GREEN ELECTIONS - GS II MAINS

Q. Enumerate the environmental hazards associated with the traditional elections and bring out the prospects of green elections in India. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Stop the dithering and encourage green elections in India*

What's in the news?

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has expressed apprehension regarding the environmental hazards linked with the utilization of non-biodegradable materials in electoral processes.

Environmental Impact of Traditional Elections:

1. Campaign Flights Carbon Emissions:

- Emissions from campaign flights contribute significantly to the carbon footprint.
- Example: In the 2016 US presidential elections, one candidate's campaign flights equaled the annual carbon footprint of 500 Americans.

2. Deforestation and Paper Usage:

- Reliance on paper-based materials for ballots, campaign literature, and administrative documents leads to deforestation.
- Production processes are energy-intensive.

3. Energy Consumption:

- Large-scale election rallies with energy-consuming equipment contribute to energy consumption and emissions.

4. Waste Generation:

- Disposable items used during campaigns add to waste generation and environmental impact.

Concept of Green Elections:

1. Eco-Friendly Campaign Materials:

- Adopt sustainable alternatives like recycled paper and biodegradable banners.

2. Reducing Energy Consumption:

- Option for energy-efficient lighting, sound systems, and transportation during rallies.

3. Promoting Digital Campaigns:

- Use digital platforms to reduce paper usage and energy consumption.

Eco-friendly Electoral Initiatives:

1. Kerala's Green Campaign:

- Ban on single-use plastics during campaigns.
- Promotion of sustainable alternatives like wall graffiti and paper posters.

2. Goa's Eco-Friendly Booths:
- Introduction of eco-friendly election booths constructed using biodegradable materials by local artisans.

3. Sri Lanka's Carbon-Sensitive Campaign:
- Measurement and offsetting of carbon emissions from campaign activities.
- Tree planting initiatives to offset emissions.

4. Estonia's Digital Voting Revolution:
- Introduction of digital voting to reduce environmental impact.

Challenges in Adoption of Green Elections:
1. Access to New Technologies and Training:
- Training election officials and ensuring equitable access to technology.

2. Financial Constraints:
- Upfront costs of implementing eco-friendly materials and advanced technology.

3. Cultural Inertia and Voter Behaviour:
- Convincing voters of the validity and security of digital alternatives.

4. Security Concerns:
- Addressing cybersecurity risks and building trust in new systems.

Way Forward:
1. Involvement of Stakeholders:
- Collaboration among political parties, Election Commissions, governments, voters, media, and civil society.

2. Top-Down Directives and Grassroots Initiatives:
- Integration of top-level directives with grassroots initiatives for a green transition.

3. Role of Political Parties:
- Enactment of legislation mandating eco-friendly electoral practices.
- Encouragement of digital campaigning and sustainable practices.

4. Supporting Digital Voting:
- Education and support for voters.
- Equitable access to digital technology.

- Training and capacity building for officials.

5. Promotion of Sustainable Practices:
- Incentivizing the use of sustainable materials for polling booths.
- Waste management and support for local artisans.