

The Hindu

Front Page

Presidential election today; Murmu has an edge over Sinha (Page no. 1) (GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

The election for the President of India will be held on Monday. The contest is between the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidate and former Jharkhand Governor Droupadi Murmu and the Opposition's choice, senior politician and former Union Minister Yashwant Sinha.

There are about 4,809 eligible voters in the Electoral College. With the Opposition parties such as the BJD, TDP, YSRCP, JD(S), JMM, BSP, Shiromani Akali Dal and the JMM pledging support to Ms. Murmu along with the AIADMK, both the factions of the Shiv Sena, JD (U) and the BJP, she is comfortably placed to win more than two-third votes.

The elected members of both the Houses of Parliament and the legislative Assemblies of States, the National Capital Territory of Delhi and the Union Territory of Puducherry make the electoral college for the presidential election.

Secretary-General of the Rajya Sabha P.C. Mody is the Returning Officer for the election. Arrangements have been made in Parliament and in all State Assemblies for polling and counting will take place here on Thursday. There are 31 such polling stations across the country for the 16th presidential election to elect the 15th President.

The value of total votes is 10,86,431. Given its strength in Parliament and Assemblies and considering the support Ms. Murmu received from various unexpected quarters, the ruling NDA's candidate is likely to win more than 6.67 lakh votes.

Nominated MPs and MLAs and members of legislative councils are not entitled to vote in the presidential election. In 2017, President Ram Nath Kovind received votes with value of more than seven lakh against his opponent Congress's Meira Kumar. Considering the support for Ms. Murmu, it is quite possible that she may also receive similar value of votes in this election.

MPs will get a green colour ballot paper and MLAs will get a pink ballot paper in the election. "For marking the vote, the Commission will supply particular pens.

The pen will be given to the electors in the polling station by the designated official when the ballot paper is handed over. Electors have to mark the ballot only with this particular pen and not with any other pen. Voting by using any other pen shall lead to invalidation of the vote at the time of counting.

The 84th amendment of the Constitution provides that the population of the States for the purposes of calculation of value of votes for the presidential election shall be based on 1971 census.

States

How Asian Games paved the way for 'Anayoottu' in Kerala (Page no. 5) (GS Paper 1, Art and Culture)

Anayoottu, an annual ritual at Sree Vadakkunnathan Temple, Thrissur, in which more than 50 elephants are fed special food, is done to propitiate Lord Ganesha, who, according to Hindu belief, removes obstacles in one's life.

According to them, Kerala's elephant pooram was selected, along with other cultural forms of the country, for display at the opening ceremony of the Asian Games held in Delhi in 1982.

It was a herculean task to transport the elephants all the way to Delhi. K.C. Panicker, veterinary surgeon and elephant treatment specialist, took the responsibility with the support of authorities, devaswoms and elephant owners.

A trial run of the train carrying the elephants was conducted from Thrissur to Ernakulam before the trip. Thirty-four majestic elephants from across the State were selected and readied for the journey. Many of them belonged to the Guruvayur temple from Punnathur Kotta.

The elephants included Kuttinarayanan of Guruvayur Devaswom, later came to be known as Asiad Appu, the mascot of the Asian Games, three-year-old Pushpa, four-year-old Nisha, five-year-old Sunitha and seven-year-old Rashmi.

A 264-member team, including 112 mahouts, 80 helpers, six veterinary experts and 21 police personnel, accompanied the elephants to Delhi.

In the train with 28 bogies, 13 were open ones for adult elephants and eight boxed ones were for calves. Four elephants were tranquilised before being taken to the bogies. Water was taken in four bogies and palm leaves in three.

Despite protests from various quarters, the train carrying the elephants was flagged off by the then Chief Minister K. Karunakaran on Kerala Piravi Day on November 1, 1982.

Railways, which extended total support for the mission, provided help at various stations. Considering the safety of elephants, the average speed of the train was 18 km/hour and a comparatively short route with less risk was chosen for the journey. Covering 3,011 km in around 165 hours, the train reached Tughlakabad station on November 8.

OPED

Preserving democracy in India (Page no. 7)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

In January 2014, while addressing the Vijay Sankalp rally in Goa, Narendra Modi called on the audience to vote for a “Congress-mukt Bharat”. He said, “Be it dynasty politics, nepotism, corruption, communalism, divisions in society or poverty, getting freedom from all this is what I mean by a Congress-mukt Bharat.”

Stating the BJP’s commitment to changing the future of India, he said, “We need efforts to integrate the nation, not divide it.”

The events that have unfolded in the last few years, including the toppling of governments in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra and the selective arrests of Opposition leaders, show that we are perhaps heading towards an Opposition-mukt Bharat.

The Indian Constitution adopted the parliamentary system and not the presidential system. B.R. Ambedkar provided the rationale for this: “A democratic executive must satisfy two conditions - (1) It must be a stable executive and (2) it must be a responsible executive.

Unfortunately it has not been possible so far to devise a system which can ensure both in equal degree... In England, where the parliamentary system prevails, the assessment of responsibility of the executive is both daily and periodic.

The daily assessment is done by members of Parliament, through questions, resolutions, no-confidence motions, adjournment motions and debates on addresses.

Periodic assessment is done by the electorate at the time of the election... The daily assessment of responsibility which is not available under the American system it is felt far more effective than the periodic assessment and far more necessary in... India. The draft Constitution in recommending the parliamentary system... has preferred more responsibility to more stability.”

Democracy is the basic feature of the Constitution. Parliamentary democracy does not envisage a condition where a one party-government becomes permanent. The presence of a vigilant Opposition is necessary not just for a vibrant democracy but for its very survival.

When the Opposition criticises the government or carries on an agitation to arouse public opinion against a party’s misdeeds, it is performing a duty that is assigned by the Constitution.

Without an effective Opposition, democracy will become dull and legislature will become submissive. The public will then think that the legislature is a sham and is unable to perform its functions and will lose interest in the functioning of Parliament.

Explainer Page

Why is Kerala protesting Supreme Court’s ESZ notification (Page no. 8)

(GS Paper 3, Environment)

The story so far: On July 7, the Kerala State Assembly unanimously passed a resolution urging the Central government to exclude the State’s human habitations, farmlands and public institutions from the purview of the Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ), recently notified by the Supreme Court, to be set-up around all protected forests in the country.

The Assembly also called upon the Centre to notify the zones by considering the State government’s proposals that marked the ESZ as zero around 10 protected areas of the State, urging the union government to enact laws for the purpose.

The June 3 directive by a three-judge SC Bench consisting of Justices L. Nageswara Rao, B. R. Gavai and Anirudha Bose to have a mandatory ESZ of minimum one kilometre measured from the demarcated boundary of every protected forest, including the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, has stirred the hornet’s nest in Kerala where any regulatory mechanism on land and land use patterns would have political ramifications.

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had notified the draft ESZs of 20 of the 23 protected areas in the State while issuing the final notification of the Mathikettan Shola National park way back in December 2020.

However, the draft notification of the Periyar Tiger Reserve is yet to be published though the State government had submitted the proposal earlier, and the State is yet to submit the draft ESZ of Karimpuzha Wildlife Sanctuary, the newest one in Kerala, located in Malappuram district.

What worries the State is the possible impact of the apex court's order on its unique landscape. Nearly 30% of Kerala is forested land and the Western Ghats occupies 48% of the State.

Moreover, there is the network of lakes and canals and wetlands and the 590-kilometres-long coastline, which are all governed by a series of environmental conservation and protection legislations, leaving little space for its 3.5 crore population to occupy.

With an average population density of 900 persons per square kilometre, much higher than the national average, the demographic pressure on the available land is unusually high in the State, as noted by the State Assembly's resolution. The State Government apprehends that the SC's notification may worsen the ground situation as it would adversely impact the interests of the State besides upsetting the lives of millions living near the protected areas.

News

Only 50% of farmers benefited from loan waivers, says study (Page no. 12) (GS Paper 3, Economy)

Only about half of the intended beneficiaries of farm loan waivers announced by nine States since 2014, have actually received debt write-offs, as per a study by State Bank of India's researchers.

As of March 2022, the poorest implementation of farm loan waiver schemes in terms of proportion of eligible farmers who had received the announced benefits, were in Telangana (5%), Madhya Pradesh (12%), Jharkhand (13%), Punjab (24%), Karnataka (38%) and Uttar Pradesh (52%).

By contrast, farm loan waivers implemented by Chhattisgarh in 2018 and Maharashtra in 2020, were received by 100% and 91% of the eligible farmers, respectively.

A similar waiver announced by Maharashtra in 2017 worth ₹34,000 crore for 67 lakh farmers, has been implemented for 68% of beneficiaries, SBI researchers reckoned.

The SBI study was based on outcomes of ten farm loan write-offs worth about ₹2.53 lakh crore announced by nine States, starting with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in 2014.

As many as 92% of Andhra Pradesh's 42 lakh farmers eligible for loan waivers had benefited, while the number was a mere 5% for Telangana.

"Since 2014, out of approximately 3.7 crore eligible farmers, only around 50% of the farmers received the amount of loan waiver till March 2022... Despite much hype and political patronage, Farm Loan waivers by States have failed to bring respite to intended subjects, sabotaging credit discipline in select geographies and making Banks and financial institutions wary of further lending," the SBI report noted, terming it a 'self goal' inflicted by the State on its subjects.

The report identified rejection of farmers' claims by State Governments, limited or low fiscal space to meet promises, and change in Governments in subsequent years, as the possible reasons for the low implementation rate of these loan waivers, whose frequency and scale have seen an unprecedented surge in the past eight years.

World

Forest fires rage in scorching southwest Europe (Page no. 13) (GS Paper 3, Environment)

Firefighters struggled to contain wildfires sweeping across southwest Europe on Sunday as a heatwave showed no sign of abating, with Britain poised to set new temperature records this coming week.

Blazes raging in France, Greece, Portugal and Spain have destroyed thousands of hectares of land, forced scores from their homes and killed several emergency personnel since last week.

It is the second heatwave engulfing parts of southwest Europe in weeks. Scientists blame climate change and predict more frequent and intense episodes of extreme weather such as heatwaves and drought.

Firefighters in France's southwestern Gironde region were fighting to control two forest blazes that have devoured nearly 11,000 hectares since Tuesday.

The wildfires have forced more than 14,000 people — residents and tourists combined — to decamp. Seven emergency shelters have been set up to take in evacuees.

Meteo France forecast temperatures of up to 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in parts of southern France on Sunday, with new heat records expected on Monday.

Authorities in the French Alps urged climbers bound for Mont Blanc, Europe's highest mountain, to postpone their trip due to repeated rock falls caused by "exceptional climatic conditions" and "drought".

The call comes after a section of Italy's biggest Alpine glacier gave way at the start of the month, killing 11 people. Spanish authorities reported around 20 wildfires still raging out of control in different parts of the country from the south to Galicia in the far northwest, where blazes have destroyed around 4,500 hectares of land.

Another fire burning in the Mijas mountain range has destroyed about 2,000 hectares of land, local officials said.

The fire forced the evacuation of just over 3,000 people. "We didn't stop working all night," regional agriculture minister Carmen Crespo told Spanish public television of efforts to quench the flames.