



# The Hindu News Analysis

**BAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY**

# Regime change in Syria and fall of Bashar al Assad

## An unravelling in Syria

Crisis could mean the decline of Iranian and Russian influence in the Levant, with rising American — and by extension, Israeli — stakes in the region



**SYIED ATA HASSAIN**

THE SPREAD of which the situation in Syria has spiralled into anarchy defies all logic. With the instability of the best surveillance systems, eyes in the sky, state-of-the-art capabilities and artificial intelligence, there should hardly be scope for strategic surprise in the world of military and quasi-military affairs. Yet, with uncanny frequency, turbulence flows under the scanner to burst out with a vengeance. We see well past the stage where one could tentatively explain the backdrop of this highly complex problem which has the potential to engulf the entire region in the Middle East. The number of players in the fray, along with ideologies and multiple other interests, complicate the situation beyond measure.



A brief recall might be necessary. The rise here is the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime which empowered the Arab Spring. The latter has been in power in one form or another since 1983. Syria has largely been a secular society, while practising Shari'ah as Islamic Sharia, it was rarely faced without any pretence of democracy. It has been strategically aligned with the West since when Syria has enjoyed much of its sovereignty and freedom. The misadventure of a pro-Israel regime in Syria facilitated their proxy war strategy in the Levant. A civil war broke out in 2011 after the Assad regime sought empowerment of the Arab Spring who were demanding greater democracy in 2011. In 2015, involving a plethora of players with interest in the region. Here was the US, which supported the rebels against the Assad regime due to the latter's anti-Israel, pro-Iran approach. There were several strategic groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, but primarily from Al-Qaeda, not necessarily aligned with the Syrian opposition.

The second war whose entire strategy of control of the Levant — from Aleppo to Hama — was to be decided by the Assad regime. The Assad regime, which is deeply involved in the Middle East, has been the mainstay of the Assad regime. The Assad regime, which is deeply involved in the Middle East, has been the mainstay of the Assad regime. The Assad regime, which is deeply involved in the Middle East, has been the mainstay of the Assad regime.

After the decline of ISIS in 2018, the civil war ebbed. The pandemic in 2020-21 came at a very low pitch. The chaotic withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, the Ukraine war and then Gaza — all of these took attention away from Syria between 2020 and 2022. However, control of the Levant was such that which is why it is surprising that the Houti

Taliban (HTS) managed to hold itself up in such a militarily powerful position as to rout the Syrian Army. HTS was a progressively evolving organisation which emerged in the Al-Qaeda front, which had split from Al-Qaeda in 2015.

Most sources say that Damascus remain the hands of the HTS, as in the case of Aleppo and Hama. In addition, the Assad regime's support remains completely to the opposition. Second, the weakening of the Iranian hold over the Levant as a result of the erosion of Hezbollah in south Lebanon over the last 12 months, and particularly the recent Israeli invasion. Third, the decisive presence of Russian Special Forces and the Russian Air Force has now less effective in the Ukraine war but a debilitating effect on Russian capability in the Middle East. A weak counter attack by the Russians last week was followed by a closure of all assets. While no response as yet can be ascribed to the lighting of the HTS, there are enough signs being reported as potential setbacks to the HTS which had also been accused of raising and funding ISIS before it went out of control. The position signals that for an ever-evolving team from HTS leader Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, although his

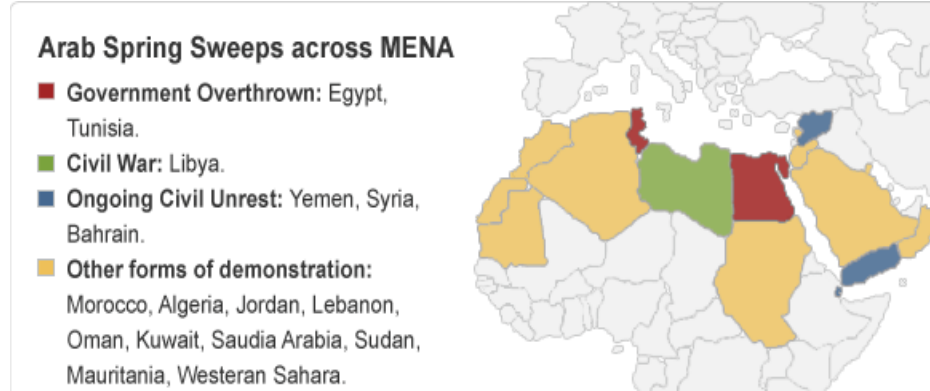
credibility remains questionable. It's important to understand the likely immediate effects of the overthrow of Assad. First, Iran's supply chain and distribution network, second, Iran's military strategy and operations, and third, the Russian presence in the Levant. Second, Iran's military strategy and operations, and third, the Russian presence in the Levant. Second, Iran's military strategy and operations, and third, the Russian presence in the Levant.

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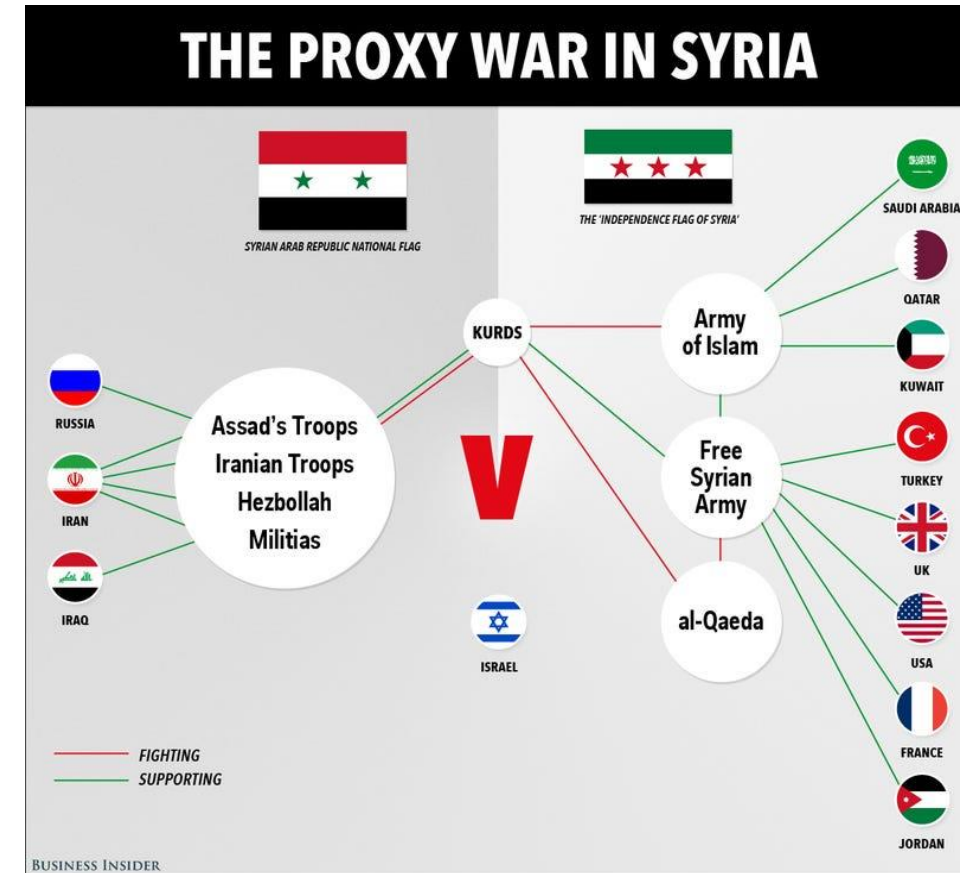


The stunning collapse of more than 53 years of al-Assad family rule has been described as a historic moment — nearly 14 years after Syrians rose in peaceful protests against a government that met them with violence that quickly spiralled into a bloody civil war.

- ❖ The issue here is the **collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime (Ba'ath Party)**; the latter has been in power in one form or another since 1963.
- ❖ Syria has largely been a secular society; while promoting plurality, an **Alawite (Shia) minority** has ruled without any pretence of democracy.
- ❖ It has been **strategically aligned with Shia Iran** from where Syria has received much of its weaponry and funding.
- ❖ The existence of a **pro-Iran regime in Syria** facilitated **Iran's proxy war strategy in the Levant**.
- ❖ A **civil war broke out in Syria in 2011** after the Assad regime targeted exponents of the **Arab Spring** who were **demanding greater democracy**.
- ❖ It raged till 2018, involving a plethora of players with interest in the region. **First was the US, which supported the rebels** against the Assad regime due to the latter's **anti-Israel, pro-Iran approach**.



- ❖ The **second was Iran** whose entire strategy of **control of the Levant** — through proxies steered by its **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps** — and hence, the ability to threaten Israel, was contingent upon an aligned Syria.
- ❖ **Hezbollah extended this control** into south Lebanon. That brought in **Israel, too.**
- ❖ Third was **Russia**, with its **deep interest in a foothold in the Middle East**, particularly in the various facilities around the **strategic port city of Latakia on the Mediterranean**, the only warm-water base with the Russian Navy outside the Black Sea.
- ❖ The advent of **ISIS in 2014** complicated matters as it fought against every other element.
- ❖ The Gulf nations, led by **Saudi Arabia and Turkey**, too joined indirectly in support of the opposition forces against Assad, converting a **political civil war into an ideological one.**





- ❖ After the **defeat of ISIS in 2018**, The chaotic withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, the **Ukraine war and then Gaza** — all of these took attention away from Syria between 2020 and '23.
- ❖ However, control of the **Levant was with Iran.**
- ❖ Which is why it is surprising that the **Hayat Tahrir al Sham** (HTS) managed to build itself up to such a militarily powerful position as to rout the Syrian Army.



- ❖ First, the utter **mismanagement of governance by Assad**, leading to the people's support switching completely to the opposition.
- ❖ Second is the **weakening of the Iranian hold over the Levant** as a result of the erosion of Hezbollah in south Lebanon over the last 15 months, and particularly since the **recent Israeli offensive.**
- ❖ Third, the **deterrent presence of Russian Special Forces** and the Russian Air Force became less effective as the Ukraine war had a debilitating effect on Russian capability in the Middle East.



- ❖ It's important to understand the likely immediate effects of the overthrow of Assad.
- ❖ First, **Iran's supply chain to Hezbollah** is now compromised, thus potentially delaying or making impossible the refurbishment of its military capability to take on Israel.
- ❖ Second, this will have an **indirect effect on the war in Gaza** where Israel can make military victory the focus of its resources and attention.
- ❖ Third, the **Russian absence strengthens American stakes** and, potentially, **Saudi influence in the Levant**, although Saudi strategic focus appears to be changing.
- ❖ It is after many years that Iran's capability to influence a **rising Shia crescent has been curbed.**
- ❖ We should hope that HTS does not evolve along the lines of ISIS, declaring Caliphate. Otherwise, **another theatre of war would open up on the Levant front**, much like in 2014.





# How to address Manipur unrest..?



Prakash Sengupta

## What Manipur needs

Attempt to contain violence must be matched by effort to find middle ground

MANIPUR: A classic example of how not to deal with an internal security problem. Not that it is a simple problem. It is an explosive cocktail of ethnic conflicts, tribal insurgency, drug trafficking, and infiltration from across the Myanmar border. The tragedy is that the problem is getting more complex with every passing month. Such a scenario is deeply un-Indian because the country has no means or expertise in dealing with diverse internal security challenges. We look back with pride that, in the past, we defused some of the most lethal manifestations of terrorism in Punjab, that insurgency in the Northeast has generally been contained, that the Maoist rebellion is an in last legs and that cross-border terrorism in J&K has been kept well within limits.

What has gone wrong in Manipur? The Government of India is, unfortunately, treating the situation primarily as a law and order problem. There was a modicum of violence in the state recently. Our response has been to send 90 additional companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) to the state and impose the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), in the justification of its police stations in the Valley areas, including at Jiribari. There are, as of date, a total of 288 CAPF companies (CRPF-105, BSF-184, SSG-6, SSO-6, TRF-5) manning the state police. In addition, there is the Assam Rifles, which is under the operational control of the Army. The state has been saturated with forces. However, what Manipur needs today is a healing touch. Unfortunately, there is hardly any meaningful political initiative and there

are few confidence-building measures. And so, the state is sinking once again. It was on May 1, 2023, that ethnic violence erupted in Manipur between the Meitei, a majority that lives in the Imphal valley and the Khasi-Zo tribals, who inhabit the surrounding hills. In fact, a total of 258 people are reported to have lost their lives in the inter-ethnic conflicts and more than 60,000 people have been displaced. A sinister aspect of these conflicts is that 186 religious structures were vandalised by the rioters.

Recently, two slain, started building on November 11, when 10 militants of the Hmar tribe were reportedly killed in an encounter with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in the Jiribari district. The militants had attacked the CRPF and a nearby relief camp and allegedly abducted six personnel of a Meitei family, three women and three children, who were all killed. On November 16, there were violent protests in Manipur during which houses of ministers and MLAs were attacked for the government's failure to curb the escalating violence. The very next day, the second-largest ally of the BJP-led Manipur government, the National People's Party, withdrew support for it for its failure to restore normalcy in the state. NPP leader and Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma expressed his discomfiture over the going on of centralised and suggested that there should have been a change of guard in Imphal.

The Government of India seems to have forgotten the simplest of lessons in dealing with the tribal unrest. The primary concern

should not doubt be to put down violence. This should, however, be quickly followed by an effort to address the grievances, find a middle ground, reconcile the differences, form peace committees at different levels, and take such political initiatives which combine the people of the government's sincerity and inspire confidence. There should be, what is called, the WIIAM approach — winning hearts and minds. There were periods of hill in Manipur which could have been utilised to initiate a dialogue between the rival groups and come to some kind of modus vivendi. The Home Minister did make some efforts on these lines in the initial stages, but there was no proper follow-up.

The situation is quite grim and calls for drastic remedial measures without any further delay. The Prime Minister should visit Manipur at the earliest. The people of Manipur are in fact waiting for him and any initiative from his side is almost certain to be accepted by the warring factions. He should declare President's Rule in the state and send, as governor, a dynamic police or army officer of integrity who has experience in counter-insurgency, preferably someone who has served in the northeast.

The administrative would need to be completely revamped. There are senior officers who are more concerned about saving their skin than dealing with situations which present formidable hazards. They will have to be replaced. It should be made clear to all

and sundry that there would be no compromise on the integrity of Manipur. The conflict contained and should go hammer and tongs against those groups of people irrespective of the community or tribe they belong to. Those indulging in or inciting violence; those trying to give a religious colour to the conflict and have been responsible for vandalising temples or churches; and those involved in drug trafficking.

There should be a well-organised attempt to disarm people of the unlicensed and prohibited bore weapons they may have acquired from any source. A time limit should be given and those found holding such weapons after the expiry of that time limit should be booked under the National Security Act.

Peace committees should be formed in every district comprising representatives of every section (group/tribe). There should be a peace committee at the state level also comprising senior leaders of different sections/groups/tribes.

Much precaution has been lost by the Centre. However, as Chavakis said: "We should not let the past run should be anxious about the future. Men of discernment deal only with the present moment." The Government of India could still recover the lost ground and bring back peace and normalcy in the state. It is going to be a long haul, but it is achievable.

The writer was DCP Assam and Director General of the Border Security Force

**Government of India has the wrong approach in Manipur. Here's what it needs to do**

***The primary concern should no doubt be to put down violence. This should, however, be quickly followed or even accompanied by an effort to address the grievances, find a middle ground, reconcile differences.***

- ❖ Manipur is a classic example of how not to deal with an internal security problem.
- ❖ Not that it is a simple problem. It is an explosive cocktail of **ethnic conflicts, tribal insurgency, drug trafficking, and infiltration** from across the Myanmar border.
- ❖ The tragedy is that the **problem is getting more complex** with every passing month. Such a scenario is deeply unfortunate because the country has enormous expertise in dealing with diverse internal security challenges.
- ❖ We look back with pride that, in the past, we defeated one of the most **lethal manifestations of terrorism in Punjab, that insurgency in the Northeast** has generally been contained, that the **Maoist rebellion is on its last legs** and that **cross-border terrorism in J&K** has been kept well within limits.

## Manipur's ethnic faultlines: Kuki-Meitei divide & recent unrest

There are 16 districts in Manipur, but the state is commonly thought of as divided into 'valley' and 'hill' districts.



In these hill areas, which comprise the bulk of Manipur's geographical area, live 15 Naga tribes and the Chin-Kuki-Mizo-Zomi group.



### Imphal (East and West)

Kukis and Nagas point out that tribal areas are 90% of state's geographical area, but the bulk of its budget and development work is focused on the Meitei-dominated Imphal valley.

The Manipur valley is encircled by skirts of low hills that spread into Nagaland and Mizoram.

While tribals can buy land in the valley, Meiteis are prohibited from buying land in the hills



## What has gone wrong in Manipur?

- ❖ The Government of India is, unfortunately, treating the situation primarily as a **law and order problem**.
- ❖ There was a recrudescence of violence in the state recently. Our response has been to send 90 additional companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) to the state and impose the **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)** in the jurisdiction of six police stations in the Valley areas, including at Jiribam.
- ❖ The state has been saturated with forces.
- ❖ However, what **Manipur needs today is a healing touch**. Unfortunately, there is **hardly any meaningful political initiative** and there are few confidence-building measures. And so, the state is sinking into an abyss.



- ❖ It was on **May 3, 2023, that ethnic violence erupted** in Manipur between the Meiteis, a majority that lives in the Imphal Valley, and the Kuki-Zo tribals, who inhabit the surrounding Hills.
- ❖ The primary concern should no doubt be to **put down violence**.
- ❖ This should, however, be quickly followed or even accompanied by an effort to **address the grievances, find a middle ground, reconcile the differences**, form peace committees at different levels, and take such political initiatives which convince the people of the government's sincerity and inspire confidence.
- ❖ There should be, what is called, the **WHAM approach – winning hearts and minds**.
- ❖ There were **periods of lull in Manipur** which could have been utilised to initiate a dialogue between the rival groups and come to some kind of **modus vivendi**.



- ❖ The PM should declare **President's Rule in the state** and send, as governor, a dynamic police or army **officer of integrity** who has experience in counter-insurgency, preferably someone who has served in the northeast.
- ❖ The **administration would need to be completely revamped.**
- ❖ It should be made clear to all and sundry that there would be **no compromise on the integrity of Manipur.**
- ❖ Strict action against Those **indulging in or inciting violence**; those trying to give a **religious colour to the conflict** and have been responsible for **vandalising temples or churches**; and those involved in drug trafficking.
- ❖ There should be a **well-organised attempt to disarm people** of the unlicensed and prohibited bore weapons they may have acquired from any source.
- ❖ A time limit should be given and those found holding such weapons after the expiry of that time limit should be booked under the **National Security Act.**
- ❖ **Peace committees should be formed in every district** comprising representatives of every section/group/tribe. There should be a peace committee at the state level also comprising senior leaders of different sections/groups/tribes.



# Does POSH Act apply to political parties..?

## Does POSH Act apply to political parties? Here's what to know

**AJOY SINHA KAPURAM  
& DAMINI NATH**  
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 15

THE SUPREME COURT last week heard a PIL stating that the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act) should apply to political parties.

The court directed the petitioner, advocate Yoganuja M G, to first approach the Election Commission of India (EC) as they were the competent authority "to prevail upon the recognised political parties for creation of an in-house mechanism to deal with complaints of sexual harassment" in a way consistent with provisions of the POSH Act.

The POSH Act requires both public and private workplaces to set up an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) to hear complaints of sexual harassment. The plea in question claims that what it comes to politi-

cal parties "the presence of Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) to address sexual harassment is inconsistent".

This case has sparked a conversation on how the POSH Act applies, if at all, to organisations like political parties, which often lack a traditional workplace structure.

### Who does the POSH Act apply to?

Section 3(1) of the POSH Act states that "no woman shall be subjected to sexual harassment at any workplace". This immediately tells us how the POSH Act will apply – at the workplace, and only when the aggrieved party is a woman.

The definition of "workplace" in the POSH Act is expansive. It includes organisations, institutions, and other public sector bodies that are "established, owned, controlled or wholly or substantially financed by funds provided directly or indirectly by the appropriate Government", as well as organisations in the private sector, hospitals, nursing

homes, sports venues, houses for men covered location (stayed by an employee "during the course of employment").

With regards to political parties, however, things are unclear.

Prior to the latest PIL, the judiciary has only once addressed the question since when the Kerala High Court decided the case of *Centre for Constitutional Rights Research and Advocacy v State of Kerala & Ors* (2022) in which it heard several petitions seeking the establishment of ICCs in television, film, news, and political organisations.

On the subject of political parties, the court held that there is no "employer-employee relationship with its members" and political parties do not carry out "any private ventures, undertaking, enterprise, institution, establishment, etc. in contemplation of a 'workplace' (under the POSH Act)". As such, the court held that political parties "are

not liable to create any Internal Complaints Committee".

### Could the POSH Act apply to political parties?

The POSH Act is meant to protect women from sexual harassment in the "workplace". But what is a "workplace" when it comes to a political party? Party workers, for instance, who partake in an employer-employee relationship, often have little interaction with high-level officials and are hired temporarily to operate in the field without a defined "workplace".

Moreover, if the court or the ICC does decide to make the POSH Act applicable to political parties, it will have to clarify who the "employer" is in the context of a political party, as the employer is responsible for turning up the ICC to handle cases of sexual harassment at the workplace.

In theory, however, the POSH Act could

still apply to political parties. The term "workplace" under the POSH Act includes location stated by an employee "during the course of employment", which could conceivably allow the Act's protections to extend to party workers in the field. The POSH Act also provides a wide definition for the term "employer", and includes people who are employed temporarily, contract-workers, or volunteers "with or without the knowledge of the principal employer".

Further, party Constitutions often provide organisational hierarchies which could help determine who the "employer" would be. The BJP Constitution and Rules, for instance, provides details of a seven-level organisational structure, beginning with Local Committees up to the national level, with an exhaustive list of members and office bearers at each level.

### At present, how do parties handle sexual harassment complaints?

Currently, parties handle internal discipline through their committees.

For example, the Congress Constitution and Rules, creates a hierarchy of committees and allows higher level committees to take action against committees and individual members that are subordinate to it.

The BJP Constitution establishes a "Disciplinary Action Committee" at the national and state levels.

Both Constitutions list actions that would be considered "breach of Discipline". For sexual harassment could conceivably only fall under one of the broad headings such as "Acting in a way calculated to lower the prestige of the Party..." (BJP) with a similar breach listed in the Congress Constitution) or "Being guilty of offences involving moral turpitude..." (Congress Constitution).

There is also no requirement for these committees to have women or external members, as would be required of an ICC under the POSH Act.

**EXPLAINED  
LAW**

- ❖ **The Supreme Court recently heard a PIL** advocating for the application of The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (commonly known as the **POSH Act, 2013**) to political parties.
- ❖ The petitioner highlighted inconsistencies in the presence of **Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs)** within political parties to address sexual harassment complaints.
- ❖ The court directed the petitioner to approach the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, deeming it the appropriate authority to encourage political parties to establish mechanisms compliant with the **POSH Act**.

## Dirty Picture

A 2012 poll conducted by Oxfam India & Social and Rural Research Institute found that the women most vulnerable to workplace harassment were those working as/in:



The reasons stated by the women for not taking any action against the harassment were

- ✓ **Fear of losing their job**
- ✓ **Absence of any complaints mechanism at the workplace**
- ✓ **Fear of getting stigmatized**
- ✓ **Lack of awareness about redressal mechanism**



## Applicability

- It covers both **public** and **private** sectors, including **non traditional** work place.
- A woman must file a **written complaint** to the committee within **3 to 6** months of a sexual harassment incident.

## Internal Complaint Committees (ICC)

Every employer must constitute an ICC at each office or branch with **10 or more employees**.

- Must be **led by a woman**, include at least two female employees, and a **third party**.
- Has powers **similar to civil court**, and the inquiry process complies with the **“principles of natural justice”**.

Employers should hold regular workshops and awareness programs to educate employees about the Act.



# PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT (POSH) ACT

## or Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition & Redressal) Act

Enacted in **2013** to implement the **Vishakha guidelines**.



Addresses **quid pro quo** harassment and hostile work environments.



## The Act defines sexual harassment to include:

Unwanted behaviors like physical contact and sexual advances.

A demand or request for sexual favours

Making sexually coloured remarks

Showing pornography





## Applicability of the POSH Act to Political Parties: Legal Challenges

### Section 3(1) of the POSH Act

- ❖ **Section 3(1) of the POSH Act** ensures protection against sexual harassment for women at workplaces.
- ❖ The Act broadly defines "**workplace**" to include both public and private organisations, hospitals, sports venues, homes, and locations visited during employment.
- ❖ However, its **application to political parties is unclear due to their unique structure.**

### Issue raised by the Kerala HC

- ❖ The Kerala High Court addressed this in ***Centre for Constitutional Rights Research and Advocacy v. State of Kerala & Ors (2022)***.
- ❖ The court ruled that political parties **lack an employer-employee relationship** with their members and do not fit the definition of a "**workplace**" under the POSH Act.
- ❖ This raises **legal and structural challenges in ensuring accountability** for sexual harassment within political organisations.



# Thank you

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