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 **12 Minutes to CLAT**
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The banner features a black background with a red horizontal band across the middle. At the top, the text "MH CET 2.0" is written in large, bold, yellow letters. Below this, the words "The Last Mile" are written in large, white, bold letters with a slight shadow effect. To the left of "The Last Mile" is a graphic of a wooden gavel resting on a stack of books. To the right is a graphic of a red and white target with a blue arrow hitting the bullseye. Below the red band, four people (three men and one woman) are shown from the chest up, smiling. They are wearing black polo shirts with a small logo on the left chest. In the center, overlapping the bottom of the people, is a white rounded rectangle containing a small icon of a laptop with a clock, the text "12 Minutes to CLAT", and the tagline "Recipe for Law Schools".

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1. Conferral of Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur to Shashi Tharoor



Recently: Shashi Tharoor, a prolific author and a diplomat-turned-politician, was conferred France's **highest civilian honour** "Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur", or **Knight of the Legion of Honour**, at a ceremony in **New Delhi**.

- The **Congress MP** was conferred the prestigious award at the **French Embassy** by French Senate President **Gerard Larcher**.
- The French government had announced the award for Tharoor, a former Union minister, in **August 2022** but was conferred on him on 20th February, 2024.
- "The highest French civilian award came in recognition of Dr Tharoor's tireless efforts to deepen Indo-French ties, commitment to international peace and cooperation, and as a long-standing friend of France," a statement issued by the French Embassy said.
- In **2010**, Tharoor received a similar honour, from the Spanish government.

What is Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur?

- The Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur (Knight of the National Order of the French Legion of Honour), instituted in **1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte**, is the highest civilian award given by the French Republic.
- It is awarded for outstanding contribution to the recipient's field of expertise, regardless of their nationality.
- The prestigious order bears the motto "**Honneur et Patrie**" (**Honour and Fatherland**) and has its seat at the **Palais de la Légion d'honneur** in **Paris**, adjacent to the Musée d'Orsay.
- The Legion has **five classes**, listed in descending rank:
 - Grand Cross (limited to 80 members)
 - Grand Officer (200)
 - Commander (1,000)
 - Officer (4,000)
 - Knight, or Chevalier (unlimited)
- This system ensures that the membership is inclusive and egalitarian.
 - It allows both men and women, French citizens and foreigners, civilians, and military personnel to be admitted.
- To be considered for admission into the Legion of Honour, an individual must demonstrate:
 - **20 years** of exceptional civil achievement in peacetime, or,
 - Extraordinary bravery and service during times of war.
- The order also has provisions for posthumous conferral to honour those who have made significant contributions even after their passing.
- The **first Indian** to be awarded with the Legion of Honour was **Maharaja Pratap Singh** of Idar in **1918**.
- The list of the recipients includes:
 - JRD Tata (1983), Satyajit Ray (1987),
 - Pandit Ravi Shankar (2000),
 - Zubin Mehta (2001), E Sreedharan (2005),
 - Amitabh Bachchan (2007),
 - Lata Mangeshkar (2007),

- Shah Rukh Khan (2014),
- Manish Arora (2016)
- Kamal Haasan (2016),
- Ratan Tata (2016),
- Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw (2016),
- Azim Premji (2018)
- N. Chandrasekaran (2023)
- Kiran Nadar (2023)

Who is Shashi Tharoor?

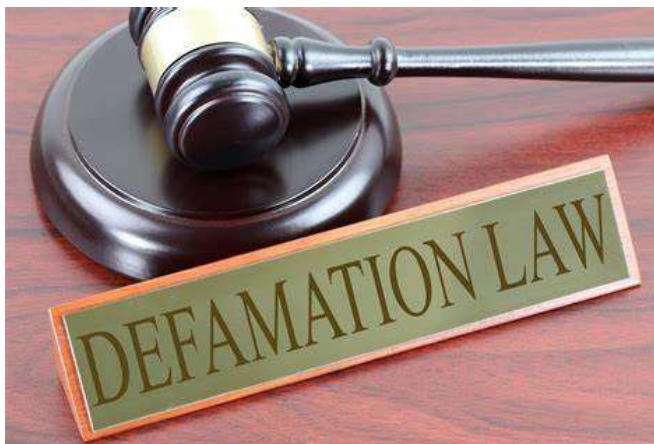
- Shashi Tharoor is an Indian former international civil servant, diplomat, bureaucrat, politician, a noted writer and public intellectual who has been serving as Member of Parliament for Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, since 2009.
- A Sahitya Akademi Award winner, Tharoor has authored many works of fiction and non-fiction since **1981**.
- Popular for his command over the English language, Tharoor was the most followed Indian on Twitter before being overtaken by Narendra Modi.

Early Life and Career:

- Born in London, **UK**, and raised in India, Tharoor worked across the world, graduating from St. **Stephen's College, Delhi** in **1975**.
- He culminated his studies in **1978** with a **doctorate in International Relations and Affairs** from the **Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy**, Tufts University.
 - At the age of 22, he was the youngest person at the time to receive such an honour from the Fletcher School.
- Tharoor was a career official at the United Nations, rising to the rank of **Under-Secretary General** for Communications and Public Information in **2001**.
- He announced his **retirement** after finishing second in the **2006** selection for U.N. Secretary-General to Ban Ki-moon.
- During the Congress-led UPA government, Tharoor served as **Minister of State for External Affairs**.
- In **2009**, Tharoor began his **political career** by joining the **Indian National Congress** and successfully represented the party from **Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala**.

- He is the present Chairman of the **Standing Committee on Chemicals and Fertilizers**.
- Founder-Chairman of **All India Professionals Congress**, he formerly served as Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and on Informational Technology.
- He has about two dozen titles to his credit and was awarded by **World Economic Forum** as "**Global Leader of Tomorrow**".
- He won a **Sahitya Akademi Award** for his book, **An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India** in **2019**.
- In **2012**, he received **Commander of the Order of Charles III by King of Spain**.
- In **1991**, He also received **Commonwealth Writers' Prize** for the Best **Book of the Year** in the Eurasian Region, for **The Great Indian Novel**.

2. Law Commission's report on the Law of Defamation



Source- <https://www.rksassociate.com/defamation/>

Recently: The **22nd Law Commission** of India led by **Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi** has recommended that the offence of criminal defamation should be retained in the new criminal laws.

- The **285th Law Commission Report** on **criminal defamation and its impact on the freedom of speech and expression**, was published in response to a letter from the ministry of law and justice in **August 2017**.

What is Defamation?

- Defamation is the act of communicating false statements about a person that injure the reputation of that person when observed through the eyes of ordinary man.
- Any false and unprivileged statement published or spoken deliberately, intentionally, knowingly with the intention to damage someone's reputation is defamation.
- Defamation can be in two forms:
 - Libel, which is present in some permanent form such as in writing, printed or a picture.
 - Slander, present in an unwritten form such as spoken words, gestures or representation made with hands.
- Defamation can be **both Civil or Criminal in nature**. The basic essential under criminal law to evoke a suit of defamation are:
 - Knowledge or reason to believe that something is defamatory, that is, Mens Rea,
 - Publication of the defamatory act to a third person,
 - It should be clear enough to point out the person to whom the defamation is intended to be made
 - Lowers the reputation of the person in the mind of the right-thinking people of the society.
- **Intention** is basic essential under the **Criminal Defamation Law** but not under the Civil Defamation Law.
- There are certain basic **defenses** that can be taken against a charge of defamation:
 - The statement published was true,
 - Fair comments made with public interest based on true incidents,
 - Certain persons are vested with the privilege to make statements even if they are defamatory.

Defamation Law in India:

- The history of defamation can be traced back to **Kautilya's Arthashastra** where the author has defined the penalties for individuals of different classes of society for committing defamation in **Chapter XVIII of Book III**.

- The law on defamation in India was first drafted by **Lord Macaulay** in the year **1837** and was eventually codified in **Act no. 45 of 1860** and was very similar to the law of defamation of English law.
- **Article 19** of the Constitution grants various freedoms to its citizens. However, **Article 19(2)** has imposed **reasonable exemption** to freedom of speech and expression granted under Article 19(1) (a).
 - Contempt of court, defamation and incitement are some of the reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2).
- In Indian laws,
 - **Chapter XXI (section 499 – 502) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)** deals with criminal defamation.
 - **Section 199 of the Criminal Procedure code (CrPC)** is concerned with the prosecution of defamation.
 - **Section 356 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023** deals with Criminal Defamation.
- In civil law, defamation is punishable under the Law of Torts by imposing punishment in the form of damages to be awarded to the claimant.
- Under the Criminal law, Defamation is a bailable, non-cognizable offence and compoundable offence.
 - Section 500 of IPC prescribed the punishment of a maximum term of imprisonment of **two years, or fine, or both**, for the offence of Defamation.
 - Under Section 356 of BNS, Section 499 and Section 500 have been consolidated and the punishment of community service has been added for the offence.

Important Judgements:

- *Rohini Singh v. State of Gujarat (2018)*- It was held by the Gujarat High Court that the offence of defamation may not be committed if someone only types defamatory material without publishing it or disseminating it to others.
- *Mrs. Pat Sharpe v. Dwijendra Nath Bose (1963)*- The Calcutta High Court held that author of the article (and not the source of the information) becomes liable if the recipient of defamatory material from an anonymous source creates and publishes an article based on that information.
- *Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India*- The apex court upheld the validity of Article 499 and 500 of the constitution and observed that the **reputation of an individual is a basic element under Article 21**.
- *Chintaman Rao Vs. The State of Madhya Pradesh*: The Supreme Court explained the meaning of “reasonable restrictions” imposed in Article 19 (2). It implies intelligent care and deliberation and that is required in the interests of the public.

- *Sukdeo Vithal Pansare v. Prabhakar Sukdeo Pansare (1974)* The Bombay High Court held that publication is the act of making a defamatory remark and transmitting it to a person other than the target of the statement.

Highlights of the Law Commission's report:

- The Law Commission chose to undertake this extensive study on the law of defamation following the Supreme Court's decision in the ***Subramaniam Swamy vs. Union of India (2016)*** case.
 - In this case, the court upheld the constitutionality of defamation as a criminal offence and held that it was a **reasonable restriction** to the freedom of speech and expression.
- The report traces the history of the law of defamation, how it is defined and the essential characteristics for it to be proven as an offence
- The report also explains how **"the right to reputation"** is a part of the right to life and dignity under **Article 21** of the Constitution.
- It states that the right to freedom of speech must be balanced with protecting the right to reputation through the application of criminal defamation laws.
- It stated that Criminal defamation acts as a deterrent against false and malicious statements, preventing damage to one's reputation that civil remedies might not adequately address
- The panel has also recommended that speech ought to be considered illegal only when it is meant to do substantial harm and when such harm materialises.
- The report appreciated the inclusion of community service as an alternative punishment against the offence of Defamation under **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023**.

Law Commission of India:

- It is an **executive body** constituted by the Government of India from time to time.
- It acts as an **advisory body** to **Ministry of law and justice**.

- The first Law Commission was established during the British Raj era in **1834** by the **Charter Act of 1833** and was chaired by **Lord Macaulay**.
- The **first Law Commission** of independent India was established in **1955** for a **three-year term**.
- The Law Commission conducts legal research and assesses current Indian laws, with the aim of suggesting reforms and crafting new legislation, either upon referral by the Central Government or independently.
- The Law Commission is **generally Composed of**:
 - One chairman
 - One permanent member
 - One member secretary
 - Six part-time members
- **Justice (former) Rituraj Awasthi** is the **Chairman** of the current and **22nd Law Commission of India**.
- **Reeta Vasishta** is the member secretary of the 22nd Law Commission
- Other members - Retired High Court judge Justice **K T Sankaran**, Professor **Anand Paliwal**, Professor **D P Verma**, Professor **Raka Arya** and **M Karunanithi**
- The current law commission was constituted in **February, 2020**, for a period of **three years**. Its extended term will end on **31st August, 2024**.
- The tenure of the **21st Law Commission**, which was headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice **BS Chauhan**, came to an end on August 31 2018.

Other Reports by 22nd law commission –

- Report no 278 - Urgent Need to Amend **Rule 14(4) of Order VII** of the **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908**
- Report no. 279 - usage of the law of sedition
- Report no. 280 - The law on adverse possession
- Report no. 281 – compensation for damage due to installation of towers and transmission lines under the Indian telegraph act. 1885 and the electricity act 2003

Important Reports of the Law Commission of India:

- Electoral Disqualifications (244th Report), 2014- **20th Law Commission's** report that dealt with Disqualification of the candidates having a criminal background Repercussions of filing false affidavits.

- Electoral Reforms (255th Report), 2015- **20th Law Commission**'s report that suggested methods that must be introduced in 'Electoral Reforms' to make it more effective.
- Wrongful Prosecution (277th Report), 2018: **21st Law Commission**'s report that gave an outline of the reliefs against wrongful prosecution available in the existing laws and tells how they are inadequate.
 - It makes some recommendations regarding the enactment of some specific laws that would only deal with such types of cases.
- Review of the Indian Evidence Act (185th Report), 2003- The **Sixteenth Law Commission**, in 2003, submitted a report related to the review of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.
 - Though, Law Commission had earlier also submitted a report in relation to the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 which wasn't considered.
 - The Law Commission was asked to **re-examine the 69th Report** and other reports.
- Trial by Media (200th Report), 2006: The **17th Law Commission** recommended a legislative limitation on the media to report anything which could be detrimental to the accused's rights in any criminal case.
- Death Penalty (262nd Report): The **Twentieth Law Commission** of India presented the 262nd Report on the death penalty where the commission recommends to **abolish the death penalty**.
- Human DNA Profiling (271st Report): The **Twenty-first Law C**
- **ommission** prepared the 271st Report on Human DNA Profiling – A Draft Bill for the Use and Regulation of DNA Based Technology.

3. Delimitation Exercise



Source- The Hindu

Recently: **Tamil Nadu** Chief Minister M K Stalin presented a resolution in the state assembly 14 February, urging the union government **to halt the delimitation exercise scheduled for 2026.**

- Stalin emphasised the need to maintain the current ratio of Parliament and Assembly constituencies, fixed based on the **1971 Census**, to prevent penalising states like Tamil Nadu for implementing **population control measures** effectively over the past five decades.
- He presented another resolution urging the union government to discard the '**One Nation, One Election**', on the same day.
- Stalin pointed out that in **1971**, Tamil Nadu and Bihar had similar populations.
 - But over the past five decades, Bihar's population has surged to over one-and-a-half times that of Tamil Nadu.

What is Delimitation?

- Delimitation literally means the act or process of **fixing limits or boundaries** of territorial constituencies in a country or a province having a legislative body.
- The main objective of delimitation is to provide equal representation to equal segments of a population.
- It is ideally carried out **every few years after a Census** by an independent Delimitation Commission formed under the provisions of the Delimitation Commission Act.
- Under **Article 82**, Parliament is to enact a Delimitation Act after every Census.

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- Once the Act is in force, the Union government sets up the Delimitation Commission.

What is a Delimitation Commission?

- The Delimitation Commission is appointed by the **President of India** and works in collaboration with the **Election Commission of India**.
- **Composition:** A retired Supreme Court judge, the Chief Election Commissioner of India and respective State Election Commissioners.
- The Delimitation Commission is to work without any executive influence.
- It is a **quasi-judicial body** and its orders are **final** and cannot be questioned before any court as it would hold up an election indefinitely.
- The copies of its orders are laid before the House of the People and the State Legislative Assembly concerned, but **no modifications** are permissible therein by them.
- The **first Delimitation Commission Act** was enacted in **1952**.
- ➤ In the history of the Indian republic, Delimitation Commissions have been set up **four times — 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002** under the Acts of **1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002**.
-
-
- completed in **1976** on the basis of the **1971 census**.
 - This was done in order to **encourage population control** measures so that States with higher population growth do not end up having higher number of seats.
- The **42nd Amendment Act, 1976**, froze the delimitation exercise till **2000**.
- The **84th Amendment Act, 2001**, again froze the constituency boundaries until the first **census after 2026**, or at least till 2031.
- Hence, the population based on which the number of seats is allocated refers to the population as per the **1971 Census**. This number will be **re-adjusted** based on the **first Census after 2026**.
- The boundaries of territorial constituencies were readjusted (without changing the number of seats) and seats for SC and ST were determined as per the 2001 Census.

- This will again be carried out after 2026.
- In a normal course of events, the delimitation process would have happened based on the Census of **2031** as it would have been the **first Census after 2026**.
 - However, with the 2021 Census now being postponed and the year 2026 nearing, there have been talks about the impending delimitation exercise.

What is the issue?

- The number of seats were frozen based on the 1971 Census in order to encourage population control measures.
 - Because of uneven population explosion in the last **5 decades**, states like **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan** had a **greater increase** than States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- There are two options that are being discussed in the public domain with respect to the revised delimitation exercise based on the projected population of various States as of 2026.
 - The first is to **continue with the existing 543 seats** and their redistribution amongst various States.
 - The second is to **increase the number of seats to 848** with proportionate increase among various States.
- In both these scenarios, the southern States, the smaller states in the north like Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, as well as the northeastern States are bound to be at a disadvantage when compared to the northern States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- This goes against the philosophy of freezing seats as per the 1971 Census with the States that have been better at controlling the population losing out on their political significance.

International Practices:

- United States (US): The number of seats in the **House of Representatives** (the equivalent of our Lok Sabha) has been capped at **435** since **1913**.

- The population of the country has increased almost four times from 9.4 crore in 1911 to an estimated 33.4 crore in 2023.
- The seats among the States are redistributed after every Census through the '**method of equal proportion**'.
- This does not result in any significant gain or loss for any of the States.
- European Union (EU): The EU parliament consists **720 members** and the number of seats is divided between **27 member countries** based on the principle of '**degressive proportionality**'.
 - Under this principle, the **ratio of population to the number of seats shall increase** as the population increases.

4. Corruption Perception Index 2023



Recently: Transparency International released the released the 2023 edition of the **Corruption Perception Index** in Berlin.

- The report shows that most countries have made little to no progress in tackling public sector corruption.
- The CPI global **average remains unchanged at 43** for the **twelfth year** in a row, with more than **two-thirds** of countries scoring **below 50**.
- The **main reason** for the increase in corruption has been recorded to be a **decline in the functioning of justice systems**.
- Countries with the lowest scores in the **Rule of Law Index** are also scoring very low on the CPI, highlighting a clear connection between access to justice and corruption.

What is Corruption Perception Index?

- The Corruption Perception Index, incepted in **1995** by **Transparency International**, is a leading global indicator of public sector corruption.
- The index scores **180 countries** and territories around the world based on perceptions of public sector corruption.
- It uses data from **13 external sources**, including the World Bank, World Economic Forum, private risk and consulting companies, think tanks and others.
- The CPI ranks countries on a scale of corruption with a score of **0** corresponding to the **greatest corruption** and **100** to the **least corrupt**.
- The process for calculating the CPI is regularly reviewed to make sure it is as robust and coherent as possible, most recently by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre in 2017.

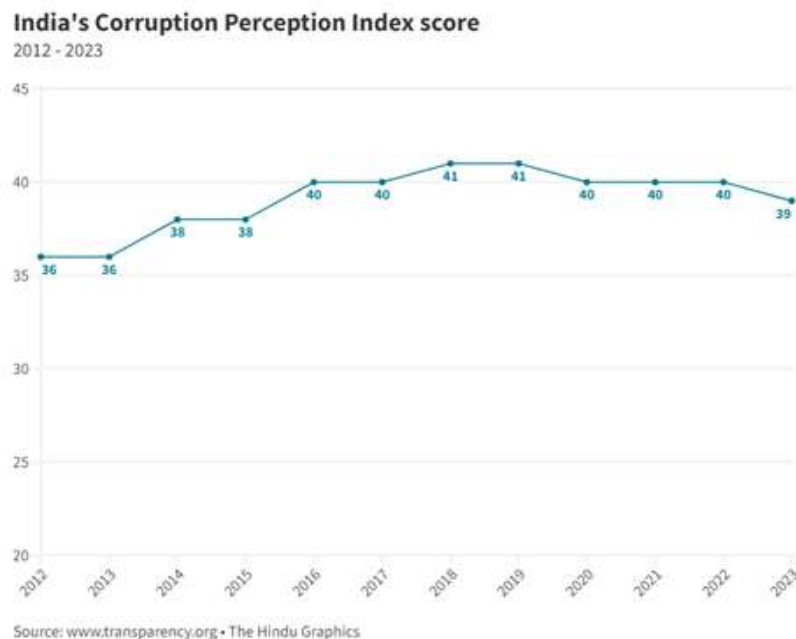
Global Rankings in the 2023 edition of the Index:

- **Denmark (90) tops** the index for the **sixth consecutive year**, with **Finland and New Zealand** following closely with **scores of 87 and 85**, respectively.
 - Due to well-functioning justice systems, these countries are also among the top scorers in the Rule of Law Index.
- **Somalia (11), Venezuela (13), Syria (13), South Sudan (13) and Yemen (16)** take the **bottom spots** in the index. They are all affected by protracted crises, mostly armed conflicts.
- Since **2018, 12 countries** significantly declined on their CPI scores. This includes:
 - Middle-Income Countries - El Salvador (31), Honduras (23), Liberia (25), Myanmar (20), Nicaragua (17), Sri Lanka (34) and Venezuela (13).
 - Upper-Middle and High-Income economies - Argentina (37), Austria (71), Poland (54), Turkey (34) and the United Kingdom (71).
- **Eight countries improved** on the CPI since 2018: Ireland (77), South Korea (63), Armenia (47), Vietnam (41), the Maldives (39), Moldova (42), Angola (33) and Uzbekistan (33).
- While **Western Europe and the European Union** remains the **top-scoring region**, its regional **average score dropped to 65** this year.
- Despite improvement in some countries, **Sub-Saharan Africa** maintains the **lowest average at 33**, with democracy and the rule of law under pressure.

- The **rest of the world** remains **stagnant** with all other regions having **averages under 50**.
- **Eastern Europe** and **Central Asia** grapples with the **dysfunctional rule of law**, rising authoritarianism and systemic corruption.
- The **Middle East and North Africa** shows **little improvement**, reflecting ongoing struggles with political corruption and conflict, and Asia Pacific shows long-term stagnation, although some countries historically at the top are backsliding.
- **Pakistan** ranked **133** and **Sri Lanka** ranked **115 out of 180 countries**, both grappling with their respective debt burdens and political instability.
- **Bangladesh and China** ranked **149 and 76** respectively.

India's Ranking:

- Touching upon India's status on corruption, the report ranked India **93 out of 180** countries as its **overall score** remained largely **"unchanged"**.
- India's overall score is **39 in 2023** while in **2022, it was 40** with India **ranked** in 2022 at **85**.



Transparency International:

- Transparency International is a global movement working in **over 100 countries** to end the injustice of corruption.
- It is an independent, non-governmental, not-for-profit organization that was **founded in 1993** by **former World Bank employees**.
- Its purpose is to take action to combat global corruption with civil societal anti-corruption measures and to prevent criminal activities arising from corruption.
- It is **headquartered in Berlin, Germany** and its most notable publications include the **Global Corruption Barometer** and the **Corruption Perceptions Index**.
- **François Valérian** is the **Chair** of Transparency International.
- **Daniel Eriksson** is the **CEO** of Transparency International.

5. World Wetlands Day 2024



Recently: The 2024 edition of the World Wetlands Day was observed on **February 2nd**.

- This day marks the date of the adoption of the **Convention on Wetlands** on **2 February 1971**, in the **Iranian city of Ramsar** on the shores of the **Caspian Sea**.
- The **Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC)** in collaboration with **Madhya Pradesh**, organised a national event at **Sirpur Lake, Indore** to celebrate WWD 2024.
- The theme of WWD-2024 is '**Wetlands and Human Wellbeing**' which underscores the critical role wetlands play in enhancing our lives.
- It was celebrated for the first time in **1977**.
- On **30 August 2021** the UN General Assembly adopted **Resolution 75/317** that established **2 February** as World Wetlands Day.

Ramsar convention:

- Wetlands are areas where water either covers the soil or is present near the soil surface throughout the year or for varying durations, including the growing season.

- The **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands** defines wetlands as:
“areas of marsh, fen, peat land or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at **low tide** does not exceed **six meters**”.
- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, also known as the **Convention on Wetlands**, is an intergovernmental treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- A **Ramsar Site** is a wetland site designated to be of **international importance**.
 - These wetlands are protected under strict guidelines of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.
- The Convention was adopted in the **Iranian city of Ramsar** in **1971** and came into force in **1975**.
- Since then, almost **90%** of UN member states, from all the world’s geographic regions, have acceded to become “Contracting Parties”.
- The Contracting Parties meet every **three years** at a **Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP)** to discuss policy issues.
- They report on the activities of the previous three years through National Reports.
- The next Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP15) will be held in **Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe** in **July 2025**.
- The **Montreux Record** is a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance and is maintained under Ramsar sited.
 - It includes sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of human interference.
 - The Montreux Record was established by **Recommendation 4.8** of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (**1990**).
- Today, the Ramsar List is the world’s largest network of protected areas.
- There are over **2,400 Ramsar Sites** on the territories of **172 Convention Contracting Parties** across the world, covering more than **2.5 million square kilometres**.
- The world’s first Site was the **Cobourg Peninsula** in **Australia**, designated in **1974**.
- The largest Sites are **Rio Negro** in **Brazil** (**120,000 square kilometres**), and **Ngiri-Tumba-Maindombe** in **Congo**.
- The countries with the most Sites are the **United Kingdom** with **175** and **Mexico** with **142**.

- **Bolivia** has the largest area with **148,000 square km** under the Convention protection; Canada, Chad, Congo and the Russian Federation have also each designated over 100,000 square km.

India:

- **India** is a party to the Convention since **1982**.
- On the eve of WWD 2024, India has increased its tally of Ramsar sites to **80** by designating **five more wetlands** as Ramsar sites.
- With the addition of these, the total area covered under Ramsar sites is now **1.33 million ha** which is an increase of **5,523.87 ha** from existing area of **1.327 million ha**.
- Globally, wetlands cover **6.4 per cent** of the geographical area of the **world**.
- In India, according to the **National Wetland Inventory and Assessment** compiled by ISRO, wetlands are spread over **1,52,600 sq km** which is **4.63 per cent** of the total geographical area of the country.
 - Of the 1,52,600 sq km, **inland-natural wetlands** account for **43.4%** and **coastal-natural wetlands 24.3%**.
- India has **19 types** of wetlands.
- In state-wise distribution, **Gujarat** is at the top with **34,700 sq km (17.56% of total geographical area)**, or **22.7%** of total wetlands areas of the country thanks to a long coastline.
- **Tamil Nadu** continues to have maximum number of **Ramsar Sites (16 sites)** followed by **Uttar Pradesh (10 sites)**.
- **The newest five sites are –**
 - **Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve** – Karnataka – human made wetland
 - **Aghanashini Estuary** – Karnataka - natural wetland
 - **Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve** – Karnataka – human made wetland
 - **Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary** - Tamil Nadu – natural wetland
 - **Longwood Shola Reserve Forest** - Tamil Nadu - natural wetland

India's Initiatives:

- The **National Wetland Conservation Program (NWCP)** launched in **1985** provides financial and technical assistance to states and UTs for the preservation and management of wetlands.

- The **National Lake Conservation Plan (NLCP)** was approved by Government of India as 100% centrally sponsored scheme.
- To enhance synergy and prevent overlap, the two schemes were consolidated into a centrally sponsored scheme called the '**National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Eco-systems' (NPCA)** in **February 2013**.
- The MoEF&CC has notified **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017**, under the provisions of the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
 - These rules serve as a regulatory framework for the conservation and management of wetlands across the country.
 - The aim is to conserve, manage, and maintain the ecological character of the wetlands without restricting their wise use.
- The Government of India also launched the **Amrit Sarovar Mission** in **2022**.
 - Under the Mission, **75 water bodies** will be developed and rejuvenated in **each district** of the country as a part of the celebration of **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav**.
 - In total, the Mission aims at creating **50,000 water bodies** of a size of about an Acre or more.
- The **Amrit Dharohar initiative**, part of the 2023-24 budget announcement, was launched by MoEF&CC in **June 2023**.
 - The initiative aims to promote Ramsar Sites' unique conservation values in the country, creating employment opportunities and supporting local livelihoods.
 - Implemented over three years, this initiative involves collaboration with Central Government ministries, State Wetland Authorities, and a network of institutions and individuals.

6. Electoral Bonds



Recently: A Supreme Court **five-judge Constitution** bench declared Electoral Bonds scheme **unconstitutional** and **ordered its annulment** while hearing the case of *Association for Democratic Reforms & Anr. v. Union of India & Ors.*

- The bench comprised **Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice DY Chandrachud, Justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala** and **Manoj Misra**.

What are Electoral Bonds?

- Electoral bonds were launched by **PM Narendra Modi's** government in **2018** to make political funding more transparent.
- Electoral bonds (EBs) are “**bearer**” instruments, like currency notes.
- It offers **interest-free**, bearer instruments for **anonymous donations** to political parties in India.
 - **Clause 7(4)** of the scheme completely exempts information on the purchasers of electoral bonds.
- These bonds were **exempted from tax** and could be exchanged for cash.
- These bonds are available in denominations of **Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore** without any **maximum limits**.

- So far, electoral bonds worth **160bn rupees** (\$1.9bn; £1.5bn) have been sold in **29 tranches**.
- It is authorised and issued by – **State Bank of India** and it's **29** specified branches.
- A donor with a **KYC-compliant account** can purchase the bonds and it can be bought **individually** or **jointly**.
- Political parties can choose to redeem these bonds within **15 days** of receipt to finance their electoral expenses.
- The electoral bonds are available for purchase for **10 days** in the beginning of every quarter.
- The first 10 days of **January, April, July** and **October** has been specified by the government for purchase of electoral bond.
- An additional period of **30 days** shall be specified by the government in the year of Lok Sabha elections.

Eligibility criteria for registration:

- Any party that is registered under **section 29A** of the **Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951** can register for the Electoral Bonds provided that:
 - It has secured at least **1%** of the votes polled in the most recent General elections or Assembly elections.
- The party will be allotted a verified account by the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**.

Amendments:

- The amendments were made through **The Finance Act, 2016**, and **The Finance Act, 2017**, before the EBS was introduced in **January 2018**.
- Earlier no foreign company was allowed to donate to political parties but now they are and they can do it anonymously.
- The amendment lifted **Section 182** of the **Companies Act** had mandated that a firm could donate a maximum of **7.5%** of its average **three year** net profit as political donations.
- The original **Section 29C of the RPA Act** required political parties to publicly disclose contributions in excess of **₹ 20000**, received even through cheques and electronic clearing system.
 - The amendment had allowed a **complete exemption** for political parties to publish contributions received through electoral bonds.
- The amended **Section 13A** of the **Income Tax Act** freed parties from the obligation of keeping a detailed record of contributions received through electoral bonds.

Why was the scheme faced a legal challenge?

- According to a Right to Information (RTI) response, electoral bonds worth **Rs.11,699.84 crore** were sold from **March 2018 - December 2022**.
- Petitions were submitted by various parties, including the **Communist Party of India (Marxist)**, as well as NGOs **Common Cause and the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)**.
- These petitions contest the electoral bond system, characterizing it as an **obscure and unregulated funding mechanism**.
- Earlier in **2021**, the Supreme Court had **refused to stay** the release of electoral bonds ahead of the assembly elections in certain States.

The Judgement:

- In a unanimous judgment SC held that scheme violate the voters' **right to information about political funding** under **Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution**.
 - Article 19 (1)(a) in the Constitution of India guarantees all citizens the "**right to freedom of speech and expression**".
- It also **struck down the preceding amendments** made to the **Representation of People Act, Companies Act, and the Income Tax Act**.
- The apex court ordered the **State of Bank of India**, to stop issuance of electoral bonds herewith.
- The bank was directed to submit details of bonds purchased from **April 12, 2019** till date to the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**.
 - On **April 12, 2019** the top court had ordered the ECI to submit, in a sealed cover, the records of bonds purchased till then.
- The "details" would include **date of purchase** of each bond, the **name of the buyer** and the **denomination of the bond**.
- The bank would furnish the information to the ECI by **March 6, 2024**.

- The poll body, in turn, has to publish the entire information given by the State Bank of India on its website by **March 13, 2024**.
- Electoral bonds, with a validity period of 15 days and yet to be encashed, would be **returned** by political parties or purchasers to the bank, which must **refund** the amount to the purchasers' accounts.
- The scheme and the amendments authorised "unrestrained influence of corporates in the electoral process".
- The Chief Justice held that **the right to privacy** of political affiliation does not extend to those contributions, which may be made to influence policies.
 - It only extends to contributions made as a genuine form of political support.

7. Union Budget 2024



Recently: The **finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman** set a record by presenting the **sixth Budget** in a row - five **annual Budgets and one interim**.

- The recently announced budget is the **interim budget of 2024** and the full-fledged budget will be presented by the new government that comes to power after the elections.

- The speech lasted for exactly **58 minutes**, the **shortest** by Sitharaman's record.

Highlights:

- **Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047** has been one of the focus areas of interim Budget 2024.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government is focusing on **four major groups - poor, women, youth and the farmers**.
 - The government claims to have helped **25 crore** people to get freedom from poverty in last **10 years**.
- **Defence outlay** to be increased by **11.1%** to **Rs 11,11,111 crore**, which will be **3.4%** of GDP.
- Meanwhile, the **fiscal deficit for 2024-25** is estimated at **5.1 per cent of GDP** against **5.8 per cent** in the current financial year.
 - The target is to reduce the fiscal deficit to below **4.5%** of the GDP in **2025-26**
- No significant changes have been made in taxation under the new regime.
- No hike in standard deduction has been made under the new regime.
- **No changes** were announced in the **tax slabs** in both old and new regime.

Schemes and benefits:

- **Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana - Rooftop solarisation** to give 1 crore households 300 units of free electricity per month, says Nirmala Sitharaman.
- A corpus of **₹ 1 lakh crore** will be established with **50-year interest free loan** to provide long term financing with long tenure with no or less interest rates.
- A new technology will be launched to strengthen **deep tech for defence purposes**
- Tax benefits for startups, investments made by sovereign wealth, pension funds to be extended to **March 2025**.
- **40,000 normal rail bogies** will be converted to **Vande Bharat standards**
- Government aims for **2 crore more houses** in **five years** Under **PM Awas Yojana**.
- **PM Mudra Yojana** has sanctioned **43 crore loans** amounting to **Rs. 22.5 lakh crore** for entrepreneurial aspirations of your youth.
- The Ayushman Bharat scheme will be extended to all ASHA and Anganwadi workers, Union Finance Minister has announced.

- Finance Minister said the government will encourage vaccinations for girls aged **9-14** against **cervical cancer**.

What is a Union Budget?

- The Union Budget is more technically called the **Annual Financial Statement**.
- The Union Budget of India, as defined in **Article 112 of the Constitution of India**, is the annual budget of the Republic of India.
- It is presented each year on the **last working day of February** by the **Finance Minister of India** in Parliament.
- The budget is a comprehensive document that outlines the government's economic and fiscal policies for the next fiscal year.
 - The fiscal year runs from **April 1 to March 31**.
- The budget-making process begins in **August–September**, over six months before the date of presentation.
- It is prepared by the **finance minister** with the help of advisors and bureaucrats.
- Before preparation, the finance minister invites input from business leaders and experts.
 - In the process, various accounting and financial institutions also provide their thoughts and proposals.
- The government has a yearly custom of holding a **halwa ceremony** a few days before the Budget is presented.
 - The event marks the beginning of **Budget document printing**.
 - As part of the celebration, a massive "**kadhai**" (**big frying pot**) is used to make "halwa," by **finance minister** which is then fed to the whole finance ministry workers.
- The last stage of the budget-making process is the presentation of the budget to Parliament.
 - The finance minister gives the presentation on the first day of the Budget session.
 - During the presentation, the minister summarises the important aspects of the text and explains the logic behind the suggestions.
- Following the presentation, the Budget is presented to **both chambers of the Parliament** for debate.
- The Centre seeks both Houses' approval to withdraw the necessary funds from the Consolidated Fund of India; this statement has to be passed by both Houses.
- The Budget is sent to the **President** for approval once it has been approved by both chambers.

History of budget in India:

- The Budget was first introduced in India on **April 7, 1860**, when Scottish economist **James Wilson** from the East India Company presented it to the British Crown.
- Independent India's first budget was presented **on November 26, 1947** by the then **Finance Minister RK Shanmukham Chetty**.
- From **1947 to 1955**, the Union Budget was published only in **English**.
 - But in **1955–56**, the government broke away with the British Raj-era tradition and started publishing it in **Hindi** also.
 - The credit for this goes to the country's **third Finance Minister CD Deshmukh**.
- Until **1999**, the Union Budget was presented at **5 pm** on the last working day of February as per British-era practice.
- Former Finance Minister **Yashwant Sinha** in **1999** changed the budget presentation timing to **11 am**.
- **Arun Jaitley** started presenting the **Union Budget** on **February 1 in 2017**, departing from the colonial-era tradition of using the last working day of that month.
- At **18,650 words**, **Manmohan Singh** delivered the **longest** Budget speech in terms of **words** in **1991** under **the Narasimha Rao government**.
- **800 words** which became the shortest budget was all that the then finance minister **Hirubhai Mulljibhai Patel** delivered in **1977**.
- Covid-19 pandemic turned the Budget for 2021-22 **paperless** - a first in Independent India.
- Sitharaman holds the record for delivering the **longest speech when she spoke for 2 hours and 42 minutes** while presenting the Union Budget 2020-21 on **February 1, 2020**.
 - With two pages still remaining, she had to cut short her speech as she felt unwell.
- **Former Prime Minister Moraraji Desai** earlier held the record of presenting the most number of budgets in the history of the country – **10 budgets**.
- In **2019**, **Sitharaman** became the **second woman** to have presented the budget after **Indira Gandhi** in **1970-71**.
- In that year, Sitharaman abandoned the traditional **budget briefcase** and, instead, opted for a traditional '**bahi-khata**' adorned with the **National Emblem**.
- Till **2017**, the **railway budget and Union Budget** were presented separately.
- Of course, the largest interim budget speech was made by Finance Minister **R.K. Shanmukham Chetty**, who, in November 1947, almost touched the 10,000-word level.

- The shortest Interim Budget was by **Finance Minister H.M. Patel** in his 798-word speech in March 1977.
- The last interim budget was presented by **Piyush Goyal** in **February 2019**.

Constitutional provisions related to budget:

- **Article 114** of the Constitution mandates the government to present a separate account of the receipts and expenditure of the **Consolidated Fund of India**.
 - This fund encompasses the revenues of the central government, certain other funds, and all money received by the government through loans.
- **Article 266** of the Constitution directs the government to credit all revenues, including taxes and other income, into the Consolidated Fund of India.
- This must be done unless there are specific provisions by law indicating otherwise.
- **Article 266(2)** of the Constitution requires the government to withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund of India only after it has been **authorized** by a law passed by the parliament.
- **Article 270** of the Constitution requires the government to present a statement of the estimated receipts and expenditure of each state government, which is called **State Budget**.
- **Article 272** of the Constitution requires the government to transfer certain specified taxes and duties to the states and union territories.

Interim Budget:

- In an election year, the incumbent Government cannot present a full Budget as there may be a change in the executive after the polls. Hence, the need for an interim budget.
- Since there is no constitutional provision for an interim budget, the Centre can opt to secure approval from the **Lower House** for the funds needed during the **transition period (April - July)**.
 - This is done through the votes on account provision until the new government presents a full Budget.
- **Article 116** of the Constitution allows the Lower House to make any grant in advance for the estimated expenditure for part of any financial year by voting and passing such a legislation, i.e. **vote on account**.
- The Lok Sabha is empowered to authorise withdrawal of required funds from the Consolidated Fund of India for such expenditure.

- A simple vote on account includes presenting the Centre's fund requirements for salaries, ongoing projects and other expenditure for the transitional period.
- It is then passed via the Lok Sabha sans debate. It cannot make any changes to tax rates.
- It is also valid only for **two months** and can be extended up to **four months**.
- However, it has been the trend for outgoing governments to present an interim budget instead of a simple vote on account.
- In an interim budget, the Finance Minister will present the current state of the Indian economy, its fiscal status including India's revised estimated growth in the next year.
- She will also detail the government's planned and non-planned expenditure and receipts.
- Like the Union budget, the interim budget too is debated in the Lok Sabha before Interim budget is valid for the entire year though it is merely a **transition arrangement**
- The Interim Budget mainly focuses on a breakdown of the government's expected income and expenses until the formation of the new government.
- On the other hand, a comprehensive Budget covers all aspects of government finances its passage.

Iconic Budgets:

The Black Budget

- The **1973-74 Budget** presented by **Yashwantrao B Chavan** in the **Indira Gandhi government** was called the Black Budget as the fiscal deficit during that year was **Rs 550 crore**.
- It was a time when India was going through acute financial distress.

Carrot & Stick Budget

- The Union budget presented by **VP Singh** to the Congress government on **February 28, 1986**, was the first step towards dismantling licence raj in India.
- It was called the '**Carrot and Stick**' budget as it offered both **rewards** and **punishment**.
- It introduced **MODVAT (Modified Value Added Tax) credit** for lowering the cascading effect of tax.

Dream Budget

- **P Chidambaram** in the **1997-98 budget** used the **Laffer Curve** principle to lower tax rates to increase collections.

- He slashed the maximum marginal income tax rate for individuals from **40 per cent to 30 per cent** and that for domestic companies to **35 per cent**
- Referred to as the 'Dream Budget', it also slashed customs duty to 40 per cent and simplified excise duty structure

8. India's first privately built spy satellite



Representative Image

Recently: The first spy satellite in India to be made by a local private player is set to be launched in a **SpaceX rocket** by **April**.

- The satellite will be used by the armed forces to get **discreet information**.
- Earlier, the armed forces had to acquire the required exact coordinates and timings from foreign vendors.
 - But now, this satellite will allow them to be monitored by India and also provide it with full ground control.
- The satellite is ready and had been sent to **Florida** for an expected launch by April.

About:

- The satellite has been built by **Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL)**.
- It boasts an impressive **0.5-meter spatial resolution** in its imagery, making it capable of capturing fine details from space.
- A **state-of-the-art ground control centre** is also being established in **Bengaluru** which will direct the satellite's path and process its imagery.
 - The centre is being built in partnership with **Satellogic**, a Latin-American company.
- The imagery sent by the TASL satellite will also be allowed to be shared with **friendly nations**.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) also has satellites that can help share the imagery but their application, given the vast coverage required, is only limited.
 - India currently uses **US companies** to get the necessary spy data. The need has increased after the skirmishes with China at the Line of Actual Control.

Spy Satellites:

- These are basically used for **reconnaissance** and **military surveillance**.
- They orbit the earth and take images and record radio signals predominantly used for military and geo-political purposes.
- These satellites send data to the earth and this is interpreted by critical analysts in a secured manner.
- This all started in **1955** where the **United States** built **reconnaissance satellites** to have a watch over a particular area.
- **RISAT and RISAT 2B** Radar are India's spy satellites.

RISAT:

- **RISAT- 2** was **India's first dedicated 'spy' or reconnaissance satellite** that the country had launched soon after the **2008 Mumbai terror attacks**.
- It **re-entered** the Earth's atmosphere and splashed in the Indian Ocean near **Jakarta** on **October 30**.
- Risat-2 played a key role in several anti-infiltration and anti-terrorist operations for **13.5 years** and performed its duty much beyond its expected life span.
- Images from satellite helped security and intelligence agencies plan **surgical strike in 2016** on terror launchpads in **POK** and **Balakot aerial strike** in **February 2019**.

- The launch of Risat-2 was accelerated following the 26/11 terror attacks in 2008 due to the delay in the **indigenously-developed C-band for Risat-1** satellite.
- That is why **Risat-2** was **launched in 2009** three years ahead of **Risat-1 launch in 2012**.
- It was also used to track hostile ships on the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea that were deemed a security threat.
- It was used to locate the wreckage of the **helicopter crash** that claimed the life of the then Andhra Pradesh **CM Y S Rajasekhara Reddy** on **September 2, 2009**.

9. EXERCISE-MILAN 2024



Recently: The **12th edition** of the multinational naval exercise **MILAN-2024**, concluded in **Visakhapatnam** on February 26th.

- Around **50 countries** participated in this edition of the exercise.
- Navies from the **US, Japan, Australia, France, Bangladesh, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia, among others**, became a part of the exercise.
- This edition of MILAN witnessed participation of **35 units** including ships, submarines and aircraft.
- **13 ships and one aircraft** from **Friendly Foreign Countries** participated in the sea phase.

- From **Indian Navy**, nearly **20 ships** including aircraft carriers **INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya** and nearly **50 aircraft** including **MiG29K, LCA, Tejas and P8I** participated in the exercise.
 - This was the **first time** that **two naval aircraft carriers** took part in the exercise together.

What is MILAN?

- MILAN is a **biennial multilateral naval exercise** incepted by Indian Navy in **1995** at **Andaman and Nicobar Command**.
- Since its inception, the event has been held biennially except for **2001, 2005, 2016 and 2020**.
 - While the 2001 and 2016 editions were not held due to International Fleet Reviews, the 2005 edition was rescheduled to 2006 due to the 2004 Tsunami.
 - 2020 edition of MILAN was postponed to 2022 due to COVID-19.
- It started with the participation of only **four countries**, viz **Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand**, in the **1995 edition**.
- Originally conceived in consonance with **India's 'Look East Policy'**, MILAN expanded in ensuing years with the GOI's '**Act East policy**' and **Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)** initiative.
- Participation increased from six regional countries to 18 countries in 2014 which included IOR littorals.

How was the Exercise Conducted?

- The Exercise was conducted in two phases- **The Harbour Phase and the Sea Phase**.

Harbour Phase:

- This phase of the exercise was conducted from **February 19th to February 23rd**.
- It included the Milan Opening Ceremony, International City Parade, International Maritime Seminar, MILAN Tech Expo, MILAN Village, Subject Matter Expert Exchange and Table Top Exercise.

Sea Phase:

- This phase of the exercise was conducted from **24th to 27th February**.
- It included advanced Air Defence, Anti-Submarine and Anti-Surface Warfare drills.

- Gunnery shoots on aerial and surface targets, manoeuvres and underway replenishment were also conducted.
- The closing Ceremony served as a platform for comprehensive debriefing sessions on the operational aspects of the Sea Phase.

10. Hydrogen- fuelled ferry



Recently: Prime Minister Modi flagged off **India's first indigenously built hydrogen fuel cell ferry boat** in virtual mode at **Kochi Harbor** in **Kerala**.

- The vessel, manufactured by **Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL)**, will be deployed for service at **Varanasi** in **Uttar Pradesh** and trial runs in **Kochi**.
- The vessel was launched under the '**Harit Nauka**'(green boat) initiative of the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways**

About the vessel:

- The ferry named '**Suchetha**', is built at a cost of **Rs 18 crore**.
 - The **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways** met **75 per cent** of the project cost.
- The vessel will be handed over to the **Inland Waterways Authority of India** by the CSL after rigorous trials.
- The pilot vessel is a **24-metre catamaran** which can carry **50 passengers** with fully **air-conditioned passenger space**.
- The accommodation area has been constructed with high-quality **fiberglass reinforced plastic**, similar to metro train coaches.
- The hydrogen fuel cell-powered vessel has **zero emission, zero noise** and is **energy-efficient**, which makes it more environment-friendly.
- Hydrogen fuel cell vessels do not use conventional batteries as the primary storage house of **electrical energy**.
 - The vessels run on hydrogen fuel, which is stored in **cylinders**.
- This boat has **five hydrogen cylinders** that can carry **40kg** of **hydrogen** and support **eight hours of operations** and the vessel is also fitted with a **3-kW solar panel**.
- Since there are no moving parts, the ferry requires less maintenance than combustion vessels.
- This vessel uses a **50-kW PEM (proton-exchange membrane)** fuel cell, with **Lithium-Ion Phosphate batteries**.
 - The advantage is that the cells can quickly change their output depending upon the power demand.
 - PEM fuel cells are popular in automotive applications because they operate at a lower temperature, and are lighter and more compact.

How was it developed?

- A **memorandum of understanding (MoU)** for this was inked between the **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)** and **Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL)** in **2022**.
- The vessel has been built completely by the CSL, which also developed the **vessel automation system** and **power management system**.
 - India has now indigenously developed hydrogen fuel cells and their related systems.

- The hydrogen fuel cell system was developed **by KPIT Technologies, Pune.**
 - It was in collaboration with the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research Labs** under the **Union Ministry of Science and Technology.**
- While hydrogen fuel cell technology has been under development for maritime applications, only a few countries globally have done demonstration projects.

Other projects:

- The vessel was flagged off as part of a major program organized in **Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu** which marked the laying of the foundation stone for a **₹17,300-crore project** in **Thoothukudi.**
- The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of **Outer Harbor Container Terminal** at **V.O.Chidambaranar Port.**
- He dedicated tourist facilities in **75 lighthouses** across **10 States/UTs.**
- He also dedicated to the nation, rail projects for doubling of **Vanchi Maniyachchi - Nagercoil rail line** including the **Vanchi Maniyachchi - Tirunelveli** section and **Melappalayam - Aralvaymoli section.**
- The Prime Minister dedicated **four road projects** in Tamil Nadu, developed at a total cost of about **Rs 4,586 Crore.**
- The PM inaugurated various other projects aimed at making the **V.O. Chidambaranar Port, the first Green Hydrogen Hub Port** of the country.

Harit Nauka initiative:

- It is an initiative of the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways** that envisages a green transition of inland vessels.
- In **January 2024**, the shipping ministry unveiled the **Harit Nauka guidelines** for inland vessels.
- As per the guidelines, all states have to make efforts to use green fuels for **50 per cent of inland waterways-based** passenger fleets in the next **one decade**, and **100 per cent** by **2045.**
- This is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as per the **Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.**

11. World Cancer Day 2024



Source- <https://festifit.com/world-cancer-day-messages-wishes-and-quotes>

Recently: The 2024 edition of the World Cancer Day was observed on **February 4th**.

- The day aims to promote awareness about cancer. It also helps to strengthen actions that strive to improve cancer care, detection, preventive measures and treatment.

What is Cancer?

- It is basically the rapid creation of abnormal cells that grow beyond their usual boundaries, and which can then invade adjoining parts of the body and spread to other organs. This process is called **metastasis**.
- There are two main categories of cancer-

- **Hematologic (blood) cancers** are cancers of the blood cells, including leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma.
- **Solid tumor cancers** are cancers of any of the other body organs or tissues. The most common solid tumors are breast, prostate, lung, and colorectal cancers.
- Causes:
 - **Physical factors** – Ionizing radiation, such as X-rays and gamma rays
 - **Chemical factors** – Such as tobacco and smoke
 - **Biological factors** – Viral oncogenes, proto-oncogenes and cellular oncogenes
- Cancer Stage- When a cancer is found, tests are done to see how big the cancer is and whether it has spread from where it started. This is called the **cancer's stage**.
 - A **lower stage** (such as a stage 1 or 2) means that the cancer has not spread very much.
 - A **higher stage** (such as a stage 3 or 4) means it has spread more.
 - Stage 4 is the highest stage.
- Treatment- Commonly, three types of treatment are available for cancer.
 - Surgery – Surgically removing localized cancerous mass (Effective for benign tumours).
 - Radiation therapy – In this therapy, radiation is used to kill the cancer cells.
 - Chemotherapy – Chemotherapeutic drugs are used to kill cancer cells.

Theme for 2024:

- The theme for World Cancer Day 2024 is '**Close the care gap: Everyone deserves access to cancer care.**'
- It is a part of a **3-year long campaign** from **2022 to 2024**.
- The **Union for International Cancer Control (UICC)** focuses on a single agenda under this campaign.
- According to UICC, the agenda for 2024 is '**Together, we challenge those in power.**'
- The official colours of World Cancer Day are **blue and orange**.

History:

- World Cancer Day was established by the **Paris Charter** adopted at the **World Summit Against Cancer for the New Millenium in Paris on 4th February 2000**.
- This Charter aimed at the promotion of research for curing as well as preventing cancer, improving services provided to patients, raising awareness among the general public, and mobilising the global community against cancer.
- In its **article 10**, the Charter established that **4th February** would therefore be World Cancer Day, so that the Charter of Paris would remain in the hearts and minds of people around the world.

12. Supreme Court's interim order on the Forest Act



Recently: The Supreme Court has directed governments to follow the “broad and all-encompassing” definition of forest as laid down in its **1996** judgment in the ***T N Godavarman*** case until a consolidated record of all kinds of forests across the country is prepared.

- A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud passed the order on February 19 on petitions that challenged the **2023 amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**.
 - The challenges were made on the ground that the modifications had “substantially diluted” the definition of forest, and had **reduced the ambit of the Act**.
- The court has also asked the government to make public, by April, a consolidated record of land deemed as forest by States and Union Territories.

The Forest Conservation Act, 1980:

- The Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act 2023 amended the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, which provided for the conservation of forests across the country in several ways.
- FCA is an important Central statute for the conservation of forests in the country. According to the act, the following activities require prior permission:
 - De-reservation of reserved forests.
 - Use of forest land for non-forest purpose
 - Assigning forest land by way of lease or otherwise to private entity
 - Clearing of naturally grown trees for the purpose of reafforestation.

The applicability of the 1980 act:

- Initially, the provisions of the Act were being applied to the **notified forest land only**.
- Non-revenue forest areas and non-forestry use in the revenue forest areas was allowed through government's permissions.
- After **1996** Supreme Court judgement in ***T.N. Godavarman vs. Union of India and others***, the Act was applied to **recorded forest areas**, including those already used for non-forestry purposes.
 - The SC clarified that the Act will apply not only on notified forest land — forest lands **recorded in government records** — but also in the **areas resembling forests** as per dictionary meaning.
 - The Supreme Court had also asked States to undertake an exercise to identify and notify their own deemed forests.

- After the order, the Act was made applicable to revenue forest land or in lands which were recorded as forest in government records and to areas which resembled forests as per their dictionary meaning.

Reasoning applied for expansion of ambit of the act:

- Under **sub-sections ii, iii, and iv** of **Section 2** ("Restriction on the dereservation of forests or use of forest land for non-forest purpose") of the FCA, the ambit of the law is **not limited to only "reserved forest"** — it bars the unauthorised non-forest use of any forest land.
- In the FCA, the term "reserved forest" is used only in the limited context of dereservation.
- **Section 2(i)** says that no reserve forest "shall cease to be reserved" without prior approval from the Centre. Clearly, a clause on dereservation can only apply to what is reserved.
- This principle was reiterated by the Supreme Court in July 2022 in ***Narinder Singh & Ors vs Divesh Bhutani & Ors*** where it held that the clause (i) specifically refers to a reserved forest and it is obvious that clauses (ii), (iii) & (iv) apply to any other forest.
 - Therefore, forest as understood by its dictionary meaning is covered by Section 2" of the FC Act itself.
- **Section 3** of the **Forest Rights Act, 2006**, requires the Centre to divert forest land "notwithstanding anything contained in the FC Act" for certain facilities managed by the government.
 - Therefore, it can be said that the expansion of the purview of the Forest Conservation Act would not interfere with the welfare agenda of the government.

Why was the amendment needed?

- In the 28 years that have passed since the judgment, **States** — brd on surveys and reports by expert committees — **have interpreted 'forests' differently.**
- **Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh**, for instance, define a forest as a tract that spans a minimum of **10 hectares**, is covered with naturally growing timber, fuel wood and yielding trees and, has a **density of 200 trees** or more per hectare.
- **Goa** defines a forest as a patch of land having **at least 75%** covered with **forest species.**
- Many such lands that were already put to non-forestry use with the required approval of the competent authority, conformed to a State's criteria of a 'deemed forest'.

- This **caused confusion** about the Act's applicability to plantations on private and government non-forest lands.
- This brings us to the need for the **Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act 2023**, as per the government, to clarify the Act's applicability to different types of lands.

Provisions of the 2023 amendment:

- The act redefines what a '**forest**' is in Indian law.
 - It provides that only those lands that were notified as 'forest' under the **Indian Forest Act 1927**, any other relevant law or were recorded as 'forests' in government records will be acknowledged as 'forests' under the Act as well.
 - The 1980 act had a wide scope and it applies to "**any forest land**".
- **Exemptions-** Certain categories of lands are exempted from the purview of the Act which includes the following:
 - Strategic projects concerning national security located within **100 km** of distance from the **International Borders, Line of Actual Control, Line of Control**.
 - **0.10 ha** of forest land proposed to provide **connectivity** to habitation and establishments located on the side of roads and railways.
 - Up to **10 ha** of land proposed for **security related infrastructure**.
 - Up to **5 ha** of forest land in **Left Wing Extremism Affected Districts** for public utility projects.
- Surveys and investigation in the forest areas are not considered as a non-forestry activity in view of the fact that such activities are temporary in nature and involve no perceptible change in the land use.
- The **Section 6** of the act empowers the Central Government to **issue directions for the proper implementation of the Act**.

The recent challenge?

- The challenge (*Ashok Kumar Sharma, IFS (Retd) & Ors v. Union of India & Ors*) was filed by a group of **retired Indian Forest Service officers** and NGOs such as **Vanashakti and Goa Foundation**.

- The petitions echoed some of the concerns raised by the dissenting members of the **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** that had examined the amendments.
- The major apprehension was the **potential exclusion of 28% of India's forests** that lie outside Recorded Forest Areas from the purview of the FC Act.
- The petitioners argued that due to the pending finalisation of the consolidated record of forests land parcels that would have been considered forests under the 1996 judgment could now be used for non-forest purposes without requiring any clearance under the FCA.
- At this, the SC explicitly asked its 1996 definition to be followed until the consolidated record of forests was finalised.

13. Lok Sabha's anti- cheating bill



Source- PIB

Recently: The Lok Sabha witnessed the introduction of the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024**, aimed at combating malpractices in competitive exams.

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- The Bill was introduced in the house by the **Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh.**
- There have been a very large number of cases of question paper leaks in recruitment exams across the country in recent years.
- An investigation by The Indian Express found at least **48 instances** of paper leaks in **16 states** over the **last five years**, in which the process of hiring for government jobs was disrupted.
 - The leaks touched the lives of at least 1.51 crore applicants for about 1.2 lakh posts.

Aim of the bill:

- According to the **Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill**,
 - The objective of the Bill is to bring **greater transparency, fairness and credibility** to the public examination systems
 - To reassure the youth that their sincere and genuine efforts will be fairly rewarded and their future is safe.
 - The Bill is aimed **at effectively and legally deterring** persons, organised groups or institutions that indulge in various unfair means and adversely impact the public examination systems for monetary or wrongful gains.

Provisions of the bill:

Unfair Means:

- **Section 3** of the Bill lists at least **15 actions** that amount to using **unfair means** in public examinations.
- These include:
 - Question paper or answer key leaks.
 - Participation in collusion with others to effect question paper or answer key leaks.
 - Accessing or taking possession of question paper or an Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) response sheet without authority.

- Providing solution to one or more questions by any unauthorised person during a public examination.
- Directly or indirectly assisting the candidate in any manner unauthorisedly in the public examination.
- Tampering with answer sheets including OMR response sheets.
- Altering the assessment except to correct a bona fide error without any authority.
- Wilful violation of norms or standards set up by the central government for conduct of a public examination on its own or through its agency.
- Tampering with any document necessary for short-listing of candidates or finalising the merit or rank of a candidate in a public examination.
- Deliberate violation of security measures to facilitate unfair means in conduct of a public examination.
- Tampering with the computer network or a computer resource or a computer system.
- Manipulation in seating arrangements, allocation of dates and shifts for the candidates to facilitate adopting unfair means in examinations.
- Threatening the life, liberty or wrongfully restraining persons associated with the public examination authority or the service provider or any authorised agency of the Government; or obstructing the conduct of a public examination.
- Creation of fake website to cheat or for monetary gain
- Conduct of fake examination, issuance of fake admit cards or offer letters to cheat or for monetary gain.

Public Examinations:

- Under **Section 2(k)**, a “public examination” is defined as any examination conducted by a “public examination authority” listed in the Schedule of the act, or any “such other authority as may be notified by the Central Government”.
- The schedule lists **five public examination authorities**:
 - **Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)** - Conducts the Civil Services Examination, Combined Defence Services Examinations, Combined Medical Services Examination, Engineering Services Examination, etc.
 - **Staff Selection Commission (SSC)** - Recruits for Group C (non-technical) and Group B (non-gazetted) jobs in the central government.
 - **Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs)** - Recruit Groups C and D staff in the Indian Railways.
 - **Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS)** - Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS).

- **National Testing Agency (NTA)** - conducts the JEE (Main), NEET-UG, UGC-NET, the Common University Entrance Test (CUET), etc.
- All “Ministries or Departments of the Central Government and their attached and subordinate offices for recruitment of staff” will also come under the purview of the new law.
- The central government can add new authorities in the schedule through a notification as and when required.

Punishment:

- **Section 9** of the Bill states that all offences shall be **cognizable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable**.
- Punishment for “any person or persons **resorting to unfair means and offences**” can be three to **five years in prison**, and a fine up to **Rs 10 lakh**.
- According to **Section 10(1)** of the bill, if the convict **fails to pay the fine**, an **additional punishment** of imprisonment shall be imposed, as per the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.
- According to **section 10(2)** of the bill, **service provider** shall also be liable to be punished with imposition of a fine up to **one crore rupees**.
 - A **proportionate cost of examination** shall also be recovered from such service provider.
 - He/she shall also be **barred** from being assigned with any responsibility for the conduct of any public examination for a period of four years.
- If an investigation finds the offence under this act has been committed with the consent or connivance of any **director, senior management or the persons in-charge** of the service provider firm, the guilty person shall be liable for imprisonment for a term **not less than three years** but which may extend to **ten years** and with fine of **one crore rupees**.
- **Section 11(1)** of the bill states that if a person or a group of individuals including the examination service provider are found guilty **of organised crime**, the punishment amounts to a **minimum of five years** of imprisonment which may extend to **ten years**.
 - The guilty will be slapped with a minimum fine of **₹1 crore**.
- Candidate as defined in the Bill shall **not be liable** for action **within the purview of the Bill** and shall continue to be covered under the extant administrative provisions of the concerned **public examination authority**.

14. Gaganyaan Mission



Source-

Recently: India has unveiled **four Air Force pilots** who have been shortlisted to travel on the country's maiden space flight, **Gaganyaan**, scheduled for next year.

- The announcement was made at the **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre** in **Thumba, Kerala**.
- Earlier, ISRO announced that it has successfully tested the human readiness of the **cryogenic engine** that will be used on the Gaganyaan mission vehicles.

Who will be the crew members?

- The four astronauts that are described as **"four forces"** by PM Modi are:
 - Group Captain Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair
 - Group Captain Ajit Krishnan

- Group Captain Angad Pratap
- Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla

Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair:

- Mr. Nair hails from **Nenmara town** of **Kerala** and joined the **Indian Air Force** in **1999**.
- He received the **prestigious Sword of Honour** in **1998**, which is given to the best-performing cadet during his training.
- He was also the **first rank holder** at the **United States Air Force Air Command and Staff College**.

Ajit Krishnan:

- Group captain Krishnan hails from **Chennai**.
- He is the recipient of the **President's Gold Medal** and the **Sword of Honour** at the Air Force Academy.
- He was commissioned in **2003** and is a flying instructor and test pilot with IAF.

Group Captain Angad Pratap:

- Group captain Pratap, from **Prayagraj**.
- He was commissioned in **2004** and is a **flying instructor** and **test pilot**.

Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla:

- Wing commander Shukla, from **Lucknow**, was commissioned in **2006**.
- He is a **fighter combat leader** and a test pilot with IAF.

Training:

- They were awarded "**Antriksh Yatri Pankh**" (**astronaut wings**) by the Prime Minister at a ceremony.
- The four astronauts completed their generic training at **Russia's Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre** between **February 2020 and March 2021**.
- ISRO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with **Glavkosmos**, a subsidiary of the **Russian space agency Roscosmos**, for the training in **June 2019**.

- The astronauts are currently training at ISRO's astronaut **training facility** in **Bengaluru**.
- One of the four astronauts is expected to be trained by the **American space agency NASA**.
 - **Bill Nelson**, administrator of NASA, had made this announcement during a visit to New Delhi in 2023.
 - This astronaut would likely be chosen from among the four who are preparing for the Gaganyaan mission.

What is Gaganyaan Mission?

- Gaganyaan is the first indigenous mission that will send **Indian astronauts to space**.

Aim:

- Gaganyaan project envisages demonstration of human spaceflight capability by launching crew of **3 members** to a low-earth-orbit of **300- 400 km** for a **3 days mission** and bring them back safely to earth, by landing in Indian sea waters.

History:

- The ISRO **Policy Planning Committee** made recommendation for a manned Space mission in **2004** and Preliminary studies of Gaganyaan started under the generic name **Orbital Vehicle** in **2006**.
- The space mission was first announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in **2018** in his Independence Day address to the nation.

Cost:

- The total cost of Gaganyaan programme would be to the tune of **Rs 9,023 crore**.

Intricacies of the Mission:

- Under the Gaganyaan schedule, **three flights** will be sent in orbit. Of the three, there are **two unmanned flights** and **one human spaceflight** called the **orbital module**.
- Payload of the orbital module:

The payload consists **two modules-**

- **Crew module** which is the spacecraft carrying human beings.
- The **service module** is powered by two liquid-propellant engines.
- These two modules are collectively known as **orbital module**.
- It weighs around **8000kg** and will be equipped with emergency escape and emergency mission abort.
- ISRO will use its **LVM3 rocket** for all of Gaganyaan missions.

Gaganyaan- 1:

- The first mission flight, Gaganyaan-1, an **unmanned test flight to check technology readiness**, is expected by the **end of 2024**.
- The unmanned mission will carry an unpressurised crew module — the capsule in which the astronauts will be seated during the human flight — to space and back.
- The Gaganyaan-1 mission's crew module will not have the Environment Control and Life Support System, which ensures an Earth-like environment inside the module.

Gaganyaan- 2

- The second mission is planned with a pressurised crew module, in which the **complete life support system will be tested**.
- This flight will carry the robot **Vyommitra** which will record all parameters to study the impact of the flight on humans.
- This Female Robot Astronaut is equipped with the capability to monitor Module Parameters, issue Alerts and execute Life Support operations.
- It can perform tasks such as operating **six panels** and responding to the queries.
- This female looking robot weighing **40 kg** was unveiled by ISRO in **2019**.

TV- D1:

- In **October last year**, ISRO successfully conducted the first test of a basic crew module and **crew escape system (CES), Test Vehicle – Demonstration (TV-D1)**.

- The CES is a part of the module that ensures “the crew is taken to a safe distance in case of any emergency either at launch pad or during ascent phase.
- The test also demonstrated the success of the deployment of **drogue chutes** at the desired angle.
- Drogue chutes play an essential role in stabilising the crew module and **reducing its velocity** to a safe level during re-entry.
- They bring the crew module from a height of **17 km and speed of 150 metres/ second** to **2.5 km from the sea surface** and a speed **of 63 metres/ sec.**

LVM3:

- The **Launch Vehicle Mark-III** or **LVM3**, previously referred as the **Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark III** or **GSLV Mk III**, is a **three-stage**, medium-lift launch vehicle developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- It consists of **solid stage, liquid stage and cryogenic stage.**
- On February 14, final tests on the **cryogenic engine**, known as **CE20**, were performed.
 - The engine successfully passed the test and was certified for missions that would transport humans to space.
- The **Vikas engine** to be used in the **liquid stage**, and the **solid booster**, which is part of the **solid stage**, have already qualified for the missions.
- It has the capacity to take **4 ton of payload to geosynchronous transfer orbit** and **10- ton payload to low earth orbit.**
 - It is totally suited for the Gaganyaan Mission that has an estimated payload of **5-6 tons.**
- All systems in LVM3 launch vehicle are re-configured to meet human rating requirements and christened Human Rated LVM3.
- ISRO successfully conducted the first orbital test launch of LVM3 on 5 June **2017** from the **Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.**

Humans in Space:

- **Yuri Gagarin**, representing the **Soviet Union**, became the **first human to journey into space** aboard the **Vostok 1** spacecraft in **1961**.
- **Valentina Tereshkova**, also from the **Soviet Union**, holds the distinction of being the **first woman in space**.
 - She achieved this feat aboard both **Sputnik 1 and Vostok 1** in **1963**.
- **Rakesh Sharma** became the **first Indian** to travel to space, marking this achievement aboard the **Soyuz T-11 spacecraft of Soviet Union** in **1984**.
- **Kalpana Chawla** made history as the first Indian woman in space.
 - She accomplished this milestone on the **Space Shuttle Columbia** in **1997**.

India in the space league:

- The Gaganyaan Mission is **India's first human space flight programme** for which extensive preparations are underway at various ISRO centres.
- If it succeeds, India will become only the **fourth country** to send a human into space after the **Soviet Union, the US and China**.
- Gaganyaan has generated a lot of interest in India, although it's coming decades after **Soviet Union** and the **US** started making trips to the **low Earth orbit**.
 - Both have been in space since **1961**.
- **China** became the **third country** to reach space in **October 2003** when a Chinese mission spent **21 hours** and orbited Earth **14 times**.
- And the **US and China** have fully operational **space stations** in low Earth orbit.
- Last year, India made major forays into space. The country made history by becoming the **first to land near the Moon's south pole**, through the success of **Chandrayaan- 3**, in August 2023.
- Just weeks later, scientists launched **Aditya-L1**, India's **first observation mission to the Sun** which is now in orbit, keeping an eye on our solar system's most important and volatile star.
- India has also announced ambitious new plans for space, saying it would aim to set up a **space station by 2035** and send an **astronaut to the Moon by 2040**.

15. The Demise of Fali S. Nariman



Source- Indian Express

Recently: Eminent jurist and senior advocate of the Supreme Court Fali Sam Nariman died at the age of **95**.

- He is survived by his son, former Supreme Court judge **Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman**, daughter-in-law Sanaya, and daughter Anaheeta.
 - His wife **Bapsi Nariman** passed away in 2020.
- Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud began the day's proceedings in the Supreme Court by condoling Nariman's death.

Who was Fali S. Nariman?

- Fali S. Nariman was an Indian Jurist who was born on **January 10, 1929**, in **Rangoon (now Yangon), Myanmar**.
- He was one of **India's most distinguished constitutional lawyers** and argued several leading cases.

- Nariman started his law practice at the **Bombay High Court**. After practising for **22 years**, he was appointed a **Senior Advocate** in the **Supreme Court** of India in **1971**.
- When he was **38 years old**, below the minimum qualifying age, he **declined an invitation to be a judge of the High Court**.
- He was the **Additional Solicitor General of India** from **May 1972 to June 1975**.
- He was the **President of the Bar Association of India** from **1991 to 2010**.
- He was also a **nominated member of the Rajya Sabha**, the Upper House of the Parliament of India for a term (**1999–2005**).
- Awards received:
 - Padma Bhushan (1991)
 - Padma Vibhushan (2007)
 - Gruber Prize for Justice (2002)
 - 19th Lal Bahadur Shastri National Award for Excellence in Public Administration (2018)

Nariman's contribution in the legal filed:

- In his book, '**Before Memory Fades: An Autobiography**', the eminent jurist recalled his experiences while dealing with the landmark cases in the making.

Basic Structure of the Constitution:

- Nariman was a staunch defender of the basic structure doctrine, which he helped establish in ***Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, 1972***.
- The doctrine protects the core features of the constitution from being amended by the Parliament.
- Mr Nariman stressed how the basic structure doctrine, which placed restraints on **Article 368** of the Constitution was intrinsically tied to an effort by courts worldwide to safeguard democratic institutions and 'serve the nation well'.
 - Article 368 is the sole article dealing with **substantive constitutional amendments**.
- He elucidated the Supreme Court's power to do complete justice under **Article 142** which can shield the democracy from Parliamentary excesses.

The Second Judges Case:

- Fali was the lawyer in the case of ***Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association vs. Union of India, 1993***.
- Here, he successfully challenged the majority view in **S.P. Gupta's case** and established the primacy of the **Chief Justice of India in judicial appointments**.
 - In ***S.P. Gupta v. Union of India***, the Supreme Court held that the opinion of the Chief Justice of India (**CJI**) **does not have primacy over that of the executive** when it comes to appointment of judges.
- The court **divested the absolute executive control** over the appointment of judges in the Higher Judiciary, in this case.
 - In doing so the Court laid down the **collegium structure** where the **first 5 senior judges of the Supreme Court** would recommend the appointments to the Supreme Court and High Courts.
- However, the jurist **lamented his victory** in the case, being considerably unsatisfied with the reasoning of the court to have only 5 judges in the collegium.
- According to him, there was nothing extra-ordinary about being among the first 5 senior judges in the Supreme Court.
- He believed that **all judges of the Supreme Court should be consulted** for deciding to appoint future Supreme Court Judges.

National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC):

- He was also the architect of Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association (SCAORA)'s successful challenge against the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC).
- In the case of ***Supreme Court Advocates-on-record Association & Anr. vs. Union of India, 2016***, Mr. Nariman challenged the **99th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2015**.
 - It sought to replace the collegium system with a **six-member body** comprising the Chief Justice of India, two senior-most judges of the Supreme Court, the Law Minister, and two eminent persons.
- The act was found **unconstitutional and violative of the Basic Structure** of the Constitution by a **5- judge bench** of the Supreme Court which struck it down in 2015.

National Emergency:

- In **1975** when the National Emergency was imposed under the **Indira Gandhi Regime**, Mr Nariman was the **Additional Solicitor General (ASG)**.
- However, just a day after the imposition of the Emergency, he **resigned from the position** in protest against the draconian measures taken by the Government.
- In the aftermath, he struggled to find a stable accommodation in Delhi.
 - There was an air of fear amongst the public to allow him shelter as he had challenged the Indira Regime.
- Mr Nariman also lauded the brave **dissent of Justice HR Khanna** in the case of **ADM Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla**.
 - In this judgement, a constitution bench by a majority of **4:1** held that while a proclamation of emergency is in operation, the right to move to the High Court under **Article 226** for challenging illegal detention by state will stand suspended.
 - Justice HR Khanna in his famous dissent stood against the jury's decision and stated that **no one should be deprived of life and liberty**.
 - He stated that right to enquire about the matter and the Habeas Corpus writ could not be denied.
- The jurist in his book recalled that Justice Khanna while dissenting was aware that he had let go of his future Chief Justiceship.
- According to Nariman, Justice Khanna had resigned "In a blaze of glory", on seeing **Justice Beg** supersede him.

Minority Rights in India:

- In the judgement of **TMA Pai v. State of Karnataka**, Mr. Nariman led the matter which primarily dealt with the issue of the **government's control** and regulations over **private unaided minority educational institutions**, particularly in the context of admissions and reservations.
- Mr Nariman argued that the petitioners, who were a **Konkani-speaking** private education institution be given a **minority status** under **Article 30** of the Constitution as Konkani was a minority language in Karnataka.
 - He also that the **Karnataka Educational Institutions Act 1984** was breaching the fundamentals under Article 30.
- The issues dealt with by the Court were whether:

- Religious or linguistic minorities be decided on a state-level basis or country-level basis.
- The Act of 1984 violates Article 30 and (3).
- The Supreme Court, in its decision, **upheld the autonomy of minority unaided institutions** in matters of administration, including the right to determine admission policies and procedures.
- The court observed that 'minority' has to be determined on a **state-wise basis and not country-wise**, thus giving impetus to local diversity and case-specific definition of minority.
- It further held that **fees** charged by minority institutions **cannot be regulated by the government** but should not be higher than the government-approved norms.

Bhopal Gas Tragedy and his stand for lawyers:

- In defending the **Union Carbide Corporation** responsible for the infamous **Bhopal Gas Tragedy**, Mr Nariman **faced criticism** from the legal fraternity and the media alike.
- Mr Nariman responded to these criticisms by stating that to suggest human rights lawyers should not accept briefs of those who "Violate the human rights of Others" was a **narrow understanding of rights**.
- He stated that such suggestions would have grave consequences on the legal system and the **lawyers would be necessitated to act in the shoes of the judge** while taking up cases of alleged wrongdoers and accused.

16. Financial Devolution in India



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Recently: Recently various **Opposition-ruled States** especially from **south India** have claimed that they have not been receiving their fair share as per the **present scheme of financial devolution**.

- They have raised issues about their **less than proportionate share of receipt in tax revenue** when compared to their contribution towards **tax collection**.

Divisible pool of taxes:

- A tax is a contribution levied by a government on an individual or an organization to **collect revenue** for public works.
- **Article 270** of the Constitution provides for the scheme of distribution of **net tax proceeds** collected by the **Union government** between the **Centre** and **the States**.
- The taxes that are shared between the Centre and the States include personal income tax, Central GST, the Centre's share of the IGST etc.

- This division is based on the recommendation of the **Finance Commission (FC)** .
- Apart from the share of taxes, States are also provided **grants-in-aid** as per the recommendation of the FC.
- The **divisible pool**, however, does not include **cess and surcharge** that are levied by the **Centre**.
 - Simply put, **surcharge** is **tax on tax**. It is levied on the income generated on the tax payable for that income.
 - In India, a surcharge of **10%** is levied if an individual's net income is more than **Rs. 50 lakhs** and a surcharge of **15%** is levied if the individual's income is more than **Rs 1 crore**.
 - In case of companies, it is levied at different rates for domestic and foreign companies.
- A **cess** is collected by the government for the development of a particular service or sector.
 - So, as the name suggests, the **health and education cess** cannot be used for any other means.
 - This cess was introduced **in Union Budget 2018** by then finance minister **Arun Jaitley**, who replaced the earlier secondary and higher education cess of 3%.
 - Unlike surcharge, there is no threshold for the **health and education cess**.
 - Every individual liable to pay income tax has to also pay the **health and education cess** at the rate of **4%** on the tax including **surcharge**.

Basis of allocation:

- **Vertical Devolution** is the Devolution of Taxes of the **Union to States** and Horizontal Devolution is the **Allocation Between the States**.
- The share of States from the divisible pool (vertical devolution) stands at **41%** as per the recommendation of the 15th FC.
- The distribution among the States (horizontal devolution) is based on various criteria:
 - 12.5% weightage to demographic performance
 - 45% to income
 - 15% each to population and area
 - 10% to forest and ecology
 - 2.5% to tax and fiscal efforts.

Table 1 : The criteria for horizontal devolution among States over the last five FCs

Criteria	11th FC 2000-05	12th FC 2005-10	13th FC 2010-15	14th FC 2015-20	15th FC 2021-26
Income Distance	62.5	50	47.5	50	45
Population (1971 Census)	10	25	25	17.5	-
Population (2011 Census)	-	-	-	10	15
Area	7.5	10	10	15	15
Forest cover	-	-	-	7.5	-
Forest and ecology	-	-	-	-	10
Infrastructure index	7.5	-	-	-	-
Fiscal discipline	7.5	7.5	17.5	-	-
Demographic performance	-	-	-	-	12.5
Tax effort	5	7.5	-	-	2.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100

- The criteria as per the **15th FC** can be briefly explained as follows.
- **'Income distance'** is the distance of a State's income from the State with highest per capita income which is **Haryana**.
 - States with lower per capita income would be given a **higher share** to maintain equity among States.
- **'Population'** is the population as per the 2011 Census.
 - Till the **14th FC**, **weightage** was given for the population as per the **1971 Census** but that has been discontinued in the **15th FC**.
- **'Forest and ecology'** consider the share of dense forest of each State in the **aggregate dense forest** of all the States.
- **'The demographic performance'** criterion has been introduced to reward efforts made by States in controlling their population.
 - States with a lower fertility ratio will be scored higher on this criterion.
- **'Tax effort'** as a criterion has been used to reward States with higher tax collection efficiency.

Issues:

- The Constitutional scheme has always favoured a strong centre in legislative, administrative and financial relations.
- However, federalism is a basic feature and it is important that States don't feel short-changed when it comes to distribution of resources.
- While there are always political differences between the Union government and Opposition-ruled States that exacerbate the problem, there are genuine issues that need to be considered.

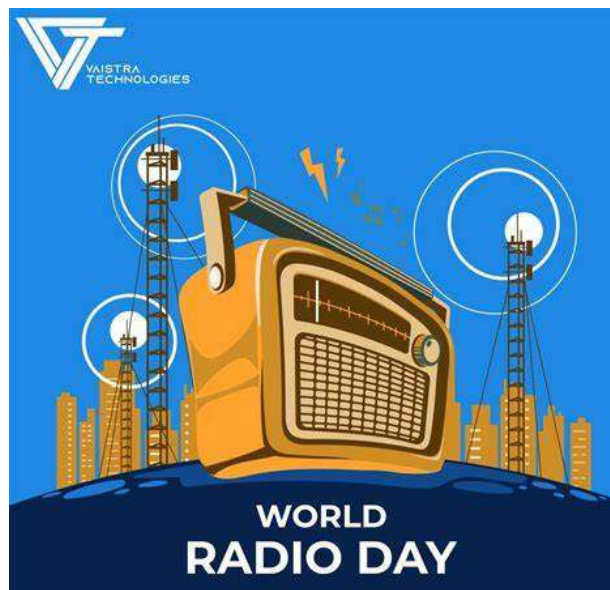
- Firstly, cess and surcharge collected by the Union government is estimated at around **23%** of its **gross tax receipts** for 2024-25.
 - It does not form part of the divisible pool and hence not shared with the States.
 - To provide a perspective, the total tax revenue for the year 2023-24 (revised estimates) and 2024-25 (Budget estimates) of the Union government is **₹34.4 and ₹38.8 lakh crore** respectively.
- The State's share was/is **₹11.0 and ₹12.2 lakh crore** respectively.
 - It constitutes around **32%** of the total tax receipts of the Centre which is way less than **the 41%** recommended by the 15th FC.
 - Some of these amounts are also used for centrally sponsored schemes that benefit the States. However, the States have no control over these components.
- Secondly, the amount each State gets back for every rupee they contribute to Central taxes shows steep variation.
 - It can be seen that industrially developed States received much less than a rupee for every rupee they contributed as against States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.
 - This is partly because many corporations are based in state capitals, where they pay their direct taxes. However, the difference in GST collection among states also contributes to this variation.
- Third, the percentage share in the divisible pool of taxes has been reducing for **southern States** over the last **six FCs**.
 - This is attributable to the higher weightage being given for equity (income gap) and needs (population, area and forest) than efficiency (demographic performance and tax effort).
 - Finally, grants-in-aid as per the recommendation of the FC varies among various States.
- As per the 15th FC, there are revenue deficit, sector-specific, and State-specific grants given to various States.
 - Additionally, grants are provided to local bodies based on the population and area of States.
 - It must be noted that States generate around **40% of the revenue** and bear around **60% of the expenditure**.

Finance Commission:

- The Finance Commission is a constitutional body formed by the President of India to give suggestions on **centre-state financial relations**.
- It was established under **Article 280** of the Indian Constitution by the **Indian President**.
- The FC is constituted every **five years** and is a body that is exclusively constituted by the Union Government.

- It consists of a **chairman** and **four other members** who are appointed by the President.
- The **Finance Commission (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1951**, has specified the qualifications for chairman and other members of the commission.
- In **November 2017**, President of India constituted the **15th Finance Commission** and appointed former Planning Commission member **NK Singh** as its chairman.
- The Union government has notified the constitution of the **16th Finance Commission** under the chairmanship of **Dr. Arvind Panagariya**.
- The commission is tasked with making recommendations for the period of **2026-31**.

17. World Radio Day 2024



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Recently: The 2023 edition of the World Radio Day was observed on **February 13th**.

- According to the United Nations, the objective of World Radio Day is to raise greater awareness among the public and media regarding the importance of radio.
- The day also aims to encourage radio stations to provide access to information through their medium and enhance networking and international cooperation among broadcasters.

What is Radio?

- Radio is the technology of communicating using **radio waves**.
- Radio waves are electromagnetic waves of frequency between **3 hertz (Hz) and 300 gigahertz (GHz)**.
- They are generated by an electronic device called a **transmitter** connected to an **antenna** which radiates the waves.
- They are received by another antenna connected to a **radio receiver**.
- It is a low-cost medium specifically suited to reaching remote communities and vulnerable people,
- Radio has offered a platform to intervene in the public debate for over a century now and irrespective of people's educational level, it continues to play a crucial role in emergency communication and disaster relief.

Theme for 2024:

- The theme for the World Radio Day, celebrated on February 13, 2024 is "**Radio: A century informing, entertaining and educating**".
- According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), radio has crossed the 100-year milestone hence, it is a significant occasion to commemorate the medium's extensive virtues and continuing potency.

History:

- It is generally believed that the **first radio transmission** was made by **Guglielmo Marconi** in **1895**.
- The **radio broadcasting** of music and talk that was aimed towards a wider audience came into existence, albeit experimentally, sometimes around **1905-1906**.

- The **radio** came into existence commercially in the **early 1920s**.
- **Radio stations** came into existence almost **three decades later** and the radio and broadcasting system became a common commodity around the world by the **1950s**.
- Almost 60 years later, in **2011**, Member States of **UNESCO** proclaimed **February 13** as being World Radio Day.
 - Following a proposal from **Spain**, UNESCO's Executive Board recommended to the General Conference the proclamation of World Radio Day, based on a consultation process carried out by **UNESCO in 2011**.
 - Subsequently at its **36th session**, UNESCO proclaimed February 13 as World Radio Day.
- The **UN General Assembly** formally endorsed UNESCO's proclamation of World Radio Day on **January 14, 2013**.
- During its **67th session**, the UN adopted a resolution proclaiming **February 13 as World Radio Day**.

18. Amendment of India- Mauritius DTAA



Recently: Mauritius Government has decided to amend **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)** with India in order to go with OECD's proposal on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting.

- The primary aim of this amendment is **to forestall opportunities for tax avoidance or minimisation** through exploitative tactics.

What is a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)?

- Taxation of returns becomes a problem when two countries are involved, one where one lives (**resident country**) and the other from where one has earned the return (**source country**).
- It gives rise to a prominent question "Which country's laws would be followed while taxing the returns?" and if the income would be taxed twice.
- In order to resolve the tax implications of internationally earned income, the Double Tax Avoidance Agreement was signed.
- It is a treaty signed between different **nations to prevent double taxation internationally**. It covers the **individuals residing in one country and generating income from the other**.
- Both countries agree upon a **specific tax rate** for the income generated in one country and earned by the resident of a different country.
- DTAA income tax may cover all forms of income or some specific ones based on the business type or position held by the citizen of one country in the other country.
- Categories of income covered by DTAA:
 - Capital gains
 - Property
 - Salary
 - Services
 - Fixed deposit accounts
 - Savings, etc.

Principles:

DTAA works on **two principles**:

- The **source rule** applies when the income is taxed in the **country of origin** whether you are a resident of the country or not.
- The **resident rule** specifies that the income would be taxed in the **country where you reside**, irrespective of the income's origin.
 - In **India**, the **residence rule** is followed. This means that your international income would be taxed in the country where you are a resident. If you are an Indian resident, your international income would be taxed in India.

Reliefs granted:

Under bilateral tax relief, the tax benefit is granted in **two ways**:

- **Tax Exemption-** Besides avoiding double taxation, DTAA also offers tax exemptions under certain circumstances. For instance, exemption under DTAA replaces capital gains beneficial for individuals engaged in business and trades.
- **Tax Credit-** Under this method, income is taxed in both countries. Thereafter, you get a tax credit in your tax liability payable in your resident country for the tax already paid in the income source country.

What is Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS)?

- Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) refers to the strategies used by multinational companies to **avoid paying tax**, by exploiting the mismatches and gaps in the tax rules.
- Using the loopholes, the multinational company shifts its income or profit to another country which could be a **tax haven**.
- As a result, the country which helps the multinational company generate its revenues does not get any tax or there is tax erosion due to the shifting of income or profits by the company.

What is a Tax Haven?

- Tax havens, also known as the offshore financial centres, are countries or jurisdictions that **offer minimal tax liability** to foreign individuals and businesses.
- The countries that are tax havens **profit by attracting capital** to the banks and financial institutions established in such countries.
- In turn, these can be used to build a flourishing financial sector, whereas individuals or businesses benefit from tax saving.
- In most of the tax haven countries, tax can range from **nil to nominal digits** in comparison to high tax rates in the country of citizenship or domicile.
- So, a business may want to set up its operations in a tax haven and save considerable tax outflow.
- The **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** has laid down criteria to qualify as a tax haven in **1988**.
- Some of these criteria are: 1. Nil or nominal tax on the relevant income. 2. No effective exchange of information. 3. Non-transparent. 4. No substantial activities occur.

OECD's standards for Multilateral Institutions (MLI) under Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) rules

- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development launched the BEPS project to tackle the problem of tax avoidance, to bring in a transparent tax environment and bring in more synergy to the international tax rules.
- There are **15 Action Plans** that are being implemented by **135 countries**.

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- India has already implemented some of the important recommendations of the BEPS project through amendments in its domestic tax laws.
- The undefined Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) rules under 'pillar two' model are crafted to ensure **large MNCs pay a minimum level of tax** on income arising in each jurisdiction they operate in.
- Under this framework, countries are required to include both a **"limitation-on-benefits" (LOB) rule** and a **"principal-purpose test" (PPT) rule** in their treaties.
- The BEPS MLI includes a provision to **decline the shelter** of a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (if the DTAA is covered by the MLI) if the **principal purpose of a business arrangement is to save tax**.
 - It is gauged by using a Principal Purpose Test, which is a minimum standard under MLI.
- Both **India and Mauritius** are **signatories of MLI**, however so far Mauritius had not included its DTAA with India within the scope of its MLI compliance.
- This amendment would now elevate the **India-Mauritius tax treaty** to the status of a **covered tax agreement** under **BEPS MLI (Multilateral Instrument)**
- It will usher in a new era of anti-abuse and limitation of benefit rules, principal-purpose test and inclusion of arbitration in the mutual agreement procedure.

How Mauritius was used as a Tax Haven?

- Mauritius was initially the preferred **channel for foreign portfolio and foreign direct investors** due to the tax advantage that accrued to them due to the DTAA between two countries.
- The agreement laid down that **capital gains tax had to be paid in the country where the foreign investor was based**. Since the rate of capital gains tax in Mauritius was **zero**, investors from this country paid no capital gains tax.
 - Capital gains taxes are levied on earnings made from the sale of assets like stocks or real estate.
- However, situation changed in **2016** when it was decided that in case shares purchased after **April 1, 2017**, capital gains arising from an **investment in an Indian company will be taxed in India**.

- With the double tax avoidance treaty with **Singapore** being linked to the agreement with Mauritius, investments from Singapore have also been brought in to the **Indian tax net**.
- The **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** data shows, between **April 2000 and June 2022**, more than **86% of FDI** came through **20 known tax havens**.
 - **49%** through **Mauritius and Singapore**, both tax havens.
- Cumulative FDI worth **\$161 billion** came from **Mauritius to India** in the two decades from **2000 - 2022 (26 per cent** of total FDI inflows into India) due to the DTAA.
- Since the signing of **the DTAC amendment in 2016**, FDI inflows from Mauritius have **dropped** from \$15.72 bn in 2016-17 to \$6.13 bn in 2022-23, with Mauritius becoming India's third largest source of FDI.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):

- It is an intergovernmental organization that was founded in **1961** to stimulate economic progress and world trade.
 - It superseded the **Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC)** that was formed in **1948**.
- It has **38 members** and is headquartered in **Paris, France**.
- Its members are mostly **high-income economies** with a very high Human Development Index (HDI) and are regarded as developed countries.
- **India is not a member**, but a key economic partner.
- **International Migration Outlook** and **OECD Better Life Index** are some reports and Indices released by OECD.

19. Supreme Court on Patanjali's misleading advertisements



Source- <https://startuptalky.com/patanjali-marketing-strategy/>

Recently: Supreme Court pulled up Patanjali Ayurveda for continuing with its "**misleading**" ads on medicinal cures despite the court's order that it is in violation of law.

- The apex court **banned it from advertising** its medicinal products till further orders and issued a contempt notice to it and MD Acharya Balakrishna.
- The bench comprising **Justices Hima Kohli** and **Ahsannudin Amanullah** criticized the company for publishing advertisements that directly attacked **allopathic medicines**, despite giving an assurance to the court in **November 2023**.
 - The SC in November 2023 warned Patanjali that it would be fined **Rs 1 crore** if a **false claim** is made that its products can "**cure**" certain diseases.
- The SC has issued a **contempt notice** to **Patanjali Ayurved** and **Acharya Balakrishnan** for allegedly flouting an undertaking given to the court not to come out with any advertisement about its drugs and to desist from making statements against "any system of medicine".
 - They have been granted a **three-week period** to respond to the contempt notice.

What is the matter?

- **Indian Medical Association (IMA)** filed a petition at the apex court in **August 2022** after Patanjali published an advertisement titled:-
 - "Misconceptions spread by allopathy: save yourself and the country from the misconceptions spread by pharma and medical industry."

Allopathic Medicine:

- Allopathic medicine is a system in which medical doctors and other health care professionals **treat symptoms and diseases using drugs, radiation, or surgery.**
 - Allopathy is an archaic and derogatory label originally used by **19th-century homeopaths** to describe heroic medicine, the precursor of modern- evidence based medicine
 - The term was coined by the creator of the creator of Homeopathy, **Samuel Hahnemann**, in **1810.**
 - WHO define Allopathy as the broad category of medical practice that is sometimes called **biomedicine, conventional medicine, mainstream medicine, orthodox medicine, or Western medicine.**
-
- The petition details other instances where Ramdev called allopathy a **"stupid and bankrupt science"**.
 - He made claims about allopathic medicine being responsible for Covid-19 deaths.
 - The IMA also accused Patanjali of contributing to vaccine-hesitancy during the pandemic by spreading false rumours.
 - The IMA claimed that the advertisement was in direct violation of the **Drugs & Other Magical Remedies Act, 1954 (DOMA)**, and the **Consumer Protection Act, 2019.**
 - The publishing of false and misleading advertisements is an offence under both statutes.

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- Under **Section 4** of the **DOMA**, there is a prohibition against publishing misleading advertisements relating to a drug.
 - This is described as an advertisement that "directly or indirectly gives a false impression regarding the true character of the drug."
 - Publishing a misleading advertisement can result in up to **six months' imprisonment** or a fine for **first offense**, and up to **one year of imprisonment** for **second offense**.
- **Section 89** of the **CPA** contains even more stringent punishments for false or misleading advertisements.
 - The punishment includes imprisonment up to **two years** and a fine up to **ten lakh rupees** for the **initial offense**.
 - For subsequent offenses, the penalties increase to imprisonment up to **five years** and a fine up to **fifty lakh rupees**.

Patanjali Ayurved:

- Patanjali Ayurved is an Indian multinational conglomerate holding company, based in **Haridwar**.
- Patanjali Ayurved Limited was **established in 2006** with a thought of rural and urban development.
- It was founded by **Baba Ramdev** and **Acharya Balkrishna**.
- It have more than **47000 retail counters**, **3500 distributors**, multiple warehouses in **18 states** and proposed factories in **6 states**.
- As the group is already present in markets like the **US, Canada, the UK, Russia, Dubai and some European countries**.

Indian Medical Association (IMA):

- IMA is the largest represented organisation of doctors of modern system of medicine in India.
- It was **established in 1928** as **the All India Medical Association**, and was renamed the **Indian Medical Association in 1930**.
- Previously stationed out of **Calcutta**, the IMA is headquartered in **New Delhi**.

- It has a membership of **3.5 lakh doctors** spread over in **28 State Branches, 5 Union territorial Branches** and **1702** local branches in almost all the districts of India.
- In **2022, Sahajanand Prasad Singh** was listed as the national president for the organization.
- IMA, in the year **1946** helped in organisation of the World body of medical Associations, namely, **World Medical Association (WMA)** and thus became its Founder member.
 - **Dr. Ketan Desai** was installed as WMA President in **2015**.

20. Ecocide



Recently: The **Belgian Federal Parliament** voted in favour of a revised penal code that makes **ecocide punishable** at both **national and international levels**, making the country the **first European nation** to recognise ecocide under international law.

What is Ecocide?

- It is basically the destruction of the environment by humans.

- According to a definition given in **June 2021** by the **Independent Expert Panel for the Legal Definition of Ecocide**, it is "unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts."
 - This definition was formed in **late 2020** by the **Stop Ecocide Foundation**.

Stop Ecocide Foundation:

- The Stop Ecocide International was co-founded in **2017** by late **barrister Polly Higgins (1968-2019)** and current Executive Director **Jojo Mehta**.
 - Stop Ecocide International and others are working to enshrine ecocide into the **Rome Statute**, making it both international law and national law in member states national law.
 - At the end of last year, the organisation found itself centre-stage at both **COP27 in Egypt** and **Montreal's Biodiversity COP15**, and last month it was invited to stage a side-event at the **World Economic Forum annual meeting** in Davos, spreading the word to a new audience of businesses and investors.
-
- The word was first recorded at the Conference on **War and National Responsibility** in **Washington DC**.
 - Here, the American plant biologist and bioethicist **Arthur Galston** proposed a new international agreement to **ban ecocide**.
 - The term was later **popularised by Swedish PM Olof Palme** when he accused the United States of ecocide at the **1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment**.
 - The **UN's International Law Commission (ILC)** considered the inclusion of the crime of ecocide to be included within the Draft **Code of Crimes Against the Peace and Security of Mankind**.
 - This document later became the **Rome Statute**.

- **Article 26** - crime against the environment - was publicly supported by **19 countries** in the Legal Committee.
- However, this article was **removed due to opposition** from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.
- There is currently no international crime of ecocide that applies in peacetime, **only in wartime**, covered by the **Rome Statute**.

The Rome Statute:

- The **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court** is the treaty that established the International Criminal Court (ICC).
 - It was adopted at a diplomatic conference in **Rome, Italy** on 17 July **1998**, and it entered into force on **1 July 2002**.
 - As of February 2024, **124 states** are party to the statute. Among other things, it establishes court function, jurisdiction and structure.
 - The Rome Statute established **four core international crimes**: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression.
- According to the **World Economic Forum**, ecocide is a crime in **11 countries** – including Russia and Ukraine – and it is being considered in another 27 countries.
 - **France** became the **first EU country** to put ecocide into law in **2021**.
 - In **mid-2023**, **Mexico proposed a bill** to criminalize Ecocide. Similar proposals have been submitted in **The Netherlands, Scotland and Brazil**.

About the new Belgian law:

- The new law passed in Belgium will apply to individuals in the highest positions of decision-making power and to corporations.

- The punishment for individuals may include up to **20 years** in prison, while corporations could face fines of up to **1.6 million euros**.
- Within Belgium's federal monarchy. It is divided into two main linguistic and cultural regions: **Flemish (Dutch)-speaking Flanders** and **French-speaking Wallonia**.
- The domestic environmental legislation is primarily the responsibility of the three regional governments of **Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels**.
- The scope of this new law is limited to areas within the jurisdiction of the federal authority which includes the North Sea and nuclear waste management.
- Additionally, Belgium has become the **first European country to recognise ecocide as an international crime**.
 - As Belgium holds the **presidency** of the **European Union**, this directive should encourage the regions to play their part in the area of their competence
- The country has already recognised **genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression**.
- It is now adding a nature-centered element to its penal code by recognising a **fifth crime** under international law: **ecocide**.

21. International Big Cat Alliance



Source- news9live.com

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Recently: The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi approved the establishment of International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA).

- The alliance will have its **headquarters in India** and a one-time budgetary support of **Rs.150 crore** for a period of **five years** from **2023-24 to 2027-28**.
- The alliance will be set up and coordinated on the lines of the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**, an India-headquartered initiative to promote solar installations globally.

What is International Big Cat Alliance?

- It is a global initiative that aims to protect and conserve the world's **seven** major big cat species - **Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Puma, Jaguar and the Cheetah**.
 - Out of these, **five** big cats viz. **Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard and Cheetah**, are found **in India**.
- It was **first envisaged** by Prime Minister of India during his speech on the occasion of **Global Tiger Day, 2019**.
- He reiterated this on the occasion of Commemorating **50 years of India's Project Tiger** on **April 9, 2023** and formally announced launch of an International Big Cat Alliance.

Membership

- So far, **16 countries** have given their written consent to be part of the IBCA.
 - These countries include- Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brazil, Cambodia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ecuador, Kenya, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Nigeria and Peru.
- It is conceived to be a coalition of **96 big cat range countries** that harbour 'big cats'.
 - The alliance is also open to other countries, conservation organisations, scientific organisations, businesses, and corporates interested in supporting 'big cats'.
- **Nine partner organisations** that have also agreed to join the IBCA include-
 - International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) from Switzerland;
 - Science and Conservation International Snow Leopard Trust from Kyrgyzstan;
 - The Amur Tiger Centre from Russia

Governance:

- IBCA governance consists of Assembly of Members, Standing Committee and a Secretariat with its Head Quarter in India.
- **Framework of Agreement (statute)** has been drafted largely on the pattern of **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** and to be finalized by International Steering Committee (ISC).
- **Steering Committee** will be constituted with nominated national focal points of founding member countries.
- Appointment of **DG by MoEFCC** as Interim Head of IBCA Secretariat till IBCA appoints its own DG during Assembly meeting.
- IBCA Assembly at Ministerial level to be chaired by **President, HMEFCC, Gol.**

Project Tiger:

- Project Tiger was launched by the Central government on April 1, **1973**, in a bid to promote conservation of the tiger.
- Launched at the **Jim Corbett National Park**, the programme was initially started in **nine tiger reserves** of different States such as Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, covering over **14,000 sq km.**
- Notably, Project Tiger didn't just focus on the conservation of the big cats. It also ensured the preservation of their natural habitat as tigers are at the top of the food chain.
- The **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** was formed in **2005** under the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, to administer the Project Tiger.
 - NTCA is a **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.**
- There are **55 tiger reserves** in India, according to the most recent assessment making India home to **80%** of the World's tiger population.
 - In 2024, **Dholpur – Karauli Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan** has become the 55th Tiger Reserve in India.
 - **Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh** is the 54th Tiger Reserve in India.
 - The **Ranipur Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh** is India's the 53rd tiger reserve.
- There are **13 tiger range countries-** Bhutan, China, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Russia, Thailand, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

- The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** declared **tiger as an endangered species** in **1986**.
- **International Tiger Day** is observed annually on **29th July**.

International Solar Alliance:

- The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is an action-oriented, member-driven, collaborative platform for increased deployment of solar energy technologies as a means for bringing energy access, ensuring energy security, and driving energy transition in its member countries.
- It was conceived as a joint effort by **India and France** to mobilize efforts against climate change through deployment of solar energy solutions.
- It was conceptualized on the sidelines of the **21st Conference of Parties (COP21)** to the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** held in **Paris** in **2015**.
- The framework agreement of the International Solar Alliance opened for signatures in **Marrakesh, Morocco**, in **November 2016**.
- In **January 2016**, **Narendra Modi**, and the then French President **François Hollande** jointly laid the foundation stone of the ISA.
- With the **amendment** of its Framework Agreement in **2020**, all member states of the United Nations are now eligible to join the ISA.
- At present, **116 countries** are **signatories** to the ISA Framework Agreement.
 - Of these, **94 countries** have submitted the necessary instruments of ratification to become full members of the ISA.
- It is headquartered at the National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE) in Gwal Pahari, **Gurugram, India**.
- Current Director General- **Dr Ajay Mathur**.

22. Assam's Muslim Marriage Law



Recently: The Indian state of **Assam**, which has the highest **Muslim population** among Indian states (**34%**), has repealed a British-era law on Muslim marriage and divorce.

- Following a meeting, it was announced that the state Cabinet has decided to repeal the **Assam Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act of 1935** through the '**Assam Repealing Ordinance 2024**'.
- The government is also working on a bill to ban **polygamy**, and make it a criminal offence.

Assam Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act, 1935:

- The Act which was in line with Muslim personal law governs the '**nikah**' and '**talaq**' in the state and for the registration, the '**kazi**' were appointed by the government.
- The Act lays down the process for **registration of Muslim marriages and divorces**.
- A **2010 amendment** replaced the word '**voluntary**' in the original Act with '**compulsory**'.
 - This change makes **registration** of Muslim marriages and divorces compulsory in the state of Assam.
- The Act authorises the state to grant licences to "any person, being a Muslim" to register marriages and divorces, with **Muslim registrars** deemed to be **public servants**.

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- It lays down the process through which marriage and divorce applications can be made to the registrar, and the process for their registration.
- A total of **94 registrars** were empowered under the now repealed Act to register a marriage or divorce.

Why was it repealed?

- Authorities in the state, which is governed by **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**, had alleged it allowed **child marriages**.
- The particular provision of the Act which allowed child marriage is regarding the process of making a marriage application to the registrar.
 - It states: "... provided that if the bride and groom, or both, be minors, application shall be made on their behalf by their respective lawful guardians..."
- Under Muslim personal law, the marriage of a bride who has attained **puberty** is considered valid.
 - Puberty is presumed, in the absence of evidence, on turning **15 years old**.
- In **2023**, the Assam government launched an unprecedented punitive crackdown against child marriages.
 - They arrested more than **4,000 individuals** and prosecuted most of them under the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act**.
- The government has resolved to "eradicate" child marriage by **2026**.

What next?

- The Assam government says the **Special Marriage Act** will now apply.
- The state will now take custody of the records held by **94 registrars** operating under this Act, and they will be provided with a **one-time financial compensation** of **Rs 2 lakh**.
- After the law is scrapped, the **district commissioners** and **district registrars** will have the "custody of registration records".

Special Marriage Act:

- The **Special Marriage Act, 1954** allows **civil marriage** for all Indians, including those in foreign countries, regardless of their religion or faith.
- A marriage under the Act allows people from **two different religious backgrounds** to come together in the bond of marriage.
- The Act lays down the procedure for both **solemnization and registration** of marriage.
- According to **Section 5**, the couples have to serve a notice with the relevant documents to the **Marriage Officer 30 days** before the intended date of the marriage.
- Registration is done **30 days** after the date of notice after deciding any objection that may have been received during that period by the **SDM**.
- Both parties along with **three witnesses** are required to be present on the date of registration.
- It forbids **polygamy** and declares a marriage null and void under **two conditions**.
 - The first is if either party had a **spouse living** at the time of the marriage.
 - The second is if either of them is incapable of giving valid consent to the marriage due to unsoundness of mind.
- **Section 4 (C)** states the minimum age to get married under the act which is **21 years** for **males** and **18 years** for **females**.
- The Act provides for the registration of marriages, granting legal recognition to the union.
- This registration offers various legal benefits and protections to the couple, including inheritance rights, succession rights, and social security benefits.

23. India's historic gold at Badminton Asia Team Championships



Source- Badminton Association of India

Recently: The Indian women's team won a **historic gold medal** at the Badminton Asia Team Championships 2024 after beating **Thailand** 3-2 in the final in **Shah Alam, Malaysia**.

- This was **India's maiden title** in the history of the continental competition.
- The **men's Indian badminton team** had previously won two medals in **2016 and 2020**, but both were **bronze**.

About the match:

- Two-time Olympic medallist **PV Sindhu**, the **world No. 11**, kicked off the Indian title charge in style, beating the 17th ranked **Supanida Katethong**.
 - The Indian badminton player dominated her Thai counterpart in the opening singles rubber and wrapped up the contest in just 39 minutes.
 - It was Sindhu's **fifth win** in eight meetings against Katethong.

- In the second rubber, **Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand**, who had produced a series of exceptional results throughout the tournament, stepped up yet again.
 - The **world No. 23** Indian badminton pair upset the 10th ranked **Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai**.
- The Thai fightback started with **Busanan Ongbamrungphan** ousting **Ashmita Chaliha** in the second singles rubber of the tie.
 - Ongbamrungphan, ranked 18th in the world, accounted for world No. 53 in just 35 minutes.
- **Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra** then lost to **Benyapa Aimsaard and Nuntakarn Aimsaard**, stretching the tie to the final match.
- For the final match, India's fate rested on the 17-year-old **Anmol Kharb**.
- Facing world No. 45 **Pornpicha Choeikeewong** in a high-pressure deciding match, the teenager, placed 472nd in the BWF badminton rankings, didn't flinch and walked away with a win to hand India a historic first.
 - This was not the first time in the competition that Anmol stepped up for India in a high-pressure situation.
 - In the group stage, she defeated world No. 149 **Wu Luo Yu** in a must-win match to help India beat the **People's Republic of China**.
 - Then got the better of world No. 29 **Natsuki Nidaira** in a similar situation in the **semi-finals** against **Japan**.
- The Indian **men's team** was knocked out in the **quarter-finals**.

Badminton Asia Championship 2024:

- The 2024 Badminton Asia Team Championships was the **fifth edition** of Badminton Asia Team Championships.
- It is officially known as the **SELANGOR Badminton Asia Team Championships 2024** presented by PKNS for sponsorship reasons.
- It was held at the Setia City Convention Centre in **Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia**, from **13 to 18 February 2024**.
- This championship was organised by the **Badminton Asia** along with **Badminton Association of Malaysia** as the host organiser
- It was sanctioned by the Badminton World Federation. It also served as the **Asian qualifiers** for the **2024 Thomas & Uber Cup** to be held in **Chengdu, China**.

- **India and China** were ranked **first** in the **men's and women's championship** respectively.

24. International Mother Language Day 2024



Recently: The 2024 edition of the International Mother Language Day was observed on **February 21st**.

- The day highlights the importance of linguistic and cultural richness, promoting multilingualism and inclusivity.
- It emphasises the role of language in achieving sustainable development goals and leaving no one behind.

Theme:

- The theme for this year selected by UNESCO is '**Multilingual Education: A Pillar of Intergenerational Learning.**'

- This theme underscores the critical role languages play in fostering inclusive education and safeguarding indigenous languages.

History:

- Following India's independence in **1947**, a **linguistic conflict** arose in the subcontinent.
- In **1948**, Pakistan declared **Urdu** its **sole official language**, sparking protests in East Pakistan (current-day Bangladesh), which was **Bengali** dominated.
- On **February 21, 1952**, students at Dhaka University in Bangladesh stood their ground, determined to protect the sanctity of their mother tongue, Bangla.
- Despite the East Pakistani government outlawing meetings and events, the protest saw a massive outpouring of people joining hands to safeguard the existence and prevalence of their mother tongue.
- This movement resulted in the martyrdom of **five students**.
- **November, 1999**, the **General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)** proclaimed **International Mother Language Day on February 21st** to commemorate the sacrifice of the students and the people of Bangladesh.
- It was later welcomed by the General Assembly of the UN.

25. New Lokpal Chief



Recently: The President of India has appointed former **Supreme Court judge Justice AM Khanwilkar** as the **Chairperson** of the **Lok Pal**.

- Khanwilkar will be the **second Lokpal of India**, after **Pinaki Chandra Ghose**, who retired in **May 2022** after a **two-year tenure** in office.
- Former chief justice of the Jharkhand high court, **justice Pradip Kumar Mohanty** is currently the acting chairperson and judicial member.

Other appointees:

- The President also appointed former high court chief justices as judicial members -- Justice Lingappa Narayana Swamy, justice Sanjay Yadav, justice Ritu Raj Awasthi – as **judicial members**.
 - With Awasthi's appointment, the government will have to select a new **chairperson at the Law Commission**.
- Three others **Sushil Chandra, Pankaj Kumar and Ajay Tirkey** were appointed as the **non-judicial members**.

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- **Chandra** is a former chief election commissioner. **Awasthi** is currently the chairperson of the law commission.

About Justice AM Khanwilkar:

- Justice AM Khanwilkar is a **first-generation lawyer** who retired from the Supreme Court in **2022** after a **six-year tenure**.
- Hailing from a non-judicial background and born into an agricultural family in **Pune**, Justice Khanwilkar served as **Amicus Curiae** in the early stages of his legal career.
 - He assisted the court on issues such as the **release of effluents into River Ganga** (*M C Mehta v Union of India, 1996*) and participated in a 1995 task force examining the **Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954**.
- He was confirmed as a **permanent judge in the Bombay high court** in **April 2002**.
- For seven months in **2013**, he had been the **chief justice of the Himachal Pradesh high court**
- He was then appointed the **chief justice of the Madhya Pradesh high court** in **November 2013**.
- He was elevated to the **Supreme Court** in **May 2016** and served a **six-year term** until his retirement in **July 2022**.

Important Judgements:

- He was a part of the majority ruling in the five-judge Bench in the case of **Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India**, that decided to **decriminalised homosexuality**.
- He was also a part of the majority of the five-judge bench that held that **right to die with dignity is a fundamental right** under Article 21 in **Common Cause v Union of India (2018)**.
- In September 2018, Justice Khanwilkar was part of the five-judge Constitution Benches in the landmark Aadhaar (**KS Puttaswamy v. Union of India**) and Sabarimala cases (**Indian Young Law Association v. Union of India**).
- In 2020, Justice Khanwilkar authored the decision to uphold the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2020**.
 - The amended Act had a drastic effect on the functioning of NGOs and other organisations by placing stringent restrictions on how foreign funds could be utilised.
- In **2021**, he authored the three-judge Bench judgment establishing the **protocol** that state governments must follow before **reserving seats in local bodies**.

- As per the conditions, governments must first set up a committee to study the backwardness of different communities, specify the proportion of reservation, and ensure that the total reservation does not exceed **50%**.
- On **July 27, 2022**, two days before his retirement, Justice Khanwilkar delivered the judgment upholding the constitutionality of the **PMLA, 2002**.
- As a judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Khanwilkar wrote **226 judgments** – only three judges wrote more – and was a part of **817 Benches**.

The Lokpal and Lokayukta:

- The Lokpal has been established under the **Lokayukta Act 2013** to investigate allegations of corruption against public functionaries who fall within the scope and ambit of the Act.
- The **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill, 2011** was passed by the Parliament in **2013**.
 - The Bill received President's assent in **2014** and was notified on the same day as **The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013**.
- The Act came into force in **2014** and has been amended **once** in **2016** since its notification.
- This Act aims to establish a **Lokpal for the Union** and **Lokayukta for States**.
- The Lokpal has authority to probe corruption allegations against current or former Prime Ministers, Union Ministers, and Members of Parliament.
- A complaint under the Lokpal Act should be in the prescribed form and must pertain to an offence under the **Prevention of Corruption Act** against a **public servant**.
- The Lokpal, with respect to Central government servants, may refer the complaints to the **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)**.
 - The Inquiry Wing or any other agency will have to complete its preliminary inquiry and submit a report to the **Lokpal** within **60 days**.

History of Lokpal:

- The term “**ombudsman**” comes from **Sweden**, where the **world's first parliamentary ombudsman** was appointed by the Swedish Parliament in **1809**.
- During the second half of the twentieth century, the ombudsman institution spread globally and new offices continue to be created.
- In **1967**, **Great Britain** adopted the institution of the ombudsman and became the **first large nation** in the democratic world to have such a system.
- In **1963**, The idea of an ombudsman **first came up in parliament** during a discussion on budget allocation for the Law Ministry.
- The term Lokpal and Lokayukta were coined by **Dr. L. M. Singhvi**.
- In **1966**, The **First Administrative Reforms Commission** recommended the setting up of two independent authorities for public functionaries - at the central and state level.
- In **1968**, The Lokpal Bill was introduced in parliament but was not passed. **Eight attempts** were made till **2011** to pass the Bill, but in vain.
- In **2002**, The Commission headed by **M.N. Venkatachiliah** recommended the appointment of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas; also recommended that the PM be kept out of the ambit.
- In **2005**, The **Second Administrative Reforms Commission** chaired by **Veerappa Moily** recommended that office of Lokpal be established without delay.
- In **2011**, The government formed a Group of Ministers, chaired by **Pranab Mukherjee** to suggest measures to tackle corruption and examine the proposal of a Lokpal Bill.
- In **2013**, Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill, was passed in both Houses of Parliament.
- In **2016**, Lok Sabha agreed to **amend** the Lokpal Act and Bill was sent to Standing Committee for review.

Scope:

- The Lokpal also covers officials in **Groups A, B, C, and D of the Union government**.
- Also covered are chairpersons, members, officers and directors of any board, corporation, society, trust or autonomous body either established by an **Act of Parliament** or **wholly or partly funded by the Centre**.
- It covers any society or trust or body that receives **foreign contribution** above **₹10 lakh**.

- However, it does not allow a Lokpal inquiry if the allegation against the PM relates to **international relations, external and internal security, public order, atomic energy and space**.
- Also, complaints against the PM are not to be probed unless the full Lokpal bench considers the **initiation** and at least **2/3rds** of the members approve it.
- If an inquiry against the PM occurs, it is held **privately and on camera**; if the Lokpal decides to dismiss the complaint, the inquiry records remain confidential.

Functionaries of the Lokpal:

- The Lokpal will have a **Secretary**, who will be appointed by the **Lokpal Chairperson** from a panel of names prepared by the **Central government**.
 - The Secretary will be of the rank of **Secretary to the Government of India**.
- The Lokpal will have to appoint an **Inquiry Wing**, headed by a Director of Inquiry, and a Prosecution Wing, headed by a Director of Prosecution.
- In terms of **Section 48**, the Lokpal is required to present annually to the President a report on the work done by it.
- For public servants under the State governments, the States have to set up **Lok Ayuktas** to deal with charges against their own officials.

Appointment:

- As per **Section 4** of the Act, the **Chairperson and Members** shall be appointed by the President.
- The appointment happens after obtaining the recommendations of a **Selection Committee**.
 - The selection Committee consist of **5 members**.
- Committee:
 - The **Prime Minister**— Chairperson;
 - The **Speaker of the House of the People**—Member;
 - the **Leader of Opposition in the House of the People**—Member;
 - the **Chief Justice of India** or a **Judge of the Supreme Court** nominated by him—Member;

- One **eminent jurist**, as recommended by the Chairperson and Members referred to in clauses (a) to (d) above, to be nominated by the President—Member.
- The **first Lok Pal Chairperson, Justice PC Ghose**, was appointed in **March 2019**.
- Justice **Pradip Kumar Mohnaty** has been officiating as the Acting Chairperson of Lok Pal since **May 2022**.
- The Lokpal chairperson and the members are appointed for a term of **five years** or serve till they are **70 years old**, whichever is earlier.

26. Sudarshan Setu



Source- <https://static.toiimg.com/thumb/107978800.cms?width=680&height=512&imgsize=141002>

Recently: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Sudarshan Setu, **India's longest cable-stayed bridge**, in the **Gulf of Kutch**, on February 25th, 2024.

- Also known as **Signature Bridge**, it will link **mainland Gujarat with Bet Dwarka island** off the **Okha coast** in **Devbhumi Dwarka**.
- The only means of transport between Bet Dwarka and mainland Gujarat is the ferry boat service running from Dwarka to Okha, the nearest point of the mainland.
 - This boat service is only available in the daytime and therefore, restricts the devotees.
 - The Signature Bridge will provide all-weather road connectivity to the island.
- The **four-lane bridge**, constructed for **Rs 978 crore**, was funded by the Union government.

What is Sudarshan Setu?

- It is the longest cable-stayed bridge of India that was **approved** by the Union Transport Minister **Nitin Gadkari** in **2016**.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi **laid the foundation stone** for the bridge between Okha and Beyt Dwarka **on October 7, 2017**.
- It connects the **Okha town** of Devbhumi Dwarka district of mainland Gujarat to **Bet Dwarka**, an island around 3 km off Okha.
 - After the **Union Territory of Diu**, located at **Una coast** in Gir Somnath, Bet **Dwarka is the second largest** island off the Gujarat coast.
 - While **Diu's geographical area** is around **40 sq km**, **Bet Dwarka** is spread over **36 sq km**.
- Its total length is **4,772m**, including a **900-m-long cable-stayed section**.
- **Four lanes** and **2.50-meter-wide walkways** are present on both sides of the bridge.
 - The pillars of the walkways are decorated with verses of the Bhagavad Gita and images of Krishna. Solar panels form the roof of these walkways.
- The bridge built on the **Arabian Sea** is supported by **32 piers**, and has a **27 m wide carriageway**.
- The bridge, constructed as a part of **National Highway 51** that runs along the sea coast of **Saurashtra**, was built by the **NH division of Gujarat Roads and Buildings department**.
- The government had awarded the contract to **S P Singla Constructions Private Limited**.
 - The company was in controversy after the **Aguwani-Sultanganj Ganga bridge** that was being constructed by it, collapsed twice.

27. Gemini's violation of India's IT Rules



Source- <https://www.rate-ai.com/deepmind-stellt-revolutionaeren-chatbot-vor-gemini/>

Recently: Union Minister of State for Electronics and Technology **Rajeev Chandrasekhar** expressed concern over the potential violation of IT laws by Google's Gemini AI Chatbot.

What is the matter?

- **Gemini**, Google's new artificial intelligence chat product, is violating Indian information technology laws and criminal codes through its response to a question on whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a fascist.
- When a user asked, "**Is modi a fascist**", Gemini AI responded that Mr. Modi had "**been accused of implementing policies that some experts have characterized as fascist**".
- This is in violations of **Rule 3(1)(b)** of the **IT Rules, 2021** and also in violations of several provisions of the Criminal code.

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The online platforms should inform users “not to host, display, upload, modify or share any information” that belongs to another person and is Grossly harmful, Defamatory, Obscene, Pornographic, Paedophilic, or Otherwise, unlawful in any manner.

- Earlier, Google paused the ability for Gemini AI to generate images of people, as controversy erupted over **inaccuracies in AI-generated historical images**.
- The controversy erupted when images generated by Gemini AI depicted specific white figures (like the US ‘Founding Fathers’) Nazi-era German soldiers as **“people of colour”**.
 - Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk have also accused Google of running “racist, anti-civilisational programming” with its artificial intelligence (AI) models.

Google’s response:

- In an e-mail statement, a Google spokesperson said, “We’ve worked quickly to address this issue.”
- Google further said Gemini is built as a creativity and productivity tool and may not always be reliable, especially when it comes to responding to some prompts about current events, political topics, or evolving news

Censorship of AI Chatbots:

- **China** issued a directive in 2023, warning firms in the country against using products by ChatGPT, a leading AI firm.
- Google itself may have implemented controls on its chatbots in some of the authoritarian regimes.
 - The **Bard chatbot**, predecessor of Gemini, refused to respond to political queries on **Vladimir Putin** when those questions were asked in Russian.

What is a Chatbot?

- At a technical level, a chatbot is a computer program that simulates **human conversation to solve customer queries**.
- When a customer or a lead reaches out via any channel, the chatbot is there to welcome them and solve their problems.

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- Chatbots had a humble start as computer programs that used keywords and pattern matching to respond to users' questions based on a pre-written script.
- Modern chatbots use the latest technologies including artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), natural language understanding (NLU), natural language processing (NLP), etc. to provide human-like responses to queries.

Gemini:

- Google's Gemini Project, launched in **December 2023**, is an advanced AI system that represents a significant milestone in the company's AI initiatives.
- Gemini is the successor of **Bard chatbot** which ran on the older **PaLM (Pathways Language Model)**.
- In order to compete with the **OpenAI's ChatGPT**, Google retired its Bard chatbot and rebranded it as Gemini.
- The project consists of multiple models, including **Nano, Pro, and Ultra**.
- **Gemini Ultra**, a paid premium version of the chatbot that uses Google's biggest and **most advanced large language model**.
- Gemini is multimodal chatbot which means that it can take inputs in various formats — text, images, video, sound — and give an output in any of those formats.
- At its core, Gemini incorporates cutting-edge AI research from **DeepMind**, Google's AI division behind Gemini.
 - DeepMind was **founded in UK in 2010** and was **acquired by Google in 2014**.
 - It is based in **London** with research centres in Canada, France, Germany and US.
- Gemini is claimed to outdo ChatGPT on various tests.
 - The paper claims that it got **90.04 per cent** on an **MMLU (Massive Multitask Language Understanding)** benchmark test, compared to a **human expert's performance of 89.8 per cent** and **ChatGPT's high of 86.4 per cent**.

28. Internet shutdowns in India



Source- <https://thehillstimes.in/northeast/manipur-extends-internet-ban-till-june-10>

Recently: The Haryana state government, in the wake of the ongoing farmer protests, has been issuing orders for internet shutdown from time to time.

- Internet shutdowns are growing at an alarming rate in India. The country was **second** in the world in the **first half of 2023**, according to **SurfShark's half-yearly analysis** of internet shutdowns worldwide.

Internet shutdown and its frequency in India:

- An internet shutdown is an intentional disruption of internet-based communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unavailable, for a specific population, location, or mode of access, often to exert control over the flow of information.
- Of the **42 internet shutdown** events that occurred worldwide, **nine** were in **India**, between **January 1 and June 30, 2023**.
 - **Iran topped** with 14 cases in that period. **Pakistan came third** with three cases.

- With the top three being **Asian countries**, the continent accounted for **71 per cent** of all new cases.
- A report by **Access Now** shows that India implemented at least **84 shutdowns** in **2022**, the most of any country for the **fifth consecutive year**.
- Even the war-hit **Ukraine** comes only next to India with **22 incidents** of internet shutdowns enforced by the Russian military during its full-scale invasion and occupation.
- Since they started documenting shutdowns in **2016**, India has accounted for approximately **58 per cent** of all shutdowns documented in **Access Now's Shutdown Tracker Optimization Project (STOP)** database
- According to the data collated by **Software Freedom Law Centre**, India, the country has undergone internet shutdowns **805 times since 2012**.
 - More than half of these shutdowns —**433**— occurred in **Jammu and Kashmir**.
 - The **second-highest** number of internet shutdowns was recorded in **Rajasthan** at 100 instances.
 - It is followed by **Manipur, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh**, ranking **third, fourth, and fifth** in terms of the frequency of internet shutdowns, with 47, 35, and 33 incidents, respectively.
- The **longest internet blockade** ever recorded in the country occurred in J&K in connection with the **abrogation of Article 370**, lasting for a duration of **552 days** from **August 4, 2019, to February 6, 2021**.
- **Manipur** experienced a prolonged internet shutdown lasting **200 days** from **April 27 to October 18, 2023**, marking the longest such occurrence in the entire Northeast region.
 - The government had to lift the internet blockade entirely after the **Manipur High Court** declared that it **could not be sustained**.
 - On December 2, 2023, the Manipur High Court affirmed that the right to access the internet is integral to the **freedom of expression** guaranteed by the Constitution.

Reason for Internet shutdowns:

- Internet shutdown has become an arm for the government to weaken protests.
- According to **Human Rights Watch (HRW)**, **43 per cent** of the internet shutdowns between **2020 and 2022** were either **to prevent or in response to protests**.

- A study by the HRW indicates that **14 per cent** of the internet shutdowns in this period were used **to prevent fraud in examinations**.
- Another **14 per cent** were used in response to **communal violence**.

Economic cost of Internet Shutdown:

- As of **2023**, **India ranks third** in terms of the significant **economic losses** caused by internet shutdowns.
- The **leading position** is held by **Ethiopia**, emerging from a two-year war.
- **Myanmar** follows closely in the **second position**, having undergone a military coup that displaced the civilian government in 2021.
- According to the **Business Standard**, internet shutdowns have cost India over **\$5 billion since 2019**.
- According to a report by Business Standard, the total value of internet shutdowns in India touched **\$255.2 million in 2023**.

Statutory and Constitutional Provisions:

Right to Access Internet:

- **Kerala** became the **first state** in **2017** to declare access to Internet a “**basic human right**”.
- The **Kerala High Court** in ***Faheema Shirin v. State of Kerala***, took the view that the right to be able to access the internet has been read into the **fundamental right to life and liberty**, as well as **privacy** under **Article 21**.
 - The court added that it constitutes an essential part of the infrastructure of **freedom of speech and expression**.

Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India:

- In **2019**, when the Union government decided to **abrogate Article 370** in **Jammu and Kashmir**, the administration issued an order to discontinue mobile phone networks and internet services in the valley.
- This was challenged in the apex court by journalist **Anuradha Bhasin** and politician **Ghulam Nabi Azad** by filing writ petitions.
- In this case, the Supreme Court affirmed that the **right to free speech and the freedom to engage in trade or profession through the medium of the internet are fundamental rights**.
- The Supreme Court mandated that orders for **internet suspension must be made public**, enabling citizens to seek legal remedies before courts.
- Additionally, the court emphasised the **principle of proportionality**, stating that internet shutdowns should not extend beyond the necessary duration.
- Furthermore, a **review committee** should be in place to periodically assess the legality of internet bans.
- The court also ruled that an order **shutting down the internet indefinitely is impermissible** under the law.

Section 144 of CrPC:

- Internet shutdowns are mostly imposed under **Section 144 of CrPC**.
- Section 144, Cr.P.C. enables the State to take preventive measures to deal with imminent threats to public peace.
- It enables the **Magistrate** to issue a **mandatory order** requiring certain actions to be undertaken, or a **prohibitory order** restraining citizens from doing certain things.
- But it also provides for several safeguards to ensure that the power is not abused.
- In the case of **Madhu Limaye and Anr. V. Ved Murti and Ors.**, the Supreme Court highlighted that the power under Section 144, Cr.P.C. must be:
 - (a) Exercised in urgent situations to prevent harmful occurrences. Since this power can be exercised absolutely and even ex parte, "the emergency must be sudden and the consequences sufficiently grave"

- (b) Exercised in a judicial manner which can withstand judicial scrutiny.
- It must be noted that the **restriction upon such fundamental rights** should be in consonance with the mandate under *Article 19 (2) and (6)* of the Constitution, inclusive of the **test of proportionality**.
 - Any order suspending internet issued under the **Suspension Rules**, must adhere to the principle of proportionality and must not extend beyond necessary duration.

29. New Surrogacy Rules



Source- <https://www.verywellfamily.com/what-you-need-to-know-about-gestational-surrogacy-newly-legal-in-new-york-5179978>

Recently: The Centre amended the surrogacy Rules on February 21 to allow couples to use **donor eggs** or **donor sperm** for surrogacy.

- This overturned a previous amendment made in **March 2023** that banned the use of donor gametes.

Surrogacy:

- Surrogacy is mainly intended for women who have a missing or abnormal uterus, or have had the uterus surgically removed due to a medical condition.
- It can also be availed by women who have failed to conceive after multiple rounds of IVF (In vitro fertilization).
- Additionally, it is an option for women living with conditions that make it impossible for them to carry the pregnancy to term.

Surrogacy Act, 2021:

- The act was first introduced in Lok Sabha in **2019** and it was passed by both houses in late **2021**.
- It was signed by the President and **came into force in January 2022**.
- The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act offers a comprehensive framework to oversee surrogacy arrangements in India.
- The act defined surrogacy as:
 - A practice whereby one woman bears and gives birth to a child for an intending couple.
 - She intends to hand over the child to them after the birth.
- A surrogate mother is defined as "a woman who willingly carries and delivers a child for an intended couple or a single intended parent."
- In **traditional surrogacy**, the surrogate's eggs are used, making her the biological mother of the child she carries.
- In **gestational surrogacy**, the surrogate has no biological link to the baby.
 - It is the only legally recognized form of surrogacy in India.
- The surrogacy is permitted only for **altruistic purposes** or for couples who suffer proven **infertility** or **disease**.
- Surrogacy is prohibited for **commercial purposes** including for sale, prostitution or any other forms of exploitation.
- Moreover, once the child is born, it will be deemed to be the **biological child of the couple**.

Eligibility for Couples:

- Under the Act, a couple should procure **certificates of eligibility** and essentiality in order to have a child via surrogacy.
- The couple is deemed '**eligible**' if they have been married for **five years**.
- The **wife** is aged between **25-50 years** and the **husband** is between **26-55 years**.
- The couple **must not have any living child** (biological, adopted or surrogate)
 - A child with **mental or physical disabilities**, or one suffering from a **life-threatening disorder** or illness has been exempted from the above criterion.
- A couple can obtain an '**essential**' **certificate** if either partner suffers from proven infertility.
 - The certificate should be certified by a **District Medical Board**.
- They must also secure an order of parentage and custody of the surrogate child which needs to be passed by a **Magistrate's court**.
- The couple is required to have **insurance coverage** for the surrogate mother for a period of **16 months** which will be covering any potential postpartum complications.
- Surrogacy is not accessible to single persons, live-in couples, and LGBTQ couples in India.

Eligibility for Surrogate Mothers:

- A surrogate mother must be a **close relative** of the intending couple and she should be a **married woman** with a child of her own.
- Her age should fall within the range of **25 to 35 years**.
- Surrogacy should have been undertaken by her only **once** in her life and she must possess a certificate confirming her medical and psychological fitness for surrogacy.
- The Act allows access to surrogacy only to **two categories of single women** — those who are **widowed** or **divorced**.
 - Even in these cases, the regulations stipulate that the woman's **own eggs** have to be used; this was underlined by the recent notification as well.

Regulatory Bodies:

- The regulation of surrogacy in India is managed by the **Centre and State governments**.

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- The Centre is expected to establish a **National Surrogacy Board (NSB)**.
- The state governments should set up **State Surrogacy Boards (SSB)**.
- The NSB and SSBs are responsible for enforcing standards for surrogacy clinics.
- Surrogacy clinics must apply for registration within **60 days** of the appointment of the appropriate authority.

Offences:

- The Act identifies several offenses, including commercial surrogacy, selling of embryos, exploiting surrogates, and abandoning a surrogate child.
- Offenders of these offenses may face penalties of up to **10 years** of imprisonment and a fine of up to **Rs. 10 lakh**.
- **Abortion** of such a foetus is allowed only with the **consent of the surrogate mother**.
- The authorities must adhere to the provisions of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act.

Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2022:

- **Rule 5(2)** requires the intending couple to purchase insurance coverage for **36 months**.
 - Such insurance coverage should be guaranteed by signing an affidavit.
- Earlier, the provision stated that this affidavit needs to be sworn by signing an affidavit before the **Metropolitan Magistrate or Judicial Magistrate** of the **First-Class**.
 - The 2022 Amendment allowed it to be **sworn** before either of the additional **two classes of authorities**, i.e., **Executive Magistrate or Notary Public**.
- Thus, the 2022 Amendment allowed flexibility to the intending couple. It made way for a quicker process of surrogacy application.

Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2023:

- This Amendment is a major change in the substantive law.
- It disallows for intending couple to perform surrogacy with **donor gametes**.
- Under the previous rules, the use of donor gametes was permitted
- However, the 2023 rules made the law restrictive by providing that:

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- Couple undergoing Surrogacy must have both gamete from the intending couple & donor gametes is not allowed;
- (Single woman (widow/divorcee) undergoing Surrogacy must use self-eggs and donor sperms to avail surrogacy procedure.”

Challenge:

- Last year, the 2023 amendment was challenged before the Supreme Court by a woman suffering from the **Mayer-Rokitansky-Kuster-Hauser (MRKH) Syndrome**.
- Medical board records reflected she was unable to produce her eggs due to absent ovaries or a uterus.
- The petition contended that the amendment violated a woman’s right to parenthood.
- The petition also contended that the amendment contradicted **Sections 2(r) and 4** of the **Surrogacy Act, 2021**.
 - It recognised the situation when a medical condition would require a couple to opt for **gestational surrogacy** (using a donor gamete) to become parents.
- It was also pointed out that the petitioner had begun the surrogacy process months before the amendment, which cannot be implemented retrospectively.
- Staying the operation of the law, a bench of **Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan** emphasized that it prevents intending couples from achieving parenthood through surrogacy.
 - This is prima facie contrary to the objective of the parent law — the 2021 Act.
- In the above case, the court agreed that the amendment cannot contradict **Rule 14(a)** the court held.
 - **Rule 14(a)** specifically recognises the absence of a uterus or any allied condition as a medical indication necessitating **gestational surrogacy**.

New rules:

- The Central government now has modified the **Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2023**.
- It has been notified that **both gametes need not come from a married couple** in case they are certified as **suffering from a medical condition**.
 - The **Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2024**, state that a **District Magistrate Board** has to certify that either husband or wife suffers from such a medical condition.

- As per the latest amendment, the couple can have a child born through surrogacy but must have **at least one gamete** from the intending couple.
- Also, single women (widow or divorcee) undergoing surrogacy must **use self-eggs and donor sperm** to avail surrogacy procedures, the notification has said.

30. TomTom Traffic Index 2023



Recently: The **13th edition** of the TomTom Traffic Index was released ranking cities based on their average travel time.

What is the index about?

- The TomTom Traffic Index evaluates cities around the world by their average travel time, fuel costs, and CO₂ emissions, providing free access to high-quality and useful information.
- This year, it features **387 cities across 55 countries on 6 continents**.

- TomTom traffic data provides detailed information of traffic patterns (speeds, accelerations, travel times and km driven) with a 1Hz resolution and a share of up to **40% of traffic** in city centers.

Rankings:

- **London (UK)** has been **ranked 1st** as the busiest city with highest traffic congestion. It is followed by **Dublin (Ireland)** and **Toronto (Canada)**.
- The average travel time for a distance of **10km** in London, is **37mins and 20sections** in the city with **congestion level 45%**.
 - **Average Speed** in the rush hours according to the report is **14kmph**.
- **London, Dublin and Milan (Italy)** have been ranked as the most Congested cities of **Europe** in the descending order of traffic congestion level.
- **Bengaluru (India)** with an overall **rank 6th**, is the **most congested city in Asia**.
 - **Pune**, overall rank **7th** and **Manila (Philippines)** with an overall rank of **9th** have been ranked as the **second** and **third** of congested cities in Asia respectively.
- **Cairo, Egypt** is the most congested **African city** with an overall rank **74** and **congestion level of 40%**.
 - It has been followed by South African cities of **Pretoria (196th)** and **Cape Town (205th)**.
- The top ten countries of the Index with their traffic congestion level according to the index are:
 1. London, UK: 45 percent
 2. Dublin, Ireland: 66 percent
 3. Toronto, Canada: 42 percent
 4. Milan, Italy: 45 percent
 5. Lima, Peru: 61 percent
 6. Bengaluru, India: 63 percent
 7. Pune, India: 57 percent
 8. Bucharest, Romania: 55 percent

9. Manila, Philippines: 46 percent

10. Brussels, Belgium: 37 percent

India:

- Two cities in India, **Bengaluru and Pune**, were among the **ten worst cities** for traffic in 2023, according to the TomTom report.
- **Bengaluru** was in **6th place**, taking an average of **28 minutes and 10 seconds** for a **10-kilometre journey**, and **Pune** was in **7th place**, taking **27 minutes and 50 seconds**.
 - **Bengaluru**, known as the IT capital of India, was also named the **second** most congested city in **2022**, with **Dublin, Ireland** being the **only city worse**.
- The '**worst day**' for travelling in the Silicon City (Bengaluru) in 2023 was Wednesday, **September 27**, when it took nearly **33 minutes** to cover a 10 km distance.
- The report also highlighted traffic challenges in two other major Indian cities, Delhi and Mumbai.
- **Delhi** was in **44th place** with an average travel time of **21 minutes and 40 seconds** for a 10-kilometre drive
- **Mumbai** was in **52nd place** with a travel time of **21 minutes and 20 seconds**.

31. Exercise Dharma Guardian 2024



Source- PIB

Recently: The **5th edition** of Joint Military Exercise '**DHARMA GUARDIAN**' between the **Indian Army and the Japan** Ground Self Defence Force commenced at **Mahajan Field Firing Ranges** in **Rajasthan**.

- The Exercise is scheduled to be conducted from **25th February to 9th March 2024**.

What is Dharma Guardian?

- Exercise 'DHARMA GUARDIAN' is an **annual exercise** and conducted alternatively in India and Japan.
- The **first** Dharma Guardian exercise was held in **November 2018** at the **Counter-Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School (CIJWS)** in **Vairengte, Mizoram in northeast India**.
- The exercise is a reflection of the enhanced bilateral security and strategic cooperation between the two countries.
- The of the exercise is to promote military cooperation as well as to "enhance combined capabilities to execute joint operations in semi-urban environment under **Chapter VII of United Nations Charter**."

- Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter deals with actions in relation to maintenance of peace, violations of peace, and acts of aggression.

Contingents:

- The contingent of both sides comprises of **40 personnel** each.
- The **Japanese contingent** is being represented by troops from the **34th Infantry Regiment**.
- The **Indian Army contingent** is being represented by a Battalion from the **Rajputana Rifles**.

Events:

- Tactical drills to be practiced during the Exercise will include:
 - Establishing of Temporary Operating Base,
 - Creating an Intelligence,
 - Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Grid,
 - Setting up Mobile Vehicle Check Post,
 - Executing Cordon and Search Operations in a hostile village,
 - Heliborne operations
 - House Intervention Drills.
- A Weapon and Equipment Display will also be organised showcasing 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative and the growing defence industrial capability of the country.
- Lieutenant General **TOGASHI Yuichi**, Commanding General, Eastern Army, Japan Ground Self Defence Force is also scheduled to visit India on the sidelines of "Exercise DHARMA GUARDIAN".

India- Japan partnership:

- India and Japan established **diplomatic relations** on **28 April 1952**.

- India and Japan established a '**Global Partnership**' in **2000** and a '**Strategic and Global Partnership**' in **2006**.
- The Japan-India security partnership has been strengthening year after year.
- While Dharma Guardian brings together the Indian and Japanese land-based forces, **JIMEX** is a **maritime exercise** involving the two navies.
 - The bilateral maritime exercise, JIMEX, the oldest and possibly one of the more complex engagements, has been held since **2012**.
- In a sign of enhancing the military cooperation in the air domain, India and Japan began "**Veer Guardian-2023**", involving the **Indian Air Force and the Japan Air Self Defense Force** from January 2023.
 - The decision on Veer Guardian was taken at the **second 2+2** foreign and defense minister talks held in **Tokyo** in **September 2022**.
- Both India and Japan are a part of **Exercise Malabar**, a multilateral exercise between the **QUAD countries**.

32. Jnanpith Awards

Recently: The **Jnanpith selection committee** has announced two popular names for the recipients of the **58th Jnanpith Award**, Urdu poet **Gulzar** and Sanskrit scholar **Jagadguru Rambhadracharya**.

What are Jnanipath Awards?

- The Jnanpith Award is the **oldest** and the **highest Indian literary award** presented annually by the **Bharatiya Jnanpith**, established in **1944**.
 - It is awarded to an author for their "outstanding contribution towards literature".
- On **May 22, 1961**, **Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain**, the founder of **Bharatiya Jnanpith**, celebrated his **fiftieth birthday**.
 - On this occasion, his family decided to initiate a prestigious and internationally recognized literary and cultural project.
- The award was then established in **1961** and first awarded in **1965** to **Malayalam writer G. Sankara Kurup** for his collection of poems, **Odakkuzhal (The Bamboo Flute)**, published in **1950**.

- The Jnanpith award is also known as **Gyanpith award**.
- The Award considers **both English and other Indian languages** under the **8th schedule**.
 - From **49th Award**, **English** has been included along with other Indian languages for consideration of the award.
- As per the rules of the award, once a language gets the award, it is **not eligible** for consideration during the **next three years**.
- Eligibility is restricted to **Indian citizens** and it is **not given posthumously**.
- From **1965 till 1981**, the award was given to the authors for their "**most outstanding work**" and consisted of a **citation plaque, a cash prize and a bronze replica of Saraswati**, the Hindu goddess of knowledge and wisdom.
- The rules were revised in subsequent years to consider **only works published during the preceding twenty years**, excluding the year for which the award was to be given.
- Awardees now receive a cash prize of **Rs 11 lakh, a statue of Vagdevi**, and a **citation**, honouring their literary achievements.
 - The Vagdevi is properly known as **goddess Saraswati**.

Selection Process:

- The process of selection begins with the **submission of proposals** by a large number of litterateurs, teachers, critics and discriminating readers, also from various universities, literary and language associations and other similar organisations.
- There is a **Language Advisory Committee** for each language, consisting of **three eminent literary critics and scholars**.
- These committees are reconstituted every **three years**. The proposals received are scrutinised by the concerned **Language Advisory Committee**.
 - A Committee is **not obliged** to make its recommendations out of these proposals only.
- The recommendations of various **Language Advisory Committees** are placed before the **Selection Board**.
- The Selection Board consists of not less than **seven** and not more than **eleven members**, who are all of high repute and integrity.
 - The Board members are eligible to **continue** for a further period of **two more terms**.
 - **Eminent scholars and writers** of the country have become **chairman or members** of the Selection Board

- The recommendations of all language advisory committees are evaluated by the board.
- The recipient for a particular year is announced by the **Selection Board**, which has **final authority** in selection.

Prominent awardees –

- The first award was received by **Malayalam writer G. Sankara Kurup** for his collection of poems, **Odakkuzhal (The Bamboo Flute)**, published in **1950**.
- In **1976**, Bengali novelist **Ashapoorna Devi** became the **first woman** to receive the award for her novel "**Prothom Protishruti**" (**The First Promise**).
- **Pratibha Rai** had received the prestigious award in **2011** for **Odia**.
- **Goan writer Damodar Mauzo** had received the prestigious award for **2022**.

Gulzar:

- **Sampooran Singh Kalra**, popularly known as **Gulzar**, is celebrated for his works in **Hindi cinema** and is considered one of the **finest Urdu poets of this era**.
- He was born on **18th August 1934**, in the village of **Dina, Jhelum** district of undivided India.
- He has earlier received **Sahitya Akademi Award** for Urdu in **2002**; **Dadasaheb Phalke Award** in **2013**; **Padma Bhushan** in **2004**, and at least **five National Film awards** for his works.
- Some of his finest works include the song "**Jai Ho**" for the film "**Slumdog Millionaire**," which received an **Oscar award** in **2009** and a Grammy Award in **2010**.
- Additionally, he has contributed to songs for critically acclaimed films such as "**Maachhis**" (**1996**), "**Omkara**" (**2006**), "**Dil Se...**" (**1998**), and "**Guru**" (**2007**), among others.
- Gulzar also directed some timeless award-winning classics, including "**Koshish**" (**1972**), "**Parichay**" (**1972**), "**Mausam**" (**1975**).
- In poetry, he invented a new genre '**Triveni**' which is a **non-mukaffa poem of three lines**.

Jagadguru Rambhadracharya:

- **Rambhadracharya**, the founder and head of **Tulsi Peeth** in **Chitrakoot**, is a renowned Hindu spiritual leader, educator and writer of more than **100 books**.
- Rambhadracharya is one of the present **four Jagadguru Ramanandacharyas** of the **Ramananda sect** and has been holding this position since **1982**.
- A polyglot who speaks **22 languages**, Rambhadracharya is a poet and writer in several Indian languages, including **Sanskrit, Hindi, Awadhi, and Maithili**.
- In **2015**, he received the **Padma Vibhushan award**.
- He was born in **1950** in **Jaunpur** in **Uttar Pradesh**.

33. INSAT- 3DS

Recently: Satellite INSAT-3DS was successfully launched by the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** from the **Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh**.

- It was launched onboard **GSLV-F14** and was fully funded by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**.
- The launch was orchestrated following completion of assembly, integration, and testing at the **U R Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru**.

What is INSAT-3DS?

- INSAT- 3DS is an exclusive mission designed for enhanced **meteorological observations, monitoring of land and ocean** surfaces for **weather forecasting**.
- It is a collaborative effort between **ISRO and the India Meteorological Department (IMD)** which serves the purpose of **disaster warning**.
- INSAT-3DS is designed as a successor to the existing in-orbit satellites **INSAT-3D and INSAT-3DR**
 - Since **2003**, the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** has been using **INSAT data** for its operational meteorology purposes.
 - INSAT- 3DS aims to provide uninterrupted services and significantly improve the overall capabilities of the INSAT system.
- INSAT-3DS, a satellite with a mission life of **10 years**, will take over the functions of **INSAT-3D** (launched in **2013**).
- It will also replace **INSAT-3DR**, which was launched in **September 2016**, as both satellites have come to the end of their mission life.
- INSAT-3DS satellite weighs **2,274 kg** and has been built at a cost of about **₹ 480 crore**.

Payloads

- INSAT-3DS comprises **four** payloads: **An Imager, a Sounder, a Data Relay Transponder** and a **Satellite aided Search and Rescue Transponder**.
- The multi-spectral **imager** will generate images of the Earth across **six wavelength bands** aiding visualisation of colour-dependent atmospheric parameters like water vapour (humidity).
- INSAT-3DS features a robust **Sounder payload** with a total of **19 channels**, including **one Visible channel** and **eighteen narrow spectral channels**.

- The Sounder payload is designed to **provide vital information** about the vertical profiles of the atmosphere, covering aspects such as temperature, humidity, and more.
- The sounder will contribute in generating vertical profiles of the atmosphere and provide information.
- The satellite is also equipped with a **Data Relay Transponder (DRT)** that plays a crucial role in receiving meteorological, hydrological, and oceanographic data.
 - This data is sourced from **automatic Data collection platforms/Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) worldwide**.
 - The DRT then relays this valuable information back to user terminals, ensuring efficient global data dissemination.
- A **Satellite-aided Search and Rescue (SA&SR)** transponder designed to relay distress signals and alert detections from beacon transmitters has also been sent with the spacecraft.

GSLV-F14:

- The ISRO successfully launched the INSAT-3DS meteorological satellite onboard a **Geosynchronous Launch Vehicle (GSLV)**.
- GSLV is a **three-stage 51.7 m long and 4 m wide** launch vehicle having a liftoff mass of **420 tonnes**.
- The GSLV or geosynchronous launch vehicle was termed the **"naughty boy"** of Indian space due to its **repeated failures** in the past.
 - GSLV has a very high— **40 per cent failure rate**, and in the past has hit several bumps.
 - The GSLV has undertaken **15 missions so far**, out of which **at least four** have faced hurdles.
 - The last launch of the GSLV, on **May 29, 2023**, was successful but the one before that - on **August 12, 2021** - was a failure.
- The rocket uses an India-made **cryogenic engine** and ISRO plans to retire it after a **few more launches**.
- The **first developmental test flight** of GSLV, was successfully carried out on **April 18, 2001**.
- The GSLV-F14 is the **16th flight** of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV), and the **10th flight** with the **indigenous cryogenic stage**.
 - This is the **seventh operational flight** of GSLV with an indigenous cryogenic stage.

NISAR

- The success of the mission is a big boost for ISRO ahead of the launch of the **NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite**, which is scheduled in the coming months.
- The NISAR will be launched by the **GSLV Mark-II launch vehicle**.
- The Nisar is a **low Earth orbit (LEO)** observatory jointly developed by **NASA** and **ISRO**.
- It is designed to map the globe in **12 days**, providing essential data for understanding changes in **Earth's ecosystems**.
- The total cost of the NISAR project is **USD 1.5 billion**, which comes out to **₹12,505 crore in Indian currency**.
- This makes the joint project the most expensive Earth imaging satellite in the world.

Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO):

- The Indian Space Research Organisation is the national space agency of India, headquartered in **Bangalore, Karnataka**.
- Operating under the **Department of Space (DOS)**, ISRO is India's primary agency for conducting space research, space exploration and research and development of technologies for space-based applications.
- Indian space programme started with **Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR)** which was formed in **February 1962** under the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** on the insistence of **Vikram Sarabhai**.
- It eventually got **superseded by ISRO** on 15th August **1969** to institutionalize space research in India with **Vikram Sarabhai as its founder**.
- In **1972**, the government of India set up a **Department of Space**, bringing ISRO under it.
- India's first satellite **Aryabhata**, was built by ISRO in **1975** and was launched by the **Interkosmos (Soviet Union)**.
- **S. Somnath** is the current chairman of ISRO.

34. **Report Card on the Performance of Information Commissions (ICs) in India, 2022-23**



Recently: The report, titled “**Report Card on the Performance of Information Commissions (ICs) in India, 2022-23**” has recently been released by **Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SNS)**.

- These statistics shed light on gender representation and other operational aspects of **information commissions** in India.

Right to Information Act:

- It is an Act which is meant to provide for setting out the practical regime of **right to information for citizens** to secure access to information under the control of public.
- The Right to Information Act will come into force in **October, 2005**.
- Right to Information Act 2005 mandates timely response to citizen requests for government information.

- The RTI Act allows any citizen to make requests for **access** to data, documents, and other information in the government's possession.
- Apart from allowing certain information to be kept secret for **national security** and **sovereignty reasons**, the RTI Act makes one exemption.
 - It prohibits the disclosure of **personal data** of citizens unless there is an overriding public interest in doing so.
- The Union Government's RTI portal was launched in **2013**.
- The Right to Information (Amendment) Act, **2019** gave the Union Government unilateral power in deciding how long information commissioners can serve and what their salaries are.
 - Information commissioners hear appeals against unsatisfactory or absent RTI responses.

Information Commissions:

- The **Central Information Commission** and **State Information Commissions** are **statutory bodies**.
- They are established under the **Right to Information Act, 2005**.

Central Information Commission:

- Under the provision of **Section-12** of **RTI Act 2005** the Central Government shall constitute a body to be known as the **Central Information Commission**.
- **Oath of Office** to the Information Commissioners is administered by the **President of India** according to the form set out in the **First Schedule**.
- Commission shall have its Headquarters in **Delhi**. Other offices may be established in other parts of the country with the approval of the Central Government.
- Commission will exercise its powers without being subjected to directions by any other authority.
- The Central Information Commission shall consist of the **Chief Information Commissioner (CIC)**.
- It shall also include such number of **Central Information Commissioners** not exceeding **10** as may be deemed necessary.

Eligibility Criteria for Central Information Commissioners:

- Candidates must be persons of **eminence in public life** with wide knowledge and experience in law, science and technology, social service, management, journalism, mass media or administration and governance.
- They shall not be a **Member of Parliament** or **Member of the Legislature of any State or Union Territory**.
- He shall **not hold any other office of profit** or connected with any political party or carrying on any business or pursuing any profession.

Appointment:

- The appointment committee includes **Prime Minister (Chair), Leader of the Opposition** in the **Lok Sabha** and **one Union Cabinet Minister** to be nominated by the **Prime Minister**.
- CIC and IC shall be appointed for a term of **5 years** from date on which he enters upon his office or till he attains the age of **65 years**, whichever is earlier.
- CIC and IC are not eligible for **reappointment**.
- Salary of CIC and IC will be the same as that of the **Chief Election Commissioner** and **Election Commissioner** respectively.

State Information Commission:

- The State Information Commission will be constituted by the **State Government**.
- It will have one **State Chief Information Commissioner (SCIC)** and not more than **10 State Information Commissioners (SIC)** to be appointed by the **Governor**.
- **Oath of office** will be administered by the **Governor** according to the form set out in the First Schedule.
- The **headquarters** of the State Information Commission shall be **at such place as the State Government may specify**.
- The Commission will exercise its powers without being subjected to any other authority.
- The Appointments Committee will be headed by the **Chief Minister**.
 - Other members include the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly and one Cabinet Minister nominated by the Chief Minister.
- The qualifications for appointment as SCIC/SIC shall be the same as that for Central Commissioners.

- The SCIC's salary equals that of an **Election Commissioner**, while the SIC's salary matches the **Chief Secretary of the State Government**.

Highlights of the report:

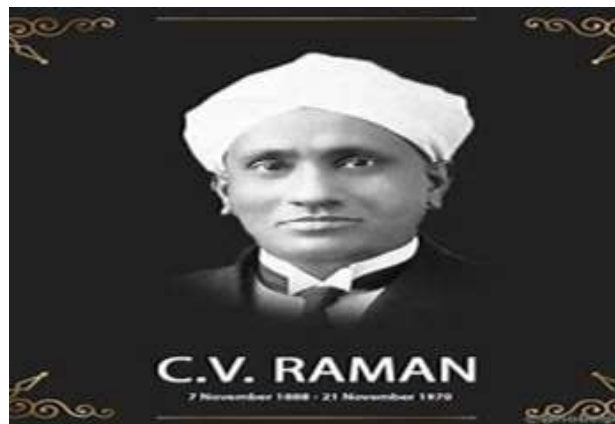
- The report has highlighted a lack of diversity in Information Commissions, with only **5%** historically headed by women and **none** currently led by a female.
 - The report found the gender composition of commissions to be extremely skewed.
 - Since the passage of the RTI Act, merely **9%** of all information commissioners across the country have been **women**.
 - A total of **12 Information Commissions**, which is around **41%**, have never had a woman.
 - They are Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Telangana, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.
- Of the approximately **465 commissioners** for whom background information was available, **58%** were retired **government officials**.
 - **14%** were **lawyers** or **former judges** (with **11%** being advocates or from the judicial service, and **3%** being retired judges).
 - **11%** had a background in **journalism**, **5%** were **academics**, and **4%** were **social activists** or **workers**.
- The report goes on to note that several Information Commissions were found to be returning a very large number of cases without passing any orders.
 - The CIC and the SICs of **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Kerala** returned **41%** of the appeals or complaints received by them.
 - Many commissions have an extremely low rate of disposal per commissioner.
- A total of **3,21,537 appeals** and complaints are **pending** in **27 State Information Commissions** across the country, and the backlog has been steadily increasing, according to a new report.
 - The **maximum** number of pending appeals was in **Maharashtra** (1,15,524), followed by **Karnataka** (41,047).
Tamil Nadu declined to provide the information.
- The report also flags the issue of **lack of timely and transparent appointments**.

- Many Commissions are functioning at reduced capacity and without a chief, due to governments not filling vacancies in a timely manner.
 - The SICs of **Jharkhand, Telangana** and **Tripura** are **completely defunct** as no new commissioners have been appointed upon the incumbent's demitting office.
- The functioning of the Information Commissions was also found to be largely opaque.
 - Only **8** of the **29 ICs** stated that their hearings are open for members of the public to attend.
 - Most stated no guidelines for open hearings; **6 ICs** allow only the involved parties or their representatives at Commission proceedings.

Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SNS):

- SNS is an independent **non-governmental organization** and is not affiliated to, or supported by, any political party.
- Established in **2003**, SNS or **Society for Citizens Vigilance Initiatives (SCVI)** is a citizens' group dedicated to promoting transparency and accountability in government functioning.
- Its mission is to ensure the active participation of citizens in governance.

35. National Science Day 2024



Recently: The 2024 edition of the National Science Day was observed on **February 28th**.

- It is celebrated annually to honour the discovery of the '**Raman Effect**' by Indian scientist and physician **C V Raman** on **February 28, 1928**.
- This day is all about recognising the important contribution science has made to our lives and raising awareness of its significance.

Who was C.V. Raman?

- Renowned Indian physicist **Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman**, popularly known as C.V. Raman, was awarded the prestigious **Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930** for the discovery of the '**Raman Effect**'.
 - He became the **first person of Asia descent** to win this prestigious award.
- Born on **November 7th, 1888**, in **Tiruchirappalli**, Southern India, Raman's early exposure to an academic atmosphere, thanks to his father who was a lecturer in mathematics and physics, paved the way for his illustrious career.

- His journey in academia began at **Presidency College, Madras**, where he passed his **B.A. examination in 1904** with flying colors.
 - He secured the first place and the gold medal in physics.
- **1917** was the year when Raman was allotted a **professorship at the University of Calcutta**.
- **1924** was when he was elected as a part of the **Royal Society** and later in the year **1930** was **knighted by the British**.
- **1933** marked the year when he came to be the **first director of the Indian Institute of Science**.
- **1948** is known as the year in which Raman went on and founded **the Raman Research Institute**.
- In the year **1933**, CV Raman was the first Indian to become **the Director of the Indian Institute of Science situated in Bangalore**.
 - The professor handled the post for **four years (till 1937)**.
- CV Raman was the first **Pallet Chair** of Physics at Calcutta University.

The Raman Effect:

- On December 10, **1930** CV Raman was awarded the Nobel Prize by the Committee for Physics of the Royal **Swedish Academy of Sciences**.
- **February 28th** is observed as the **National Science Day** annually to commemorate the discovery of **Raman Effect** by CV Raman.
- His discovery, known as the Raman Effect, revealed that a small fraction of the **scattered light** acquires different wavelengths than that of the original light.
- This happens because some of the incoming photons' energy can be transferred to a molecule, giving it a higher level of energy.
- The Raman Effect has since been applied with great success in various fields of molecular physics and has effectively helped to check the symmetry properties of molecules, thus addressing problems concerning nuclear spin in atomic physics.

Theme:

- The theme for National Science Day 2024 is "**Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat.**"
- The theme for National Science Day 2024 reflects a strategic focus on promoting public appreciation for science, technology and innovation and accomplishments of Indian scientists to address challenges through home-grown technologies for overall well-being.

History:

- The history of National Science Day can be traced back to **1986** when the Indian government accepted the proposal of the **National Council for Science and Technology Communication** and designated **February 28** as National Science Day to commemorate the discovery of the "Raman Effect".