



## **CURRENTLY: 19 JUNE**

**1. Only 10% of poll candidates since 2023 were women**

**Source: The Hindu | Page: 4**

**GS-II: Polity & Governance → Women's Political Representation / Electoral Reforms**

**2. Telegram challenge puts spotlight on Section 69A of IT Act**

**Source: The Hindu | Page: 14**

**GS-II: Governance → Digital Governance, Freedom of Speech & Intermediary Liability**

**3. RBI removes interest rate ceiling on NRE & FCNR(B) deposits**

**Source: The Indian Express (Explained) | Date: 18 June**

**GS-III: Economy → External Sector, Banking & Balance of Payments (BoP)**

**4. Exercise KHAAN QUEST 2026**

**Source: PIB | Date: 18 June**

**GS-III: Security → Defence Exercises & UN Peacekeeping**

**5. Advancing Electrolyte Engineering for Durable & Affordable Aqueous Batteries**

**Source: PIB | Date: 18 June**

**GS-III: Science & Technology → Energy Storage, Batteries & Fuel Cells**

# 'Only 10% of 31,429 poll candidates since 2023 were women'

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

Since the passage of the **Women's Reservation Bill in 2023**, Assembly polls have been held in 20 States and Union Territories (UTs). Out of a total of 31,429 candidates who contested in these polls, only 3,273 (10.2%) were women.

The proportion of women candidates did not exceed 14% across these States and Union Territories, according to an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms.

**The Women's Reservation Bill mandates that 33% seats be reserved for women.**

In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, held months after the passage of the Bill, out of 8,360 candidates analysed, only 800 (9.6%) were women and 152 (28%) in 543 constituencies had

zero women candidates, the report said.

Assemblies which had the highest number of women candidates were Odisha (2024) at 13.9%, Delhi (2025) at 13.7% and Puducherry (2026) at 13.6%. Arunachal Pradesh (2024) and Jammu and Kashmir (2024) recorded the lowest participation, with women constituting only 4.9% of the total candidates.

## **Benchmark not met**

As far as the Lok Sabha polls were concerned, no political party met the one-third (33%) benchmark for women candidates in the 2024 general election.

While the Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian National Congress fielded women candidates in the range of 13%-16%, several State parties recorded substantially higher levels of female representation.

Consider the following statements regarding

'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam' :

1. Provisions will come into effect from the 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha.
2. This will be in force for 15 years after becoming an Act.
3. There are provisions for the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes Women within the quota reserved for the Scheduled Castes.

Which of the statements given above are correct ?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1 and 3 only



1. **Context:** An analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) found that women's participation in electoral politics remains significantly low despite the enactment of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, highlighting the gap between constitutional commitment and actual political representation.

## 2. **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023 (106th Constitutional Amendment Act)**

\* Provides 33% reservation for women in:

- \* Lok Sabha
- \* State Legislative Assemblies
- \* Delhi Legislative Assembly

\* Includes reservation for SC/ST women within existing SC/ST reserved seats.

\* Article 330A (Reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha).

\* Article 332A (Reservation of seats for women in State Legislative Assemblies).

\* Article 334A (Implementation, rotation and duration of reservation).

\* Will be implemented after the first Census conducted after the Act and the subsequent delimitation exercise.

\* Reservation will operate for 15 years (extendable by Parliament).

\* Not applicable to Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils.

### 3. Mains Value Addition

- \* **ADR Data:** Women constituted only 10.2% of candidates (3,273 of 31,429) in elections held after the enactment of the Act.
- \* In the **2024 Lok Sabha election**, women constituted only 9.6% of total candidates.
- \* **152 Lok Sabha** constituencies ( $\approx 28\%$ ) had no woman candidate.
- \* Major parties remained far below the 33% benchmark:
  - \* **INC:**  $\sim 14\%$  women candidates
  - \* **BJP:**  $\sim 13\%$  women candidates
- \* **18th Lok Sabha:** 74 women MPs (13.6%) — highest-ever in absolute numbers.
- \* Women constitute nearly 50% of India's population, but parliamentary representation remains below 15%.
- \* **Global Gender Gap Report 2025:**
  - \* Overall Rank: 129/146
  - \* Political Empowerment Rank: 48/146
- \* **Women's reservation already exists at the grassroots level:**
  - \* Article 243D (Panchayats)
  - \* Article 243T (Urban Local Bodies)
  - \* Constitutional minimum: 33% reservation; many States provide 50% reservation.
  - \* More than 14 lakh elected women representatives serve in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

# Telegram challenge once again puts spotlight on Section 69A of IT Act

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Rizmi Lia M.**

CHENNAI

The Centre's move to block Telegram has once again drawn attention to Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, a provision that gives the government the power to direct intermediaries to block access to online information under specified circumstances.

The temporary ban on the platform, which was initially misused for the medical entrance examination paper leak and misinformation campaigns, was aimed at curbing another paper leak during the NEET-UG retest. Telegram has approached the Delhi High Court challenging the ban, which is set to last till June 22, and the judgment has been reserved.

Section 69A of the IT Act



Telegram has approached the Delhi HC challenging the ban, which is set to last till June 22.

authorises the Union government to block public access to any information via any computer resource, including applications and websites, if it is satisfied that such blocking is necessary "in the interest of India's sovereignty and integrity, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence".

But the restriction may interfere with Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution, which protects freedom of speech and expression. Therefore, the orders under Section 69A must be issued with the procedural safeguards established by the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking Access to Information by the Public) Rules, 2009.

In *Anuradha Bhasin v Union of India*, the Supreme Court examined the validity of the indefinite blanket ban on internet services in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir, and the court held that freedom of speech and expression, as well as freedom to practice any profession or carry on any trade, business, or occupation over the internet, are protected by Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(g). The court also concluded that orders restricting internet access must

meet the proportionality test: they must be required, use the least restrictive measures available, and be open to judicial review.

Article 19(1)(g) provides the right to practice any profession or to engage in any occupation, trade, or business. A ban on a platform that has about 150 million users in India will disrupt many creators, educators, and entrepreneurs running broadcast groups, and prevent them from maintaining communication with their subscribers. It thus limits one's ability to earn a living.

Section 79 of the IT Act also establishes intermediary safe harbour provision, which means platforms are not liable for third-party content if they exercise due diligence, follow the Information Technology Rules, 2021, and act quickly upon receiving knowledge of illegal content.

1. **Context:** The Centre's action against Telegram over the NEET paper leak and misinformation has revived the debate on balancing **NATIONAL SECURITY & PUBLIC ORDER** with **DIGITAL RIGHTS & FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**.

## 2. Legal Framework

**Section 69A, IT Act, 2000** → Central Government can block online content on **grounds** of: Sovereignty & Integrity | Defence | Security of State | Friendly Relations | Public Order | Incitement to cognizable offence

**Rights Involved:** Article 19(1)(a) (Free Speech) | Article 19(1)(g) (Trade/Business)

## 3. Section 79 & SC Safeguards

**Section 79 (Safe Harbour)** → Protects intermediaries if they follow due diligence (grievance officer | compliance with legal orders | cooperation with law enforcement).

**Shreya Singhal (2015)** → Upheld Section 69A; struck down Section 66A.

**Anuradha Bhasin (2020)** → Restrictions must be necessary, proportionate and least restrictive.

# RBI lifts interest rate ceiling on NRE & FCNR(B) deposits

George Mathew  
Mumbai, June 17

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) has decided to temporarily withdraw interest rate restriction on non-resident external (NRE) deposits of 3 year and above tenors in a move aimed at attracting more capital inflows and stabilising the rupee. The central bank has also withdrawn the interest rate ceiling on fresh FCNR(B) deposits of 3-5 year tenors.

The restriction with respect to interest rates offered on fresh NRE deposits mobilised by banks, including the deposits that are renewed upon maturity, for three years and above tenors, is temporarily withdrawn with effect from June 17, 2026, for the period until September 30, 2026, it said. "Any transfer from NRO accounts to NRE accounts shall not qualify for such exemption."

An NRE account allows a customer to deposit foreign currency, which is maintained in Indian rupees. It offers the benefit of allowing both principal and interest to be freely transferred abroad at any time. With the latest relaxation, banks are expecting more inflows through the NRE accounts as well, said a bank official.

Banks reported \$7.94 billion outstanding in 2025-26 under the NRE deposit scheme, according to RBI data. However, under the FCNR(B), the out-

## • BOOSTING DEPOSITS

**MOVE AIMED** at attracting more capital inflows and stabilise the rupee ✓

**NRE ACCOUNT** allows a customer to deposit foreign currency, which is maintained in Indian rupees, and offers the unique benefit of allowing both principal and interest to be freely transferred abroad at any time ✓

**CURRENTLY, INTEREST** rates on non-resident external and NRO deposits should not be higher than those offered by the bank on



comparable domestic rupee term deposits

standing was only \$946 million in FY26.

On June 5, the RBI announced a concessional foreign exchange swap facility on FCNR(B) deposits until September 30, 2026 to encourage external commercial borrowings (ECBs) by public sector firms. At the core, the RBI is effectively lowering the hedging and funding cost of borrowing in foreign currency, enabling banks to raise cheaper funds abroad.

"The interest rate ceiling applicable to fresh FCNR(B) deposits mobilised by banks, including the deposits that are renewed upon maturity, for three years and above-up to and including five years tenors, is temporarily withdrawn with

effect from June 17, 2026, for the period until September 30, 2026," it said in a notification.

The relaxation includes NRE deposits that are renewed upon maturity, from the date of this Amendment Directions till September 30, 2026, the RBI said.

Banks have started offering higher interest rates on FCNR(B) deposits with many offering around 7% rate. "We estimate around \$30-50 billion of inflows from this scheme in CY26, all of which we expect to materialize by Q3 (July-September). Some state and private sector banks have already raised the FCNR (B) deposit rates by around 2-4%," Goldman Sachs said in a report. ✓

FULL REPORT ON

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Consider the following :

1. Foreign currency convertible bonds
2. Foreign institutional investment with certain conditions
3. Global depository receipts
4. Non-resident external deposits (NRE)

Which of the above can be included in Foreign Direct Investments?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 2 and 4
- (d) 1 and 4



1. **Context:** RBI has relaxed interest rate regulations on select NRI deposits to attract higher foreign currency inflows, strengthen forex reserves and improve external sector stability.

## 2. **NRI Deposit Accounts**

### (i) **Non-Resident External (NRE) Account**

- \* Foreign currency deposited by an NRI is converted into Indian Rupees.
- \* Fully repatriable.
- \* Exchange rate risk borne by depositor.

### (ii) **Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) [FCNR(B)] Account**

- \* Deposit maintained in foreign currency itself (USD, Euro, GBP, Yen, etc.).
- \* Fully repatriable.
- \* No exchange rate risk.

### (iii) **Non-Resident Ordinary (NRO) Account**

- \* Used for income earned in India (rent, pension, dividend, etc.).
- \* Maintained in Indian Rupees.
- \* Repatriation subject to prescribed conditions.

**Prelims Fact:** FCNR(A) was discontinued in 1993; only FCNR(B) is operational.

### 3. RBI Relaxation & BoP Linkage

#### Earlier

- \* NRE deposit rates were linked to comparable domestic term deposit rates.
- \* FCNR(B) deposit rates were capped with reference to international benchmark rates (SOFR and related benchmarks) plus a prescribed spread.

#### Now (till 30 Sept 2026)

- \* Interest rate ceiling removed on NRE deposits (3 years & above).
- \* Interest rate ceiling removed on FCNR(B) deposits (3–5 years).

#### Significance

- \* Higher NRI deposit mobilisation.
- \* Greater foreign exchange inflows.
- \* Stronger forex reserves.
- \* Improved external sector stability.

# INDIAN ARMY CONTINGENT SET TO DEPART FOR MULTILATERAL MILITARY EXERCISE KHAAN QUEST

Posted On: 18 JUN 2026 5:01PM by PIB Delhi

The Indian Army contingent is set to depart today to participate in the multilateral joint military exercise - Exercise KHAAN QUEST. The Exercise is scheduled to be conducted from 20 June to 03 July 2026 at Five Hills Training Area, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The Exercise will bring together military forces from across the world to collaborate and enhance interoperability in peace support operations under Chapter VII of United Nations Charter. The previous edition of the exercise was conducted from 14-28 June 2025 at Mongolia.

The exercise first started as a bilateral event between USA and Mongolian Defence Forces in the year 2003. Subsequently, from the year 2006 onwards the exercise graduated to a Multilateral Peacekeeping Exercise with current one being the 23<sup>rd</sup> iteration. The participation by an Indian contingent reflects India's steadfast commitment to global peace and strategic partnership with Mongolia.

The Indian Army contingent comprising 40 personnel is being represented by troops from a Battalion of the JAT REGIMENT along with personnel from other Arms and Services.

The aim of Exercise KHAAN QUEST is to prepare contingents of participating Defence Forces for peacekeeping missions while operating in a multilateral environment. The exercise will focus on conduct of joint planning and tactical drills such as establishment of static and mobile check points, cordon and search operations, patrolling, evacuation of civilians from hostile area, counter improvised explosive device drills, combat first aid and casualty evacuation.

Exercise KHAAN QUEST will enable the participating countries to share their best practices in tactics, techniques and procedures for conduct of joint operations. The exercise will facilitate operational readiness, bonhomie and camaraderie between soldiers of the participating countries.



Which of the following statements about 'Exercise Mitra Shakti-2023' are correct ?

1. This was a joint military exercise between India and Bangladesh.
2. It commenced in Aundh (Pune).
3. Joint response during counter-terrorism operations was a goal of this operation.
4. Indian Air Force was a part of this exercise.

Select the answer using the code given below :

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
- (b) 1, 2 and 4
- (c) 1, 3 and 4
- (d) 2, 3 and 4

1. **Context:** Indian Army contingent will participate in **Exercise KHAAN QUEST 2026** from 20 June–3 July 2026 at Five Hills Training Area, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

## 2. **KHAAN QUEST**

- \* **Host:** Mongolia (Five Hills Training Area, Ulaanbaatar)
- \* **Started in 2003** as a USA–Mongolia bilateral exercise.
- \* Became a **multilateral exercise in 2006**.
- \* **2026 edition:** 23rd Edition.
- \* Conducted under UN Peace Support Operations (Chapter VII, UN Charter).
- \* **India:** 40 Army personnel, primarily from the JAT Regiment.

# Advancing electrolyte engineering for durable and affordable aqueous batteries

Posted On: 18 JUN 2026 3:21PM by PIB Delhi

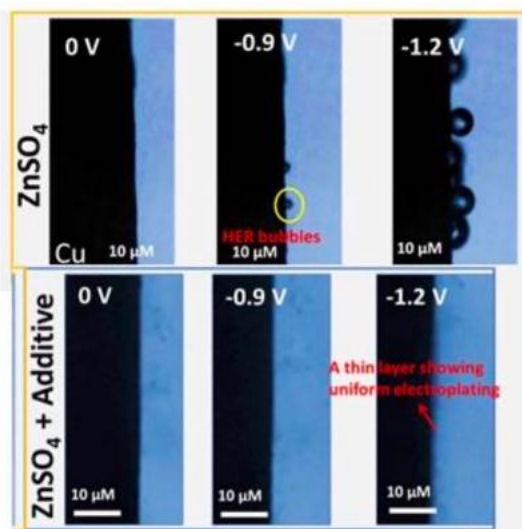
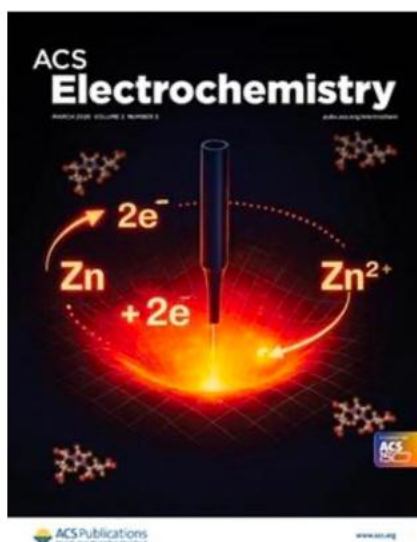
A newly developed electrolyte additive can contribute to the development of safer, longer-lasting, and more affordable rechargeable zinc batteries.

Aqueous zinc ion batteries (AZIBs) are emerging as a low-cost, safe, and sustainable alternatives to lithium-ion batteries. However, their commercialization is hindered by zinc dendrite growth, hydrogen evolution reaction (HER), corrosion, and poor cycling stability. This study addresses these critical challenges through interface engineering rather than expensive material redesign. The work provides a practical and scalable strategy for extending battery life while maintaining safety and low cost, which is essential for large-scale renewable energy storage applications.

Researchers have been working on ways to increase zinc anode stability and the importance of the electric double layer and the role of the layer Inner Helmholtz Plane where electrochemical reactions actually occur in it.

Scientists from Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST), an autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) have developed electrolyte additive, 1,3-bis (1,3-dicarboxypropyl)-1H-imidazole-3-ium chloride (BDIM), that selectively adsorbs on zinc metal surfaces and regulates the Inner Helmholtz Plane (IHP) of aqueous zinc ion batteries (AZIBs).

They dissolved Glutamic acid in sodium hydroxide (NaOH) and water, followed by the addition of glyoxal, formaldehyde, and acetic acid. The mixture was heated at 70 °C under nitrogen for 24 hours and then extracted and lyophilized to obtain a crystalline powder of BDIM.



**Fig:** (Left) Cover image of the work accepted in ACS Electrochemistry showing how electrolyte additive controls the Zn surface. (Right) Comparison of the effect of the BDIM additive on the zinc anode surface in suppressing HER

In the context of electric vehicle batteries, consider the following elements :

- I. Cobalt
- II. Graphite
- III. Lithium
- IV. Nickel

How many of the above usually make up battery cathodes?

- (a) Only one                      (b) Only two
- (c) Only three                    (d) All the four

With reference to 'fuel cells' in which hydrogen-rich fuel and oxygen are used to generate electricity, consider the following statements :

1. If pure hydrogen is used as a fuel, the fuel cell emits heat and water as by-products.
2. Fuel cells can be used for powering buildings and not for small devices like laptop computers.
3. Fuel cells produce electricity in the form of Alternating Current (AC).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Consider the following :

1. Battery storage
2. Biomass generators
3. Fuel cells
4. Rooftop solar photovoltaic units

How many of the above are considered “Distributed Energy Resources” ?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

1. **Context:** Scientists at Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST), Mohali have developed a new electrolyte additive (BDIM) that enhances the performance of Aqueous Zinc-Ion Batteries (AZIBs), making them safer, cheaper and more durable for large-scale energy storage.

## 2. Battery Basics

Battery = Anode + Cathode + Electrolyte

- \* Anode (-): Releases electrons; commonly Graphite in Li-ion batteries.
- \* Cathode (+): Receives electrons; commonly contains Lithium, Cobalt and Nickel compounds.
- \* Electrolyte: Medium through which ions move between electrodes.

**Aqueous Zinc-Ion Battery (AZIB)** → Zinc Anode + Water-based Electrolyte; safer and cheaper than conventional lithium-ion batteries.

## 3. Innovation & Significance

**Challenge:** Zinc dendrites, corrosion and hydrogen evolution reduce battery life.

**Innovation:** BDIM additive forms a protective layer on zinc, suppressing these side reactions.

**Significance:** Longer Life | Improved Safety | Lower Cost | Renewable Energy Storage | Grid-Scale Storage

## 4. **PYQ Linkages**

### **Fuel Cell vs Battery**

**Battery:** Stores chemical energy internally; requires recharging/replacement after depletion.

**Fuel Cell:** Does not store energy; continuously generates electricity as long as fuel (e.g., Hydrogen) is supplied.

**Hydrogen Fuel Cell Output:** Electricity + Water + Heat

**Distributed Energy Resources (DERs):**

\* Decentralised energy generation/storage systems located near consumers, reducing dependence on large centralised power plants.

\* **Examples:** Rooftop Solar PV | Battery Energy Storage Systems | Fuel Cells | Small Wind Turbines | Biomass Generators