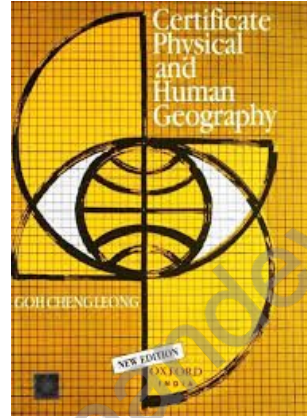
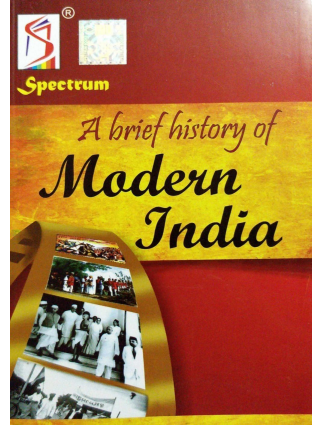
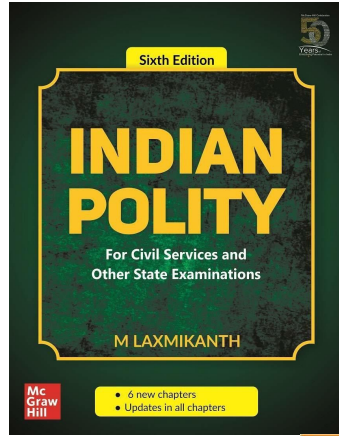
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