

CURRENT AFFAIRS SUPPLEMENT 8

EPIC (Electors Photo Identity Card) number

Election Commission to fix duplicate voter ID numbers issue in 3 months

Electors Photo Identification Card or the EPIC number is the 10-digit voter ID card number issued by the Election Commission of India to each elector.

WHY IN NEWS?

Amid the controversy over duplicate Voter ID Card numbers issued to some electors, the Election Commission of India recently said it would resolve the matter in the next three months by ensuring a unique national EPIC number to all voters.

EPIC (Electors Photo Identity Card)

- EPIC (Electors Photo Identity Card) is a 10-digit alphanumeric voter ID number assigned to each registered voter in India.
- Introduced in 1993 under the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.
- Aimed at preventing voter impersonation and electoral fraud+
- The EPIC number is generated through **ERONET** (Electoral Roll Online Management System), an online platform.

- ERONET streamlines the management of voter registration, migration, and deletion across states
- It supports multiple languages and scripts, enhancing accessibility and efficiency.

ERONET (ELECTORAL ROLL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM)

What is ERONET?

- ERONET (Electoral Roll Management System) is a web-based platform designed to streamline voter registration, migration, and deletion of names from electoral rolls.
- It provides a centralized database for elector management across all states and union territories.

Developed by: the Election Commission of India (ECI)

Aim of ERONET:

- To eliminate duplicate voter entries, ensure accuracy in electoral rolls, and provide seamless voter registration.
- To enable real-time tracking of electoral forms and support election officials in voter verification.

Key Functions of ERONET:

- **Unified National Photo Electoral Roll (UNPER):** Maintains a common database for 95+ crore electors.
- **Multi-Platform Integration:** Supports voter registration via voters.eci.gov.in, Voter Helpline App, BLO App, and Voter Portal.
- **Duplicate Entry Removal:** Identifies Photo Similar Entries (PSE) and Demographic Similar Entries (DSE) using AI-based analysis.
- **Multi-Language & Script Support:** Provides services in 14 languages and 11 scripts for accessibility.
- **Seamless Form Processing:** Automates electoral roll updates, ensuring smooth migration and registration.
- **Fair & Transparent Elections:** Helps Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) maintain an error-free electoral roll for free and fair elections.

- **Importance of EPIC Number**
 - Acts as a unique identifier linking the voter to their photo, constituency, and polling station.
 - Ensures authenticity and transparency in elections, reducing the risk of voter fraud.
 - A crucial tool in ensuring fair elections and free voter participation.
- **EPIC Duplication Issue**
 - Pre-ERONET system involved manual data entry and decentralized management, leading to the duplication of EPIC numbers.
 - Duplication risked voter disenfranchisement or manipulation during elections.

'D' voters crisis

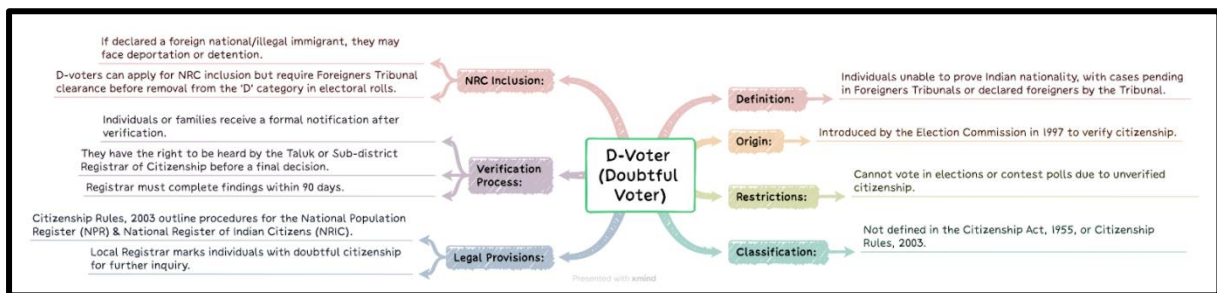
'D voters' remain a key issue in Assam during India's general elections

Those who fail to prove their citizenship face detention camps

WHY IN NEWS?

The opposition recently raised concerns over the plight of 'D' (Doubtful) voters in Assam, demanding the closure of the state's only detention centre, now termed a transit camp, and the tabling of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) report in the Assembly.

'D' (Doubtful) voters



M-YUVA 3.0 (Prime Minister's Scheme for Mentoring Young Authors)

WHY IN NEWS?

The Ministry of Education, Department of Higher Education has launched Prime Minister's Scheme PM-YUVA 3.0 (Prime Minister's Scheme for Mentoring Young Authors for Mentoring Young Authors)

PM-YUVA 3.0 (Prime Minister's Scheme for Mentoring Young Authors)

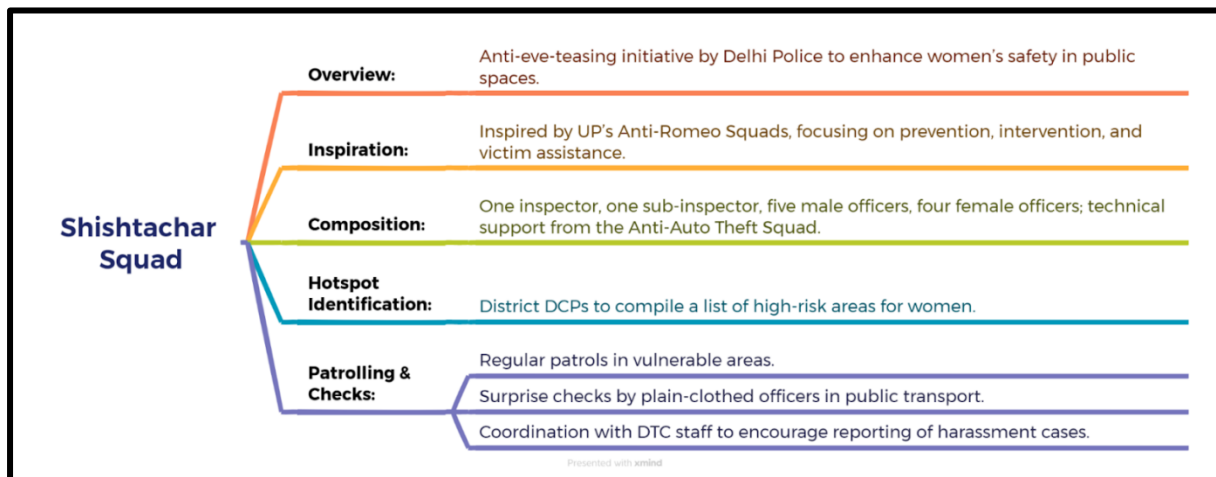
- PM-YUVA 3.0 (Prime Minister's Scheme for Mentoring Young Authors) is an initiative launched by the Ministry of Education.
- The scheme is designed to nurture and mentor young authors (below 30 years of age) in India.
- Its objective is to promote reading, writing, and book culture while showcasing Indian literature on a global stage.
- **Key Objectives**
 - Mentorship of Young Authors: The scheme aims to train and guide young talents in the field of writing, fostering their creativity and literary skills.
 - Promotion of Indian Literature: It aims to project Indian literature globally, reflecting the country's diverse culture, heritage, and intellectual contributions.
 - Support for Young Minds: The scheme also aligns with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, focusing on the empowerment of young minds and nurturing future leaders.
- **Themes of the Scheme**

- Contribution of Indian Diaspora in Nation Building: Focuses on the role of the Indian diaspora in shaping the modern nation.
- Indian Knowledge System: Encourages exploration of India's ancient and contemporary knowledge traditions, including philosophy, science, and arts.
- Makers of Modern India (1950-2025): Highlights the contributions of various personalities and movements that have shaped India's post-independence trajectory.
- **Implementing Agency:** The National Book Trust (NBT), under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for implementing the PM-YUVA 3.0 scheme.
 - NBT will oversee the training programs, publication, and translation of books under this scheme.

Delhi Police to create 'Shishtachar' squads to check harassment of women in public spaces

WHY IN NEWS?

Delhi Police will launch dedicated squads, 'Shishtachar (etiquette)', to check sexual harassment of women in public places.



Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) ID

WHY IN NEWS?

Activists and parents are worried about the rapid push by schools to generate an APAAR ID. APAAR is part of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020's record-keeping reforms, and while it is voluntary, States and school authorities have pushed students to enrol in it.

The Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) ID

- The Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) ID is a 12-digit ID system introduced under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, designed to standardize student records across educational institutions.
- It aligns with the National Credit Framework and aims to create a "One Nation, One Student ID" system for streamlined academic records and seamless transitions between educational levels.
- **Key Features**
 - **Standardization of Academic Records:**

- APAAR assigns a unique 12-digit ID to each student, which serves as a permanent academic record.
- The ID is linked to platforms like DigiLocker and the Academic Bank of Credits for efficient storage, retrieval, and verification of academic data.
- **Integration Across Educational Levels:**
 - The ID facilitates smooth transitions between different levels of education, such as school, higher education, and skill institutes.
 - It allows schools, higher education institutions, and skill institutes to access verified academic records for admissions and recruitment purposes.
- **DigiLocker and Academic Bank of Credits:**
 - Academic records associated with the APAAR ID will be stored in DigiLocker and the Academic Bank of Credits, ensuring easy access and secure verification.
- **Linkage to Aadhaar:**
 - The APAAR ID system is linked to Aadhaar for verification purposes, helping to avoid duplicate records and ensure data consistency across platforms.

Habitual offender laws

WHY IN NEWS?

Months after the Supreme Court of India questioned the need for decade-old laws that have classified a section of criminals as “habitual offenders” across India, the Government of India has revealed in Parliament that such laws continue to operate in as many as 14 States and Union Territories

Habitual Offender Laws in India

- Habitual Offender Laws allow state authorities to monitor individuals convicted repeatedly for certain crimes.
- These laws were meant to control repeat offenders but have faced heavy criticism for disproportionately affecting denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes (DNT, NT, SNT), historically labeled as "criminal tribes" under British rule.
- **Colonial Legislation:**
 - Regulation XXII (1793): Granted powers to imprison or force labour based on suspicion.
 - Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871: Allowed declaring entire communities as "criminal by birth."
 - Post-Independence: After the repeal of CTA in 1952, Habitual Offender Acts were introduced, continuing to target DNTs.
 - **October 2024:** The Supreme Court expressed concern over the classification of habitual offenders, especially when it discriminates against entire communities.
- **Crimes Under Habitual Offender Laws**
 - States classify habitual offenders based on prior convictions for crimes like:
 - Being a thug
 - Belonging to a gang of dacoits
 - Living off prostitution
 - Lurking
 - Laws involve maintaining offender registers, echoing practices under the CTA.
- **Impact on Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs)**

- **Historical Stigma:** Despite formal denotification, DNTs face police surveillance, social exclusion, and lack of access to education and employment.
- **Notable Incidents:** Budhan Sabar's custodial death (1998) sparked national outrage and led to calls for the repeal of such laws.
- **Activist Push:** Reports by the B.S. Renke Commission (2008) and the Xaxa Committee (2014) highlighted continued marginalization of DNTs due to these laws.

PAC members flag failure of Swadesh Darshan scheme - The Hindu

PAC members flag failure of Swadesh Darshan scheme

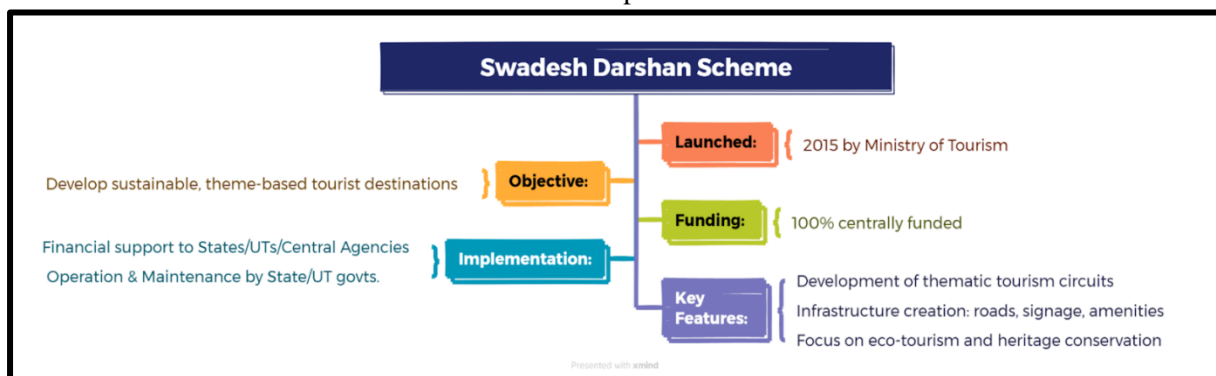
As many as 76 projects were sanctioned under the scheme between 2014-15 and 2018-19 for ₹5,292.57 crore; panel says it is dissatisfied by the Tourism Ministry's response to its review of the CAG report on the scheme

WHY IN NEWS?

Members of the Public Accounts Committee headed by senior Congress leader K.C. Venugopal slammed the Union Tourism ministry for shoddy implementation of its flagship scheme — “Swadesh Darshan” — launched in 2014-15.

Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

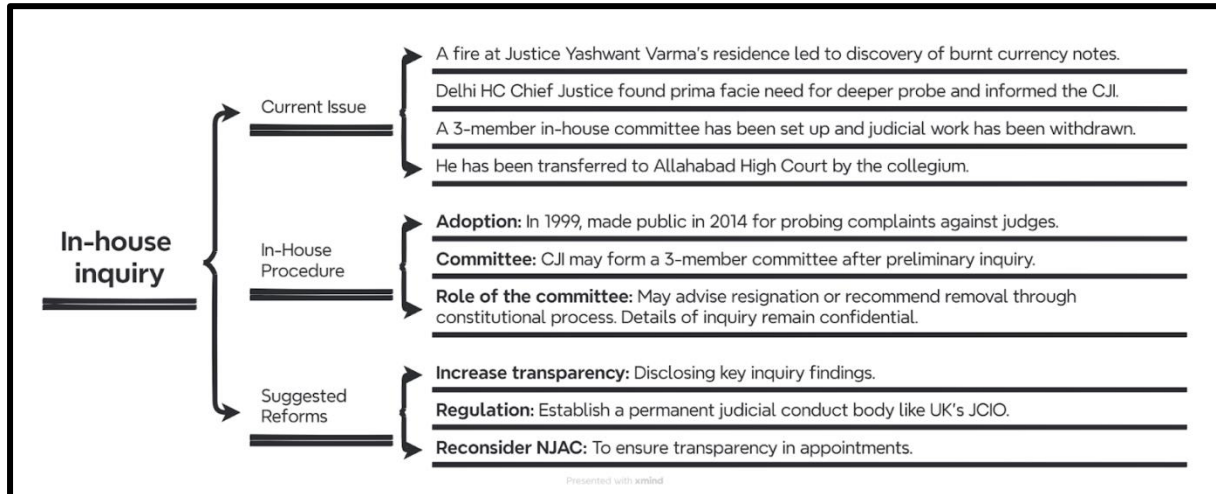
- **Established:** 1921 (oldest parliamentary committee)
- **Purpose:** Audits government revenue and expenditure to ensure legality and efficiency.
- **Key Functions:**
 - Examines CAG audit reports.
 - Ensures Parliament-sanctioned funds are properly spent.
 - Investigates financial irregularities and inefficiencies.
- **Membership:**
 - 22 members (15 Lok Sabha, 7 Rajya Sabha)
 - Chairperson: Lok Sabha MP (traditionally from Opposition)
 - Tenure: 1 year
 - Ministers excluded from membership



How is an in-house inquiry conducted?

WHY IN NEWS?

The Chief Justice of India (CJI) has constituted an in-house committee to conduct an inquiry into allegations of misconduct against Justice Yashwant Varma. This follows recovery of huge piles of cash at his residence during a fire-control operation.




NJAC VS COLLEGIUM SYSTEM

WHAT'S COLLEGIUM SYSTEM

- Collegium system based on Three Judges Cases
- Under it, appointment of judges are made by Chief Justice of India and four most senior Supreme Court judges.
- Has no constitutional backing.
- Constitution of India's Article 124 says appointments to be made by President in consultation with judges as President may deem necessary.
- Critics say it is a closed-door system which lacks transparency

WHAT'S NJAC

- NJAC was a body created to end the two-decade-old Supreme Court Collegium system of judges appointing judges.
- Was passed by Lok Sabha on August 13, 2014. Was passed by Rajya Sabha a day later.
- Will consist of six people – CJI, two senior-most Supreme Court judges, Law Minister and two 'eminent' persons.
- Critics say judges in NJAC will need support of others to push a name through. They fear judicial independence being compromised.



Judges' assets

WHY IN NEWS?

The discovery of wads of cash at the residence of Delhi High Court judge Justice has raised concerns regarding corruption in India's higher judiciary. It has given impetus to those arguing for the public disclosure of judges' assets and liabilities. Unlike other public servants, judges are not bound to make this information public, and in the majority of cases, they have not done so.

Provisions for Declaration of Assets by Judges

- **All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968**
 - Rule 16(1): Mandates that every civil servant must submit an annual return of their assets and liabilities.
 - Relevance to Judges: Though judges are not civil servants, their pay structure is linked to civil service pay scales (especially at Secretary level).
 - This has led to comparisons and arguments that similar accountability norms (like asset declarations) should also apply to judges.
- **Restatement of Values of Judicial Life, 1997**
 - Adopted by the Supreme Court as a moral and ethical code for judges.
 - **Provision:** Every judge must declare all assets (real estate, investments, etc.) held by themselves, their spouses and dependents
 - Declaration to be made to the Chief Justice, not the public.
- **Supreme Court Resolution, 2009**
 - Judges agreed to declare their assets on the Supreme Court's official website.
 - Nature: Voluntary, not mandatory.
 - Meant to promote transparency while respecting judicial independence.
- **Delhi High Court Resolution, 2009**
 - All Delhi High Court judges agreed to disclose their assets publicly.
 - This initiative supported the broader call for voluntary disclosure by members of the judiciary.
- **Other Constitutional Authorities**
 - CAG, Council of Ministers, Union Ministers regularly declare their assets.
 - MPs/MLAs also disclose assets, particularly during elections.
 - This sets a precedent and expectation that judges too should follow similar disclosure norms.

Why Judges Should Disclose Assets

- **Transparency:** Judges oversee laws, policies, and major tenders — same standards as elected officials should apply.
- **Public Trust:** Reinforces impartiality, strengthens people's faith in the judiciary.
- **RTI Compliance:** SC ruled CJI's office is a public authority; judicial conduct must reflect openness.
- **Perception Matters:** Lack of disclosure could damage the judiciary's image of integrity.

The controversy over the Bodh Gaya temple

WHY IN NEWS?

Nearly 100 Buddhist monks under the All India Buddhist Forum (AIBF) have been protesting recently, first at the Bodh Gaya's Mahabodhi Temple or Mahavihara, and later a little down the road, demanding a repeal of the Bodh Gaya Temple Act (BTA), 1949.

Protests Over the Bodh Gaya Temple Act (BTA)

- November 2023: Buddhist monks held a rally in Gaya and submitted a memorandum to the Central and State governments.
- The protest escalated to a rally in Patna after no action was taken.
- In 2012, monks filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court to repeal the Act, which remains unheard.

