

9. Short News -

1. ECI Guidelines for EVM Ballot Papers

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has revised its guidelines under Rule 49B of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961. The aim is to make the ballot papers used in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) clearer and more readable for voters.

Key Changes in EVM Ballot Papers -

Candidate Photographs - Colour photographs of candidates will now be printed directly on the ballot papers, starting with the upcoming Bihar elections.

Photo Size & Visibility - The candidate's face will occupy three-fourths of the photograph space to ensure better visibility and easy recognition.

Numerals - Serial numbers for candidates and NOTA will be printed in the international form of Indian numerals, in bold font with a size of 30.

Uniformity - The names of all candidates and NOTA will be printed in the same font type and size to maintain uniformity and prevent any visual bias.

Paper Quality - Ballot papers will now be printed on higher quality 70 GSM paper for better durability.

Colour Coding - For Assembly Elections, ballot papers will use a specific shade of pink, with defined RGB values to ensure consistency.

About Rule 49B - Preparation of Voting Machine -

This rule mandates that the Returning Officer is responsible for preparing the EVM.

Key duties include displaying candidate details in the specified language, ensuring names appear in the same order as the official list, and distinguishing between candidates with similar names using identifiers like occupation or residence.

Significance - These reforms are part of 28 key initiatives undertaken by the ECI in the last six months to streamline election processes and improve voter convenience.

2. Ebola Virus Disease (EVD)

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported a recent outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with 48 confirmed Ebola cases and 31 deaths.

About Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) -

Definition - Ebola is a severe and often fatal viral illness in humans and other primates.

Discovery - The virus was first discovered in 1976 in the Democratic Republic of Congo and is named after the Ebola River, near where the first outbreak occurred.

Causative Agent - It is caused by viruses belonging to the genus *orthoebolavirus*.

Natural Host - Fruit bats of the Pteropodidae family are considered the natural reservoirs of the Ebola virus.

Transmission -

Animal-to-Human - The virus spreads to humans through direct contact with the blood, secretions, organs, or other bodily fluids of infected animals like bats, chimpanzees, gorillas, and monkeys.

Human-to-Human - It spreads among humans through direct contact with the body fluids of an infected person (or someone who has died from the disease).

Treatment and Cure -

Medical Care - There is no permanent cure for Ebola. Treatment focuses on supportive care, including balancing fluids and electrolytes, and blood transfusions.

Approved Medicines - Two monoclonal antibody treatments, Inmazeb and Ebanga, have been approved by the US FDA for treating EVD.

3. India-AI Impact Summit 2026

The Government of India has unveiled the official logo and key initiatives for the upcoming India-AI Impact Summit 2026. The summit is scheduled to be held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, in February 2026.

About the Summit –

Global Context – The summit builds on the momentum of previous global AI summits held at Bletchley Park (UK, 2023), Seoul (South Korea, 2024), and Paris (France, 2025).

Strategic Shift – It marks a significant shift in focus from "Action" (the theme of the Paris summit) to "Impact."

Objective – The summit aims to showcase AI's role in inclusive development and position India as a global leader in responsible AI innovation.

Host – It will be hosted by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

Three Sutras (Guiding Principles) –

People – AI must serve humanity and ensure no one is left behind.

Planet – AI must align with global sustainability and climate resilience goals.

Progress – AI must ensure equitable benefits and democratize access to resources.

Seven Thematic Chakras (Focus Areas) – The summit will focus on seven key themes, including Human Capital, Inclusion for Social Empowerment, Safe and Trusted AI, Democratizing AI Resources, and AI for Economic Development.

Key Government AI Initiatives Announced –

1. Launch of Eight Indigenous Foundational Models in sectors like healthcare and agriculture.
2. Establishment of 30 Data & AI Labs under the IndiaAI Mission.
3. Expansion of the IndiaAI Fellowship Program to support 13,500 scholars.
4. A series of flagship events, including an AI Pitch Fest (UDAAN) and the YuvaAI Innovation Challenge.

4. Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR)

A State Finance Inspection report has uncovered large-scale financial irregularities at the Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR) in Kerala, including the unauthorized diversion of tourism revenue.

About Periyar Tiger Reserve –

Location – PTR is located in the Idukki district of Kerala in the southern Western Ghats, across the Cardamom and Pandalam Hills.

Genesis – The reserve was created in 1895 following the construction of the Mullaperiyar Dam and is named after the Periyar River.

Hydrology – The Periyar and Pamba rivers drain the reserve. The Mullaperiyar Dam is situated within its boundaries.

Tribal Communities – It is home to several indigenous tribes, including the Mannans and Palians.

Vegetation – The reserve boasts diverse vegetation, including tropical evergreen, moist deciduous forests, grasslands, and eucalyptus plantations.

Fauna – It is a habitat for major fauna such as elephants, tigers, gaurs, sambar deer, and wild dogs. It also supports rare primates like the lion-tailed macaque and the elusive Nilgiri Tahr.

5. Swasth Nari, Sashakt Parivar Abhiyan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Swasth Nari, Sashakt Parivar Abhiyan and the 8th Rashtriya Poshan Maah Campaign in Madhya Pradesh.

About the Abhiyan –

Scale – This marks the largest-ever health outreach program for women and children in India.

Leadership – It is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) and the Ministry of Women & Child Development (MoWCD).

Aim – To provide women-centric preventive, promotive, and curative health services at the community level.

Implementation – The campaign will involve organizing over 10 lakh health camps at Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and other government health facilities nationwide.

Significance – It aims to strengthen the screening, early detection, and treatment for non-communicable diseases, anemia, tuberculosis, and sickle cell disease, while also promoting maternal and child health.

6. International Criminal Court (ICC)

Qatar has met with the president of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to explore legal action against Israel following a recent Israeli strike on its territory that targeted Hamas leaders.

Qatar's Position – As an observer state, Qatar cannot directly refer cases to the ICC. However, it is exploring all available legal and diplomatic options to hold Israel accountable.

About the ICC –

Mandate – The ICC is the world's first permanent court established to investigate and try individuals for the most serious crimes of international concern, such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Location – The seat of the Court is in The Hague, Netherlands.

Functioning – The ICC acts as a court of last resort. It complements, rather than replaces, national courts. It has no police force and relies on the cooperation of states worldwide for arrests and enforcement.

Governing Statute – The court is governed by the Rome Statute.

