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**Student Support
Contact:**

8302916701;

9929774737;

9303019139

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National Current Affairs:

World's largest Ramayan Temple in Bihar



Recently: The **second phase** of construction of the “**world's largest Ramayan temple**” began in East **Champan district** of Bihar.

- The temple is envisaged to be the “World's largest Ramayan Temple” after its completion in 2025.

About the Temple:

History:

- In **2012**, **Acharya Kishore Kunal** performed the **bhoomi puja** of the Virat Ramayana temple to be built in **Kaithwalia**.
 - Acharya Kishore Kunal is a former IPS officer and **Secretary** of **Patna-brd Mahavir Mandir Trust**, which has borne all expenses of the construction of Viraat Ramayan temple from its internal resources.
- Chief Minister **Nitish Kumar** first unveiled the temple model at a function inaugurated by **Dwarka Peeth Shankaracharya Swami Swaroopananda Saraswati** at Patna's **Mahavir Mandir** in **November 2013**.
- The project was first proposed as **Viraat Angkot Wat Ram Mandir** in Bihar's **Hajipur**.
- After the plan was disclosed and widely discussed, the **Cambodian government** expressed its objection and concern to the Indian government over the fact that the name of this temple is a copy of the actual Angkor Wat situated in Cambodia.
- The Cambodian government also claimed that the proposed temple's design was a replica of the world-famous **Angkor Wat temple**. The **12th century** temple is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since **1992**.
- The project almost coincided with the construction of the **Statue of Unity** in Gujarat prior to the **2014** Lok Sabha elections.
- This saw the Janata Dal-United (JD-U) breaking alliance with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and joining hands with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar.
- The Statue of Unity, a Gujarat government project, was ready in **2018**, but the Viraat temple got stuck due to international issues and later some land acquisition matters.
- The project was moved to **East Champaran district** after the temple trust was allotted land there.
- The construction of the **three-storey temple**, spread over an area of **3.76 lakh sq.ft.**, began in **June 2023** and is expected to be complete in **2025**.
- Former director general of **Central Public Works Department (CPWD)** **Mohit Kumar Jaiswal** has been made the **chief adviser** of the technical cell for the project.
- The Project has the longevity of **250 years** which was planned to be only **100 years** initially.

Architecture:

- The architecture of the world's largest temple is inspired by the **Angkor Wat complex in Cambodia**, and in south India, the **Ramanathaswami temple in Rameshwaram** and the **Meenakshi Sundareshwarar temple in Madurai**.
- The temple will be constructed in **3.76 lakh sq. ft.** land in the **Kaithwalia-Bahuara** villages under the Kalyanur block on **Kesaria-Chakia road** in East **Champaran district**, about **120 km** from the State capital, **Patna**.
- The temple will have **12 domes**, the highest of which will be **270 ft tall**.
- The temple will be **2,800 ft in length, 1,400 ft in width** and **405 ft in height**.
- The temple will house a **33-foot-tall Shivling** in the **arghya (sanctum sanctorum)**. There will be **22** sanctum sanctorum for different deities in the temple complex.
- The 33-ft-high black **granite Shivling** weighs **200 tonnes** and is being made at **Mahabalipuram near Chennai**.
 - This Shivling will also be **world's largest Shivling** and be established by **Mahashivratri of 2025**.
- There will be 22 smaller temples in the complex dedicated to the important deities mentioned in the Ramayana.
- The **first phase** of construction was completed in **10 months**.
- The **second phase** will include the construction up to the **plinth level**, which will go up to a height of about **26 feet** from the ground level.
- In the **third phase**, the construction of **shikhars (spires)** and final finishing touches of the entire temple will be done.
- There will be a total of **12 shikhars** in the temple, with the main shikhar being **270 feet tall**.
- With a length of **1080 feet**, the Viraat Ramayan Mandir will be **three times** bigger than the **Ram Temple in Ayodhya (360 feet)**.
- Similarly, the Ayodhya Temple's **height is 161 feet**, while the Viraat Ramayan Temple will have a **height of 270 feet**.
- The temple will have sitting capacity of **20,000 people** at a time.

Jurisdiction of CBI



Recently: The Supreme Court upheld the West Bengal government's suit accusing the Union government of "**constitutional overreach**" by employing the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to register and investigate cases in the State despite its withdrawal of general consent.

- On the other hand, BJP-ruled **Madhya Pradesh, Odisha** and Goa have extended the CBI's remit under 'general consent' — which would earlier apply to central government officials and central PSU employees in the states' territorial jurisdiction — to "private persons" as well.

What is General Consent for CBI?

- The CBI is governed by the **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act (DPSEA)**.
- This law makes the CBI a special wing of Delhi Police and thus its original jurisdiction is limited to Delhi.
- Therefore, under **Section 6** of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, CBI needs to take permission from the respective state before investigating any case in it.
- The central government can authorise CBI to probe a case in a state but only with the consent of the concerned state government.
- However, the **Supreme Court** and **high courts** can order a CBI probe in any state even **without its consent**.

- This permission is required since **“police” and “public order”** fall within the **State List** under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- No such prior consent is necessary in **Union territories** or **railway areas**.
- Almost all states have traditionally given such consent, in the absence of which the CBI would have to apply to the state government in every case, and before taking even small actions.
- If a state withdraws its General Consent, the CBI **should not register any fresh case** involving officials of the **central government** or a **private person** in the state without the consent of the state government.
 - However, the CBI retains the power to investigate cases that had been registered before consent was withdrawn.
- In case a search requires an element of surprise, **Section 166** of the **Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)** can be used, which allows a police officer of one jurisdiction to ask an officer of another to carry out a search on their behalf.
 - And should the first officer feel that a search carried out by the latter may lead to loss of evidence, the section allows the first officer to conduct the search himself after giving notice to the latter.
- Consent does not apply in cases where someone has been caught **red-handed** taking a bribe.
- According to a **2018** judgement of the **Delhi High Court**, a case registered anywhere else in the country, which involved individuals stationed in these states, allowed the CBI's jurisdiction to extend to these states.
- States such as **West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Telangana and Kerala** have withdrawn their general consent for CBI investigations.

Recent Developments:

The Supreme Court Order:

- The West Bengal government had filed an original suit under **Article 131** of the Constitution arguing that the actions of the Union government and the involvement of the CBI in the State infringed upon its sovereignty.
 - Article 131 deals with the Supreme Court's original jurisdiction in a **dispute between the Centre and one or more states**.
- The suit highlighted that despite the withdrawal of general consent for CBI investigations by the state on **November 16, 2018**, the agency proceeded to register **12** new cases.

- Alleging this to be a “constitutional overreach,” the State sought the annulment of these 12 cases and stop the CBI from lodging any further cases.
- A bench of **Justices BR Gavai** and **Sandeep Mehta** said the detailed hearing on West Bengal's suit will be taken up later on merits.
- The court posted the final hearing of the suit on August 13 when issues for adjudication will be framed after hearing Bengal government and Union government.

The new Notifications:

- The **Madhya Pradesh** government has said that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) will need a **written permission** to initiate inquiries against state’s “**public servants**”.
- The state government, however, said no permission will be required to probe **central government officials or private individuals**.
- A notification in this regard was issued on **July 16** and said the order came into effect on July 1.
- They said that the notifications have been issued on the advice of the CBI, which was trying to standardise the ‘general consent’ regime for all states following the implementation of the new criminal laws on July 1.
- Identical notifications were issued by governments of **Odisha (June 30)** and **Goa (July 12)**.

Central Bureau of Investigation:

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is the premier investigating agency of India.
- It was formed by resolution of the **Ministry of Home Affairs** but now operates under the jurisdiction of the **Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions**.
- It works under the supervision of the **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)** in matters pertaining to the **Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988**.
- It is India’s representative for correspondence with the **INTERPOL**.
- The CBI is Headquartered in **New Delhi**.

- It is **not a statutory body** but derives its power to investigate from the **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946**.

How was it formed?

- The Central Bureau of Investigation traces its origins to the Special Police Establishment (SPE), a Central Government Police force, which was set up in **1941** by the Government of India to investigate bribery and corruption in transactions with the War and Supply Department of India.
- Later on, it was formalized as an agency of the Government of India to investigate into allegations of corruption in various wings of the Government of India by enacting the **Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946**.
- The establishment of the CBI was recommended by the **Santhanam Committee** on Prevention of Corruption (**1962–1964**).
- The DSPE **acquired** its popular **current name**, through a Home Ministry resolution in **1963**.
- In **1987**, the CBI was divided into the following divisions: the Anti-Corruption Division, the Special Crimes Division, the Economic Offences Division, the Policy and International Police Cooperation Division, the Central Forensic Science Laboratory Division.

Director of CBI:

- The CBI director is responsible for the administration of the Organization.
- The Director is appointed for a tenure of **not less than 2 years**. Earlier, the appointment was made on the basis of DSPE Act.
- In **2014**, the **Lokpal Act** provided for a committee headed by PM, for the appointment of the CBI director.
- The founding director of the CBI was **D. P. Kohli**, who held the office from 1 **April 1963** to **31 May 1968**.
- **Praveen Sood** is the current director of CBI.

Parental Consent under Digital Data Protection Act



Recently: The industry has generally embraced the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA) 2023** for its clear compliance framework. However, the requirement for verifiable parental consent before handling children's data has caused a rift between the industry and the government.

What is Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA) 2023?

History:

- The journey towards a data protection legislation can be traced back to **2017** when an **expert committee** was constituted by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY)**.
 - The committee was formed under the chairmanship of **BN Srikrishna**.
- The committee was formed after the landmark judgement **of Justice K.S. Puttaswamy & Anr. vs. Union of India & Ors. (2017)**, also known as the Right to Privacy verdict, which holds that the **right to privacy** is protected as a **fundamental right** under **Article 21 (Right to life)**.
- The major development came in **December 2021** when the **Data Protection Bill, 2021 (DPB, 2021)** was released.
- However, it was withdrawn in Parliament by **Minister for Communications and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw** on August 3, 2022.

- On November 18, 2022, a draft of the **Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 (DPDPB, 2022)** was released for public consultation.
- The submissions made under this consultation process were not made public. The request to publicly release the submissions was also denied in a Right to Information application.
- One year later, on **August 11, 2023**, a bill was passed by the parliament and it became an act.
- By using the word **"she" instead of "he"**, for the first time it acknowledges women in Parliamentary law-making.

Aim of the Act

- Introduce data protection law with minimum disruption while ensuring necessary change in the way Data Fiduciaries process data.
- Enhance the Ease of Living and the Ease of Doing Business.
- Enable India's digital economy and its innovation ecosystem.

Principles:

- The Act is based on the following seven principles as per the government:
 - Consented, lawful and transparent use of personal data.
 - Purpose Limitation- Use of personal data only for the purpose specified at the time of obtaining consent of the Data Principal.
 - Data Minimisation- Collection of only as much personal data as is necessary to serve the specified purpose.
 - Data accuracy- Ensuring data is correct and updated.
 - Storage Limitation- Storing data only till it is needed for the specified purpose.
 - Reasonable security safeguards

- **Accountability-** through adjudication of data breaches and breaches of the provisions of the Bill and imposition of penalties for the breaches.

Key Definitions:

- **Data-** Any representation of information, facts, concepts, opinions and instructions which is capable of being communicated, interpreted, and processed by human beings or by automated means.
- **Personal Data-** Any data about an individual (Data Principal) who is identifiable by or in relation to such data.
- **Processing of Personal Data-** It is the performing of a set of operation(s) by wholly or partly automated means on digital Personal Data.
 - Includes collection, storage, indexing, sharing, use, disclosure, dissemination, and includes erasure thereof.
 - Such processing can only be undertaken for a 'lawful purpose' for which a Data Principal has given her consent and for certain legitimate uses as laid down in the Act.
- **Data Fiduciaries-** They are the persons, companies and government entities who process data.

Applicability:

- The act applies to the processing of digital personal data within India where such data is: (i) collected online, or (ii) collected offline and is digitised.
- It will also apply to the processing of personal data outside India if it is for offering goods or services in India.
- It shall not apply to the Personal Data when such data is (i) processed by an individual for any personal or domestic purpose.
(ii) is made or caused to be made publicly available by the Data Principal herself or any other person being under an obligation.

Consent:

- **Section 6** of the act states that Personal data may be processed only for a **lawful purpose** after obtaining the **consent** of the individual.
 - Such consent has to be free, specific, informed, unconditional, and unambiguous with a clear affirmative action.
- **A notice** under **section 5** must be given before seeking consent.
 - The notice should contain details about the personal data to be collected and the purpose of processing.
- Consent may be withdrawn by the Data Principle at any point in time.
- Consent, as per **Section 7**, will not be required for '**legitimate uses**' including:
 - Specified purpose for which data has been provided by an individual voluntarily.
 - Provision of benefit or service by the government such as subsidy, certificate, license, benefit, permits, etc.
 - Security of the State or in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of the country
 - Medical Emergency
 - Employment
- As per Section 9, For individuals **below 18 years** of age, consent will be provided by the parent or the legal guardian.
- However, the State or any instrumentality of the State has been empowered to retain Personal Data or reject any request made for the erasure of Personal Data vide **Section 17(4)**.

Parental Consent:

- According to **Section 9**, data fiduciaries are required to secure verifiable consent from parents or guardians before **processing data related to children (people below the age of 18)**.
- The Act also prohibits harmful data processing and targeted advertising aimed at minors.
- However, certain organizations, such as healthcare and educational institutions, may be exempt from these verifiable parental consent and age-gating requirements.
- This has been a major sticking point for the industry since the **Act itself does not suggest ways in which platforms can perform age-gating**.

- Although the act introduces safeguards for protecting children's data, such as requiring parental consent, there are still challenges related to age verification and defining what constitutes harm to children.
- Another challenge is reliably establishing the relationship **between a child and their parents**.
- The lack of a definitive approach for implementing the verifiable parental consent requirement is a major reason for the delay in issuing the data protection rules.

Previous solutions not found feasible

- Last year, as part of its internal deliberations on the data protection rules, the ministry was considering two ways to establish the relationship between children and their parents.
- One option was to use **parents' DigiLocker app**, which is based on their **Aadhaar details**, while the other was for the industry to create an **electronic token system**, which would be allowed only if authorized by the government.
- However, the ministry no longer thinks these solutions could be implemented at scale and is understood to have dropped the idea.
- The inability to arrive at a conclusive decision on how to proceed with the verifiable parental consent provision is the biggest reason behind the delay in releasing the data protection rules.
- Without the rules, the data protection Act can not be operationalised as it depends on at least **25 such provisions** to implement the modalities of the Act.

Global laws don't prescribe tech measure:

- Globally, privacy legislations have not prescribed a technology to gather verifiable parental consent, and have left it to data collectors to use relevant technology through which such consent can be gathered.
- For instance, the **United States' Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)** does not mandate the method a company must use to get parental consent.
 - Instead, it says that an operator must choose a **method "reasonably designed"** in light of available technology to ensure that the person giving the consent is the child's parent.

- The COPPA, however, has prescribed some **basic standards** that any technological measure to gather a child's parent's consent should adhere to.
- These include signing a **consent form** and sending it back via fax, mail, or electronic scan.
- Using a credit **card, debit card, or other online payment system** that provides notification of each separate transaction to the account holder is also included.
- Another method is calling a toll-free number staffed by trained personnel or connecting to trained personnel via a video conference.
- Verifying a picture of a driver's license or other photo ID submitted by the parent, and then comparing that photo to a second photo submitted by the parent using facial recognition technology, is among the options as well.
- The **European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), 2016** is considered to be among the strictest privacy laws globally.
- On the other hand, it requires data collectors to make "reasonable efforts" using available technology to verify that consent provided on behalf of a child under the **age of 13** has, in fact, been provided by the holder of parental responsibility for that child.
- In the event of a complaint, the law will consider whether a data collector has made reasonable efforts to verify that the data subject is old enough to provide their own consent.
- This evaluation will take into account the risks inherent in the processing and the available technology.

85th Death Anniversary of Sardar Udham Singh



Recently: India observed the 85th Death Anniversary of the "**Patient Assassin**", Sardar Udham Singh on **July 31st**.

- On **July 31, 1940**, Indian revolutionary leader **Udham Singh** was executed at the **Pentonville prison in London** for killing **Michael O'Dwyer**, the former lieutenant governor of Punjab.

Who was Sardar Udham Singh?

- Udham Singh was born as **Sher Singh** on **December 26, 1899**, in the **Sunam city** of **Sangrur district**.
- His parents died while he was young and subsequently, Singh's uncle sent him and his elder brother to live in the **Central Khalsa Orphanage** in **Amritsar** in **1907**, where they were both given new names.
- In **1917**, tragedy again struck when his brother **Mukt Singh** died of an unknown disease.
- Having grown up in the early decades of the 20th century, he was heavily influenced by political events in Punjab such as the **Komagata Maru incident of 1914** and the **Ghadar Party's uprising of 1914-16**.

- He was a young boy of 20 when he witnessed General Dyer's madness at Jallianwala Bagh as he fired upon a group of innocent, unarmed people.

The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre:

- The arrest of **Dr Satya Pal** and **Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew** on **April, 10, 1919**, under the **Rowlatt Act** on connection with Satyagraha, caused serious unrest in Punjab.
 - **Rowlatt Act-** The Act empowered the government to arrest and detain Indian citizens without trial, sparking widespread protests and agitation across the nation.
- It was in this climate of unrest that a public gathering was organized at Jallianwala Bagh, a garden in Amritsar, to protest against the Act and express solidarity with the leaders arrested under its provisions.
- Among the attendees were men, women, and children, many of whom had come to celebrate the spring **festival of Baisakhi**. The gathering was peaceful and nonviolent.
- Unbeknownst to the protestors, **Brigadier General Reginald Dyer**, on the command of the then Lieutenant Governor, **Michael O' Dwyer**, had decided to quell the gathering by force.
- As the protesters assembled, Dyer marched into Jallianwala Bagh **with fifty armed soldiers** and, without warning, ordered them to open fire indiscriminately on the crowd.
- As a result, hundreds of men, women and children were killed and more than **1200** were wounded.
- The then government of India ordered an investigation of the incident (**the Hunter Commission**), which in **1920** censured Dyer for his actions and ordered him to resign from the military.
- The incident became one of the causes of the **non- cooperation movement, 1920**.
- After the incident, Nobel laureate **Rabindranath Tagore** renounced the **knighthood** that he had received in **1915**.
- **Mahatma Gandhi** renounced the **Kesar-i-Hind** that he was awarded in **1915 by Lord Hardings**.
- In **1922**, the infamous **Rowlett Act was repealed** by the British.
- The central government set up the **Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial Trust** on **May 1, 1951** under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister.
- The **Jallianwala Bagh complex** was opened by then **President Dr Rajendra Prasad** on **April 13, 1961**, as a tribute to the victims of the massacre. The **renovated complex** was inaugurated in **2021**.

- Udham Singh along with his mates from the orphanage were there to distribute water among the attendees.
- As Dwyer fired upon the group, all his other friends from the orphanage died.

The Assassination:

- The Jallianwala Bagh massacre was a turning point in his life, and he resolved to take revenge.
- Deeply influenced by the activities of **Bhagat Singh**, he got involved in the **Ghadar Party** in **1924**.
- For the next few years he travelled abroad and organised Indian revolutionaries overseas to overthrow colonial rule.
- After he returned to India in **1927** with a supply of ammunition on the orders of Bhagat Singh, he was arrested and **sentenced to five years** in prison.
- Upon his release in **1931**, although he was under constant surveillance of the Punjab Police, he managed to escape to **Germany** and from there to **London** in **1934** where he worked as an engineer.
- All this while, Udham Singh was making plans to assassinate O'Dwyer.
- In **1939**, as the **Second World War** started out, he saw in the crisis an opportunity to overthrow the Raj.
- Reportedly, a few days before this party Udham Singh had been to the **India Office** where he saw a poster announcing a joint meeting of the **East India Association** and the **Royal Central Asian Society**.
 - The Royal Central Asian Society was an independent body formed in **1901** to promote a greater understanding of Central Asia and the surrounding regions.
 - Over the years, it had come to cover the entire region of Asia and by **1940** was regularly meeting for fortnightly meetings in the **Tudor Room at Caxton Hall**.
- O'Dwyer was listed as one of the speakers for the meeting on **March 13**.
- When Udham Singh saw the poster, he made up his mind to attend it and stage a protest with revolver shots.
- The meeting started at 3 PM and was attended by about 450 people.
- As the meeting ended, **Udham Singh** emerged from among the crowd, pulled out a revolver from his jacket pocket and fired **six shots** in rapid succession within **five seconds**.
- One of the shots hit O'Dwyer, who fell back soaked in blood and died soon after.
- The trial was held in **June 1940** and the presiding judge pronounced a death sentence to **Sardar Udham** after hearing both the sides.

- On **July 31, 1940**, Indian revolutionary Udham Singh was executed at **Pentonville Prison** in **London** for killing Michael O'Dwyer.

The Memorials of Udham Singh:

- In **1974**, Singh's remains were exhumed in the **UK** and repatriated to India.
- Singh's cremation was done in **Sunam** and on **August 2, 1974**, his ashes were divided among **seven urns** sent to – **Haridwar, Kiratpur Sahib, Rayza Sharif, the museum at Jallianwala Bagh, Sunam** and **two** for the library of **Shaheed Udham Singh Government College** in **Sunam**.
- Singh's one-room accommodation **ancestral house** in Sunam has been converted into a museum, now maintained by the archaeology department.
 - It houses literature on him and other revolutionaries, along with a few of his photos. However, it is closed on the weekends.
- Additionally, a memorial for Singh was built on **four acres** of land in Sunam for **2.61 crores**.
 - On **December 26, 2016**, marking Udham Singh's birthday, then Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal laid its **foundation stone**.
 - The **memorial** was inaugurated on **October 31, 2021**, by then **CM Captain Amarinder Singh**.
- The city has **4** of **Singh's statues** and a government college has also been named after him.
- The Sunam assembly constituency is also called **Sunam Udham Singh Wala**.
- Historians say that a few of Udham Singh's letters at the **Guru Nanak Dev University** in **Amritsar** should also be shifted to the memorial.
- There has also been a demand to bring back Udham Singh's pistol and his other belongings from London.

Karnataka's Job Quota



Recently: The southern Indian state of **Karnataka** has **paused** a bill that mandated quotas for locals in **private sector jobs** after pushback from tech companies.

- The state cabinet had earlier **approved the bill**, triggering protests from top industrialists and opposition leaders.
- **Chief Minister Siddaramaiah** said the bill would be reviewed in the next cabinet meeting before any decision was made.

About the Bill:

- The bill is named as **Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024**.
- The Bill made it a rule that **any factory, industry or establishment** must appoint local candidates **to 50% of its management positions and 70% of its non-management positions**.
- 'Local candidate' is defined as anyone born in **Karnataka**, **domiciled** for **at least 15 years in the State**, and who can **read, write and speak Kannada**.

- Candidates not possessing a secondary school certificate with **Kannada** as a language must pass a **Kannada proficiency test** prescribed by a **nodal agency**.
- Where qualified or suitable candidates are not available, the Bill gives **three years to the establishments to train and engage local candidates**.
- The establishments may also apply to the government for **relaxation of norms**, but the relaxation cannot be less than **25% for management category** and **50% for non-management category**.
- Earlier a tweet mentioned that the bill mandates private companies in Karnataka to reserve **100 per cent of 'C' and 'D' grade posts for local Kannadigas**.
- The post was deleted amid backlash from industry leaders and stakeholders.
- Soon, the **Karnataka Labor Minister Santosh S Lad** clarified that the reservation for locals is capped at **70 per cent in non – management roles** and **50 per cent in management roles**.
- The government has proposed a penalty between **Rs 10,000 to Rs 25,000** in case of violations of the provisions of the Bill.
- If the contravention continues after penalty has been imposed, then, with further penalty which may extend to **one hundred rupees for each day till the time contravention continues**.
- **Karnataka Industries Minister M.B. Patil** promises greater consultation before passing reservation Bill for locals.
- Ever since the **Sarojini Mahishi Commission in 1986** recommended reservation for Kannadigas in private sector jobs, the issue has remained an emotional chord among the Kannadigas.
- Though the previous BJP government tried to bring changes to the **Industrial Standing Order Rules in 2019**, it refrained from setting a quota.

Reason for Opposition?

- Business and industry responded with alarm on hearing of the features of the proposed Bill.

- As per property consultancy Colliers, in the **January-June period of 2024, foreign-origin companies** accounted for nearly 80% of the **Grade A office space demand in Bengaluru.**
- According to Nasscom, Karnataka accounts for a quarter of the country's digital talent and is home to over **11,000 startups and 30% of the total global capability centres in India.**
- The diversity Bengaluru offers in terms of talent is a significant pull factor for GCCs setting up shop in the city, experts said.
- Today, Bengaluru dominates India's commercial real estate market with over **223 million square feet of office stock.**
- At the current pace, the IT capital is expected to continue its lead with **330-340 million square feet of office stock** by the year **2030**, according to a report by the Confederation of Indian Industry and CBRE.
- **About 80%** of the construction workers come from outside the state, primarily from regions like **Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar.**
- About **30-40% of the tenants in East Bengaluru** are those who come from other states and have stayed in Karnataka **for less than 15 years.**
- Many expressed concern over the impact of such measures on Karnataka's leading position in technology and described it as regressive and short-sighted.

Other such Statutes:

- **Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Jharkhand** are among the States that have tried to bring in legislation to mandate reservation for domiciles or local residents in the government or private sector.
- Earlier, in November **2019**, the **Andhra Pradesh Assembly** had passed The **Andhra Pradesh Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries/Factories Bill, 2019.**
 - It reserves **three-fourths (75%)** of jobs for local candidates within three years of the commencement of the Act.
 - It also gave a three-year period for training and engaging local candidates, if suitable candidates were not available.
 - The Act has been challenged in the Andhra Pradesh High Court, but the government itself has not been zealously implementing its provisions so far.

- **The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020**, was struck down by the **Punjab and Haryana High Court in 2020**, and the matter is now before the Supreme Court.
 - Haryana provided for **75% reservation in the private sector** for jobs that entailed a salary of up to **₹30,000** a month.
 - It also came with a sunset clause that said it would lapse after **10 years**.
 - The court held that the law violates fundamental rights and that it is beyond the State Assembly's purview to legislate on the issue.
- The **Jharkhand** Definition of Local Persons and for Extending the Consequential Social, Cultural and Other Benefits to such **Local Persons Bill was passed in 2022**.
- Jharkhand Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan returned the Bill with comments to the effect that providing for **100% reservation for locals in Class III and Class IV employment opportunities** may be unconstitutional.
- The Hemant Soren government, however, got it re-enacted in the Assembly in **December 2023**.

Constitutional articles regarding the matter:

- **Article 14** provides **right to equality** for every citizen.
- **Article 15** prescribes that the state "shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, **place of birth** or any of them."
- **Article 16** guarantees the absence of birthplace-based discrimination in **public employment**. It further provides that there has to be equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.
- Further, **Article 16(3)** allows Parliament to make any law prescribing a **requirement as to residence within a State or Union Territory** prior to employment or appointment to a **public office** in that State or Union Territory.
 - This is not the same as place of birth but only a certain length of residence during or before the employment.
- Another constitutional issue is the effect local quotas have on **the freedom of movement of citizens throughout the territory of India**, guaranteed by **Article 19(1)(d)**.
- **Article 19 (1)** provides **freedom to reside and settle** in any part of the territory of India.

- **Article 19(g)** provides freedom to recognize any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.
- **Article 35(a)** says **Parliament alone**, and not any State legislature, will have the power to enact such a law as to a **residential requirement**.
- **Article 371 of the Constitution** provides special concessions to several states, allowing relaxed rules for recruitment.
 - However, several court judgements have highlighted that the remit of Article 16 is for public employment.
- In fact, the Constitution has no manifest provision which allows states to make laws mandating reservation in the private sector.

What does the court say?

- Court rulings on domicile quota have largely involved admissions, elevated criteria in marking, and free structures but not employment, let alone private employment.
- One of the early cases — **DP Joshi vs The State Of Madhya Bharat — in 1955**, dealt with a fee exemption for students of **Madhya Bharat**.
- While the court quashed the rule, it did not go into the larger “question as to the existence or admissibility of the concept of regional domicile as distinguished from Indian domicile.”
- In the 1970s, **Andhra Pradesh** brought in a law allowing **domicile quota for jobs** in the **Telangana sector** to curb the demand for a separate state.
- The Supreme Court struck down this law as **unconstitutional**.
- Even in the handful of cases before the SC, it has observed that domicile quotas foster “narrow parochial loyalties fostered by interested parties.”
- In a **1984 decision, Dr. Pradeep Jain vs Union Of India**, the SC said that “when the Constitution came into operation, we took the spirit of nationhood for granted and paid little attention to nourish it, unmindful of the fact that it was a hard-won concept.
- We allowed ‘sons of the soil’ demands to develop claiming special treatment on the basis of residence in the concerned State, because recognizing and conceding such demands had a populist appeal.”

- In 1995, the SC struck down an **Andhra Pradesh law that allowed an extra 5% weightage in marks** for candidates whose medium of instruction was **Telugu**.
- In 2019, the AP government passed a law similar to the Karnataka Bill.
- When challenged in court in 2020, the AP High Court made a prima facie observation that the move “might be unconstitutional”. The case is yet to be decided on its merits.

Sub- categorization of SCs and STs



Recently: In a landmark judgement, a **seven-judge Bench** of the Supreme Court on **August 1** reframed how the **Scheduled Castes (SC)** and **Scheduled Tribes (ST)** quota may operate — for the very first time since reservations were introduced in the Constitution in **1950**.

- In a **6:1 majority ruling**, the SC held that **sub-classification within the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) categories** is permissible to extend the benefit of affirmative action.
- This **seven-judge Bench** was headed by **Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud**.

- The court also held that “historical and empirical evidence indicates that Scheduled castes are not a homogenous class.”

What is sub categorization of SC and ST?

- Subcategorization involves **breaking down a broad category** into more detailed and specific subcategories based on particular criteria or traits.
- In the context of SC and ST in India, subcategorization might include additional classifications within the group based on aspects like **socioeconomic status or historical disadvantages**.
- The grounds for sub-classification is that a group from the larger group faces more discrimination.
- Subcategorization allows for more tailored assistance and resources, addressing the unique needs of different subgroups within the SC category.
- It can lead to more effective policies by recognizing varying levels of socioeconomic challenges and addressing them more precisely.
- It ensures that the most disadvantaged within the SC community receive adequate support, improving overall representation and equity within the group.

History:

- For the first time, in **1975**, the **Punjab** government issued a notification to divide its **25% SC reservation into two categories**.
 - The first category, seats were reserved solely for the **Balmiki and Mazhabi Sikh communities**, which were and continue to be considered two of the most economically and educationally backward communities in the state.
 - Under the policy, they were to be given first preference for reservation in education and public employment.
 - The second category consisted of the rest of **the SC communities**.
- While the notification remained in force for nearly **30 years**, it ran into legal hurdles in **2004**.

- In ***E.V. Chinnaiah v. State of Andhra Pradesh, 2004***, the Supreme Court struck down the **Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Act, 2000** for being violative of the **right to equality**.
 - The law contained an expansive list of Scheduled Caste communities in the state and the quota of reservation benefits provided to each of them.
 - The court held that the sub-classification would violate the right to equality by treating communities within the category differently, and the SC list must be treated as a single, homogenous group.
- The case emphasized that the SC list should be treated as a single, homogeneous group and that states cannot alter it through sub-classification.
- The court also drew attention to **Article 341 of the Constitution**, which gives the President the power to create a list of SC communities for the purposes of reservation.
 - The five-judge Bench held that this meant states did not have the power to “interfere” or “disturb” this list, including through sub-classification.
- Two years after the apex court ruling, **the Punjab & Haryana High Court** in ***Dr. Kishan Pal v. State of Punjab*** struck down the **1975 notification**.
- The Punjab government attempted to bring back the law by passing the **Punjab Scheduled Caste and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act, 2006**.
 - This Act reintroduced the first preference in reservations for the **Balmiki and Mazhabi** Sikh communities.
- In **2010**, the High Court once again struck down this provision. The Punjab government then moved the Supreme Court.
- In **2014**, the **Supreme Court** in ***Davinder Singh v State of Punjab***, referred the appeal to determine if the **2004 E V Chinnaiah decision** required reconsideration since it needed an inquiry into the interplay of several constitutional provisions.
- Interpretation of the Constitution requires a Bench of at least five judges of the Supreme Court.
- In **2020**, the Constitution Bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra held that the court’s 2004 decision against sub-categorisation required reconsideration.
- Crucially, since the E V Chinnaiah decision, the concept of a “**creamy layer**” (which exists in Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservations) has also trickled down to SC reservations.

- In the landmark **2018** ruling in ***Jarnail Singh v Lachhmi Narain Gupta***, the Supreme Court upheld the “**creamy layer**” within SCs.
- The idea puts an income ceiling on those eligible for reservations. It was applied to **promotions of SCs** for the first time in **2018**.

Arguments for Sub- Categorization:

- States have argued that the sub-classification is essentially an application of the **creamy layer formula**.
 - Instead of excluding the better-off castes from the Scheduled Caste list, the state is merely giving preferential treatment to the most disadvantaged castes.”
- The **Advocate General of Punjab, Gurminder Singh**, argued that E.V. Chinnaiah was mistaken when it held that states could not tamper with the classes that comprised the Presidential list under Article 341.
- Highlighting the language used in **Article 16(4) of the Constitution**, it was pointed out that the Article allows the State to provide reservations for backward classes who are not “adequately represented” in State services.
- As the phrase used is “**adequately**” and not “**equally**”, there is no obligation to provide the same opportunities to every community in the Presidential list.
- **Additional Advocate General of Punjab Shadan Farasat** pointed out that the recently introduced **Article 342A** on the Constitution made it clear that the Chinnaiah decision could no longer apply.
 - This provision specifically empowers States and Union Territories to maintain a list of **Socially and Economically Backward Classes** which may be different from the Presidential list.

What is article 341 to the constitution?

- The Constitution, while providing for special treatment of SCs and STs to achieve equality, does not specify the castes and tribes that are to be called Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- This power is left to the central executive — the **President**.
- As per **Article 341**, those castes notified by the **President** are called **SCs and STs**.
- **Article 341(2)** on the other hand allows **Parliament** to add or remove any caste, race, or tribe from the list of Scheduled Castes through a **law**.
- However, once a notification about this list is issued, it cannot be changed by any other notification.
- Simply stating, Article 341(2) allows Parliament to change this list. So, any change to the **SC list requires amending the Constitution**

The recent Supreme Court Ruling:

- The SC finally overruled a **2004 verdict by a five-judge Bench** in ***E.V. Chinnaiah v. State of Andhra Pradesh***.
- The basic error in EV Chinnaiah judgment is that it proceeded on the understanding that **Article 341** is the basis of reservation.
- The bench comprised Justices B R Gavai, Vikram Nath, Bela M Trivedi, Pankaj Mithal, Manoj Misra, and Satish Chandra Sharma.
 - **Justice Bela Trivedi** dissented from the majority ruling.
- The SC ruled that Sub-classification does neither violates the principle of equality enshrined under **Article 14 of the Constitution** nor does it violate **Article 341(2) of the Constitution**.
- There is nothing in **Articles 15 and 16** which prevents the State from sub-classifying a Caste. So, states can do that.
- However, the **seven-judge Bench** headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud underscored that this must be based on “**quantifiable and demonstrable data**” instead of political expediency.
- Underscoring that **Article 14 of the Constitution** casts an obligation on the State to ensure that the same law applies only to those who are “**similarly situated**”, the majority ruled that sub-classification within the SC/ST categories does not fall foul of the right to equality.

- Dismissing the petitioners' arguments, the judges highlighted that there is nothing in the Constitution that prevents States from making such **sub-classifications**.
 - **Article 341**, they noted, does not limit this power — it merely grants the President the authority to **notify certain castes and tribes as SCs and STs**.
- It was also pointed out that studies conducted by field experts reveal that the **SCs are not a "homogeneous class"**.
- The judges also assuaged concerns of potential political tinkering by clarifying that State governments are not entitled to earmark **100% reservation** for a sub-class to the exclusion of other castes in the President's List.
- It therefore, held that the subclassification of backward classes would be permissible provided the reserved seats are available for **backward classes** as well as more or **most backward classes**".
- The court relied on ***Indra Sawhney Etc v. Union of India (1992)*** decision.

About the 'creamy layer'?

- The concept of a creamy layer arose out of the landmark **Indra Sawhney ruling in 1992**.
- Based on the recommendation of the **Mandal Commission**, the **V P Singh government** on **August 13, 1990**, had notified **27% reservation** for **Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (OBC reservation)** in civil posts and services.
 - This was challenged in the Supreme Court by Indra Sawhney and others.
- On **November 16, 1992**, a **nine-judge Bench** headed by Justice B P **Jeevan Reddy**, upheld the **27% OBC reservation** subject to **exclusion of the creamy layer**, or the more socially, economically, and educationally advanced members among OBCs.
 - This was done in order to ensure that reservation benefits go to those who need it the most.
- The creamy layer is not the same as sub-classification or sub-categorisation.
 - The latter refers to community/caste wise breakdown of a reserved category (like SC) based on various **socio-economic or other criteria**.
 - Creamy layer, however, refers to a group of people within a certain caste/community who are better off than the rest based on certain criteria.

- The logic of determining the creamy layer was made by an expert committee headed by the retired **Justice Ram Nandan Prasad**, which was constituted following the Indra Sawhney judgement.
- The committee submitted its report on **March 10, 1993**, based on which, on September 8, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) listed six categories of people whose children would be considered to fall in the creamy layer. These are:
 - Constitutional/statutory post;
 - Group 'A' and group 'B' officers of central and state governments, employees of PSUs and statutory bodies, universities;
 - Colonel and above in armed forces and equivalent in paramilitary forces;
 - Professionals like doctors, lawyers, management consultants, engineers etc;
 - Property owners with agricultural holdings or vacant land and/or buildings; and
 - Income/wealth tax assessee.
- The union government constituted a committee headed by former **DoPT secretary B P Sharma in March 2019** to review this criteria. But no progress has been made in this regard.
- The creamy layer comprises **two broader categories** (besides persons holding constitutional post) —
 - People whose parents are/were in government service
 - Those whose parents work/worked in the private sector
- For the latter, the creamy layer determination is based on their parents' income, while for the former, the determination is based on rank.
- Originally, the income threshold was fixed at **Rs 1 lakh per annum**, with a provision for this figure to be revised every **three years**.
- However, since **2017**, when the threshold was updated to **Rs 8 lakh**, no further revision has taken place.
- In **2015**, the **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** had recommended raising the income threshold to **Rs 15 lakh**, however no action was taken in this regard.
- The recent apex court ruling leaves the final decision to states on whether to create a creamy layer exception for SCs and STs and if so, how to do it. They will likely have to constitute a committee on the lines of the **Justice R N Prasad Committee** for OBC reservations.

Punjab's Bill for removing Governor as the Chancellor



Recently: President Droupadi Murmu has refused to clear a **Punjab government Bill** seeking the removal of **Governor Banwarilal Purohit** as the **Chancellor of state-run universities**.

- The state government has now decided to seek legal option.
- The Bill, sent to the President in December, was recently returned to the Punjab Raj Bhavan.

What is Governor?

- **Article 153** of the Constitution says "There shall be a Governor for each State."
- **Article 155** says that the "Governor of a State shall be appointed by the **President** by warrant under his hand and seal".
- Under **Article 156**, "the Governor shall hold office during the **pleasure of the President**. But his normal term of office will be **five years**."
- If the President withdraws her pleasure before the completion of five years, the Governor has to step down.
- The President acts on the aid and advice of the Prime Minister and the Union Council of Ministers. As a result, the Governor is appointed and removed by the **central government**.
- Articles **157** and **158** lay down the qualifications of the Governor and the conditions of his office.

Qualifications of the Governor and the conditions of his office:

- The Governor must be a **citizen of India**.
- He should have completed the age of **35 years**.
- The Governor should **not be a member of Parliament or a state legislature**.
- He must not hold any other **office of profit**.

Governor as chancellor in public universities:

- State public universities are established through laws passed by **state legislatures**.
- In most laws the **Governor** has been designated as the **Chancellor of these universities**.
- The Chancellor functions as the head of **public universities**, and **appoints the Vice-Chancellor of the university**.
- Further, the Chancellor can declare invalid, any university proceeding which is not as per existing laws.
- In some states (such as Bihar, Gujarat, and Jharkhand), the Chancellor has the power to conduct inspections in the university.
- The Chancellor also presides over the convocation of the university, and confirms proposals for conferring honorary degrees.
- This is different in **Telangana**, where the **Chancellor is appointed by the state government**.

Does the Governor have discretion in his capacity as Chancellor?

- In **1997**, the SC held that the Governor was not bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, while discharging duties of a separate **statutory office (such as the Chancellor)**.
- The **Sarkaria and Punchhi Commission** also dealt with the role of the Governor in educational institutions.
- Both Commissions concurred that while discharging statutory functions, the Governor is not legally bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.

UGC's role:

- Education comes under the **Concurrent List**, but **entry 66** of the **Union List** — “coordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions” — gives the **Centre substantial authority** over higher education.
- The UGC plays that standard-setting role, even in the case of appointments in universities and colleges.
- According to the **UGC Regulations, 2018**, the “Visitor/Chancellor” — mostly the Governor in states — shall **appoint the VC** out of the panel of names recommended by search-cum-selection committees.
- Higher educational institutions, particularly those that get UGC funds, are mandated to follow its regulations.
- These are usually followed without friction in the case of central universities, but are sometimes resisted by the states in the case of state universities.

The process of granting assent to a bill:

- **Article 200** of the Constitution covers the options before the **Governor**.
- When a Bill passed by both Houses of the Legislature is presented to him, it outlines the governor's role and responsibilities.
- The first proviso to the Article states that the Governor has **two options**.
 - He could either declare his assent to the Bill or withhold the assent if it is not a Money Bill.
 - Alternatively, he can reserve the law for the consideration of the President.
- He can reserve if he thinks the Bill derogates from or endangers the power of judicial review of the High Court. In withholding case, he should return the Bill **"as soon as possible"** with a message.
- The message should request the Legislative Assembly to reconsider the Bill or specific provisions and suggest amendments.
- The Assembly will reconsider and pass the Bill. In this case, the Governor should not withhold assent.
- Ultimately, the constitutional head of the State follows the decision of the elected representatives of the people.
- Governors did have a discretion to return Bills before the first proviso in the draft **Article 175 (now Article 200)**.
 - This was amended by the **Constituent Assembly in 1949**.
 - Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, while introducing the amended proviso, said “in a responsible government there can be no room for the Governor acting on discretion”.

- **Article 163** makes it clear the Governor is not expected to act independently.
- The Supreme Court, in **Shamsher Singh case (1974)** made a significant ruling regarding the role of the Governor.
 - The Governor, as the formal head of the State, is expected to exercise all the powers and functions granted to them by or under the Constitution.
 - In most cases, these powers and functions are to be executed on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.
 - However, there are specific spheres defined by the Constitution where the Governor is mandated to exercise their functions independently, based on their discretion.
 - The assent or return of the Bill does not involve the discretion of **individuals** occupying the Governor's post.

What happened in Punjab?

- The SC gave the decision on **November 10** last year, while hearing a petition by the **AAP government**, contending Purohit had been withholding his approval to Bills passed by the state Assembly.
 - "The Governor cannot be at liberty to keep the Bill pending indefinitely without taking any action whatsoever."
- The bench comprised **CJI DY Chandrachud, Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra** gave a **27-page ruling**.
- Following a November 10 Supreme Court ruling that "governors cannot sit on state Bills", Purohit had reserved **three pending Bills** —
 - The Punjab Universities Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2023
 - The Sikh Gurudwaras (Amendment) Bill, 2023
 - The Punjab Police (Amendment) Bill, 2023 — for the President's consideration.
- The **Punjab Universities Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2023** was for replacing the Governor with the Chief Minister as the Chancellor of state-run universities and it was refused by the president.
- The governor and **Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann** had been at loggerheads over various issues including the appointment of vice chancellor of **Ludhiana-based Punjab Agricultural University**.

- Purohit sent the three Bills to the President in December last year, a month after the SC ruling. The other two Bills are still with the President.
- **The Sikh Gurdwaras (Amendment) Bill, 2023** was aimed at ensuring a free-to-air telecast of 'Gurbani' from the Golden Temple in Amritsar.
- While the **Punjab Police (Amendment) Bill, 2023** was to pave the way to bring about an independent mechanism for selection and appointment of suitable persons to the director general of police post.

Other states:

- A battery of non-BJP ruled States have approached the Supreme Court accusing their Governors of using a non-existent discretion to unreasonably **delay** the passing of crucial Bills into law.
- Recently, some states have taken steps to reduce the oversight of the Governor in state public universities.
- The **West Bengal University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2022** designates the **Chief Minister of West Bengal** as the Chancellor of the **31 public universities in the state**.
 - Further, the **Chief Minister (instead of the Governor)** will be the head of these universities, and preside over the meetings of university bodies (such as Court/Senate).
- In **April 2024**, the Supreme Court seeks clarification from the West Bengal Governor regarding the **withholding of assent** to the WB Universities. As of now, it is still a bill.
- In **April 2022**, the **Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly** passed **two Bills**, to transfer the power of appointing the Vice-Chancellor (in public universities) from the Governor, to the state government.
- In **2021**, **Maharashtra** amended **Maharashtra Public Universities Act, 2016** and the process to appoint the Vice Chancellor of state public universities.
- Prior to the amendment, a **Search Committee forwarded a panel of at least five names to the Chancellor (who is the Governor)**.

- The Chancellor could then appoint one of the persons from the suggested panel as Vice-Chancellor, or ask for a fresh panel of names to be recommended.
- The 2021 amendment mandated the Search Committee to first forward the panel of names to the state government, which would recommend a panel of **two names (from the original panel)** to the Chancellor.
- The Chancellor must appoint **one of the two names** from the panel as Vice-Chancellor **within thirty days**.
- As per the amendment, the Chancellor has no option of asking for a fresh panel of names to be recommended.

125th Constitutional Amendment Bill



Source- <https://mizothuziak.blogspot.com/2021/04/constitution-125th-amendment-bill-2019.html>

Recently: Chief Executive Magistrates (CEMs) from 10 Autonomous District Councils met with the Union Home Minister to demand the passing of the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill.

- The Union government will form a committee to resolve the issues that have been holding up the **Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019**.
- The committee will be headed by **Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai**.

About the Sixth Schedule:

- The Sixth Schedule under **Article 244** provides for the formation of **autonomous administrative divisions**.
- The Sixth Schedule states that tribal areas in certain regions of certain states will be '**autonomous districts**', each consisting of a **District Council**.
- Further, if multiple tribes are present, the Governor may divide an autonomous district into **autonomous regions**, each consisting of a **Regional Council**.
- In simple terms, Inclusion under this allows to create **Autonomous District councils** and **Autonomous Regional Councils (ADCs and ARCs)**.
- ADCs and ARCs are elected bodies that have jurisdiction – with limited executive, legislative and financial powers – over specific tribal-majority areas.
- Their powers allows them to make laws on subjects such as **forest management, agriculture, administration of villages and towns, inheritance, marriage, divorce and social customs**.
- The ADCs and ARCs may also constitute courts to decide disputes between parties from **Scheduled Tribes**.
- Additionally, they can appoint officers to oversee the administration of the laws they enact.
- The **Governor of the state** can empower ADCs and ARCs to try cases **punishable by death** or over **five years of imprisonment** under the **country's criminal and civil laws**.
- The governor has the authority to organise, reorganise, and modify autonomous districts, including their areas and boundaries.
- Currently, **ten ADCs** exist in the tribal areas of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram**.
 - There are **three each in Assam, Meghalaya, and Mizoram**, and **one in Tripura**.

- Their objective is to ensure development in these areas and boost self-government by tribal communities. Their purpose is to protect cultural identities and preservation of natural resources of the tribal people.
- ADCs have up to **30 members** with a term of **five years**. **Four of the members** are nominated by the **governor** and the rest are elected.
- The **Bodoland Territorial Council** in **Assam** is an exception with more than **40 members** and the right to make laws on **39 issues**.
- In **September 2019**, the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** also recommended the inclusion of **Ladakh** under the Sixth Schedule after the state's demand for it.

About the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill:

- The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in **Rajya Sabha** by the Minister of Home Affairs, **Mr. Rajnath Singh** on **February 6, 2019**.
- The Bill amends provisions related to the **Finance Commission** and the **Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution.
- The Bill amends this to provide for **Village and Municipal Councils** in addition to the **District and Regional Councils**.
 - **Village Councils** will be established for **villages or groups of villages in rural areas**, and **Municipal Councils** will be established in **urban areas of each district**.
- Further, the **District Councils** may make laws on various issues, including:
 - Number of Village and Municipal Councils to be formed, and their composition.
 - Delimitation of constituencies for election to the Village and Municipal Councils.
 - Powers and functions of Village and Municipal Councils.
- Further, the Bill states that the **Governor** may make rules for **devolution of powers** and **responsibilities** to the **Village and Municipal Councils**. Such rules may be framed in relation to:
 - Preparation of plans for economic development,
 - Implementation of land reforms,
 - Urban and town planning, and
 - Regulation of land-use, among other functions.

- The Bill provides the appointment of a different **Finance Commission for these states**, to review the financial position of District, Village, and Municipal Councils. The Commission will make recommendations regarding:
 - **Distribution of taxes** between states and District Councils,
 - **Grants-in-aid** to District, Village, and Municipal Councils from the Consolidated Fund of the state,
 - Measures to improve the financial position of District, Village, and Municipal Councils.
- Under the Constitution, the functions of the Finance Commission include making **recommendations to the President** on:
 - Distribution of taxes between the **Union and states**
 - The provision of grants-in-aid to states.
- The Bill also directs the Commission to recommend ways to increase the **Consolidated Fund of a state** to provide resources to District Councils, Village Councils, and Municipal Councils in the **four Sixth Schedule states**.
- The Bill states that all elections to the District Councils, Regional Councils, Village Councils, and Municipal Councils will be conducted by the **State Election Commission** appointed by the **Governor**.
- The Sixth Schedule provides that the Governor may make rules for the constitution of District and Regional Councils, including **qualifications** for being elected as members of these councils.
 - The Bill adds that the Governor may make rules for the disqualification of such members on the **grounds of defection**.
- After being presented in the Rajya Sabha, The Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill of 2019 was sent to the **Departmental-Related Standing Committee on Home Affairs** for further examination.
- In its report released in **2020**, the committee highlighted multiple issues and concerns regarding the Bill.
- As a result of these concerns, the Bill has been stalled and remains pending for further discussion and action.

Why is there a push for the bill?

- The united push by **ten ADCs** for expediting the passing of the 125th amendment has revived the issue of strengthening the tribal autonomous councils of the northeast region.
- The proposed amendment seeks to bring the ADCs in the Northeast region on par with the **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI)** and strengthen the ADCs at the grassroots level.

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah inviting the delegation of Chief Executive Members of ADCs for discussion has brightened hopes for fast tracking the process.
- **Two Memoranda of Settlement** were signed between the **Government of India, State Government of Assam** and **United People's Democratic Solidarity (2011)** and **Dima Halam Daogah (2012)**.
- Another Memoranda of Settlement was signed between the Government of **India, State Government of Meghalaya** and **Achik National Volunteer's Council (2014)**.
- All these Memoranda of Settlement aim at enhancing autonomy of the existing Autonomous Councils, renaming the Councils and increasing the number of seats in the concerned Councils.

UP Anti – Conversion Law



Recently: **Uttar Pradesh Assembly** passed an amendment bill enhancing **punishment** under **Uttar Pradesh's anti-conversion law**.

- **Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Khanna** introduced the **Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2024** in the House.
- **Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath** had taken this initiative with the intention of curbing '**love jihad**', a term coined by some Hindu outfits for alleged forcible conversion.

What is Uttar Pradesh's Anti-Conversion law?

- An ordinance was issued for curbing forced conversion in **November 2020**.
- Later, after the bill was passed by both houses of the Uttar Pradesh Legislature, the **Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021** came into force.
- **Section 3(1)** of the UP anti-conversion law prohibits the religious conversion of a person by the use of **"misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means"**.
 - Notably, the explanation under this section states that "conversion by solemnization of marriage or relationship in the nature of marriage" would also qualify as illegal conversion.
- Also, **Section 4** of the law states that **"Any aggrieved person" or their relatives** can lodge an FIR for illegal conversion.
- Those found guilty under **Section 3** can be punished as per **Section 5** of the anti-conversion law.
- The standard punishment is **1-5 years imprisonment**, and a fine of at least **Rs. 15,000**.
- If the **victim is a woman**, a **minor** or a **person belonging to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe**, the punishment increases to **2-10 years** with a fine of at least **Rs. 25,000**.
- In cases of **mass conversion**, the punishment becomes **3-10 years**, and a fine of at least **Rs. 50,000**.
- For those who have already been once convicted of an offence under this law, up to **double** the relevant punishment may be provided imposed.
- On the subject of conversion by marriage, **Section 6** of the law also bars "Any marriage done for the sole purpose of unlawful conversion" and states that such marriages shall be declared **"void"**.

Procedure for valid conversion:

- The process for valid conversion is provided under **Sections 8 & 9** of the anti-conversion law.
- This requires the person converting to submit **two declarations** to the **District Magistrate**.
- The first **at least 60 days before the conversion** takes place, and the second a **maximum of 60 days after the conversion**.

- The first declaration must contain a statement that the individual wishes to convert their religion without **any force, coercion, undue influence, or allurement**.
- Further, the person conducting the conversion ceremony — the “**religious converter**” — must inform the **District Magistrate one month** in advance regarding where the ceremony will take place.
- The Magistrate will then ensure that a **police enquiry** is conducted to determine the “real intention” of the religious conversion.
- The second declaration will include details such as **date of birth, permanent address, father/husbands name, prior religion, religion** to which the individual is converting, and the details of the conversion ceremony.
- After the second declaration is submitted, the District Magistrate will post a copy of it to the notice board, for the public to record objections to the conversion, if any.
- The law also reverses the standard burden of proof in criminal cases.
- Under **Section 12**, the “person who has caused the conversion” must prove that it was not done on the grounds enumerated under **Section 3(1)**.

The amendment:

- The Amendment was introduced by the BJP government in UP with the stated aim of protecting certain groups of people, including **minors, people with disabilities, women, and persons belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST)** communities.
- It says that the penal provisions under the 2021 Act were “not sufficient to prevent and control religious conversion and mass conversion” of persons belonging to these groups.
- The Amendment is also set to resolve certain difficulties that have arisen in the past pertaining to **Section 4 of the 2021 Act** which allowed “Any aggrieved person, **his/her parents, brother, sister, or any other person who is related to him/her by blood, marriage or adoption**” to file an FIR for unlawful conversion with the police.
 - The Allahabad High Court, on at least two occasions in **2023**, has held that the phrase “**any aggrieved person**” does not mean that anyone can file an FIR for unlawful conversion.

- In September 2023, in the case of ***Jose Papachen vs. State of Uttar Pradesh***, the court held that this phrase is “qualified” and “completely whittled down” by the categories that follow it (parents, brother, sister, etc).
- The court gave a similar analysis in a **February 2023** order in the **Fatehpur Mass Conversion case**.

What are the changes does the Amendment introduce?

- The Amendment removes restrictions on who can file an **FIR**, proposes **stringent bail conditions** similar to those for accused persons in **terrorism and money laundering cases**, and increases the **punishment for unlawful conversion**.
- The Amendment changes the wording of **Section 4** to address the aforementioned “difficulties”.
- The revised provision states that “**any person**” can file an FIR related to violation of the **2021 Act** in the manner provided under the new governing criminal procedure, **the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS)**.
 - Under **Section 173 of the BNSS**, which deals with the registration of an FIR, information regarding a crime can be given to the officer in charge of a police station “irrespective of the area where the offence is committed”.
- This means that any individual can approach any police station to file an FIR for alleged crimes under the Act.

Strict bail conditions:

- For those accused under **Section 3**, the Amendment introduces stringent bail conditions that are akin to the bail conditions under the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967**.
- Under the new **Section 7**, an accused cannot be released on bail unless two conditions have been met.
 - First, the **public prosecutor** (the advocate representing the state government prosecuting the crime) must be given the opportunity to oppose the bail application.
 - Second, the court must be satisfied that there are “reasonable grounds for believing that he is not guilty of such an offence and that no offence can be committed by him while on bail”.
- These cases would not be heard by any court below the sessions court. Bill has also made the crime **non-bailable**.

Enhancement of punishments:

- Apart from increasing the years of imprisonment under **Section 5 of the Act**, the Amendment also adds **two new categories of offences**.
 - First, if the accused has **received money** from “foreign or illegal institutions” in connection with unlawful conversion, they may be punished with **7-14 years imprisonment** and **a fine of at least Rs. 10,00,000**.
 - Second, if the accused causes any person to “fear of his life or property, assaults or uses force, promises or instigates marriage, conspires or induced any minor, woman or person to traffics or otherwise sells them”, they shall be punished with a **minimum 20 years imprisonment which can be extended to life imprisonment**.
- With the inclusion of “**promises or instigates marriage**” in the category of offences that carries a prison sentence **of 20 years to life**, the Amendment greatly enhances the punishment for unlawful conversion through marriage from a **maximum of the previous maximum of 10 years**.

Other states with Anti-conversion laws:

- Over the years, several states enacted “Freedom of Religion” legislation to restrict religious conversions carried out by force, inducements or fraud.
- **Twelve states in India** have legislation criminalizing religious conversions in various circumstances.
- The states are- Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh.
- **Odisha** was the first State to enact a law in **1967** restricting religious conversions, prohibiting forceful conversions and fraudulent means.

Failed attempts:

- Following independence, the **Indian Parliament** introduced **anti-conversion bills** but none of them were enacted.
- First, the **Indian Conversion (Regulation and Registration) Bill** was introduced in **1954**, which sought to enforce “licensing of missionaries and the registration of conversion with government officials”.

- The bill failed as it could not gather majority support in the Lok Sabha.
- This was followed by the introduction of **the Backward Communities (Religious Protection) Bill in 1960**.
 - It aimed at "checking conversion of Hindus to 'non-Indian religions' which, as per the definition in the Bill, included Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism".
- After a few years, the **Freedom of Religion Bill** was introduced in the Parliament in **1979**. It sought "official curbs on inter-religious conversion."
- However, both bills were not passed by the Parliament as they could not gather political support.
- In **2015**, the law ministry had suggested that a law against forced and fraudulent conversions could not be created at the national level as law and order is a state subject under the Indian Constitution.
- However, state governments have the authority to enact such laws.

Around the world:

- In **Algeria**, the constitution declares **that Islam is the state religion**. It introduced **religious conversion law in 2006**.
- According to the law, an attempt to convert a **Muslim** will be penalised with **five years** in prison and a fine of **\$70 to \$140**.
- **Bhutan** introduced an **anti-conversion clause in 2011** which imposes an imprisonment of **three years**.
- The Constitution of the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** states that it is illegal to convert from **Islam** and leaving the **Islamic faith is a crime punishable by death**.

25th Anniversary of Kargil War



Recently: On **26th July 2024**, PM Modi paid tribute to the heroes of the **Kargil War** on the occasion of the **25th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas** in **Drass, Kargil, Ladakh**.

- He reminded that in a few days from now on **5th of August**, the abrogation of **Article 370** will complete **5 years**.
- After the event, Mr. Modi carried out the first blast at the **Shinkun La Tunnel Project** in **Ladakh virtually**.
 - The **Shinkun La Tunnel Project** consists of a **4.1 km long Twin-Tube tunnel** which will be constructed at an altitude of around **15,800 feet on the Nimu – Padum – Darcha Road**.
- Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh **Brig (Dr) B D Sharma**, Union Minister of State for Defence **Sanjay Seth**, Chief of Defence Staff **Gen Anil Chauhan**, and the Army Chiefs of the three-armed forces attended the event.

The Battlefield of Kargil:

- **Kargil** is located at the **northern edge** of the **Line of Control (LoC)**, some **200 km northeast of Srinagar** and **230 km west of Leh**.

- Kargil town lies at an **altitude of 2,676 m (8,780 ft)**, Dras lies at a height of **3,300 m (10,800 ft)**.
- The surrounding peaks rise to altitudes of **4,800 m (16,000 ft) to 5,500 m (18,000 ft)**.
 - These extreme heights cause severe physiological effects on the one's body — and equipment.
- Challenge number one is the **crippling cold**. The battlefield in Kargil lay in a cold desert where winter temperatures dropped to as low as **-30 degrees Celsius**.
- The cold impacts both the men and the machines – guns jams while their operators expend great amounts of energy to keep the body warm.
- Problem number two is the **thin air, and reduced oxygen levels**.
 - This leads to a wide range of physiological effects among soldiers including **acute mountain sickness (AMS)**, which can cause headaches, nausea, appetite loss, muscular weakness, and general fatigue.
- In addition to sapping the strength of the soldiers, low air pressure impacts the performance of both weapons and aircraft.
- Lastly, the terrain imposes significant restrictions on soldiers.
- It reduces **mobility, provides cover to the enemy, and limits the scope of operations**.
- During the Kargil War, the Indian Army was at a particular disadvantage with the enemy occupying high positions overlooking the positions held by Indians.

What led to Kargil War?

- In **August 1947**, with the end of British rule, **two new nations, India and Pakistan** were born in the Indian subcontinent.
- The bone of contention between India and Pakistan are the attempts by Pakistan to annex the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir by any means.
 - Ever since, the two nations have been involved in a violent border dispute.
- In **1966**, after the wars of **1947-48** and **1965**, the **Tashkent Agreement** was signed by the Indian Prime Minister **Lal Bahadur Shastri** and Pakistan's President **Gen Ayub Khan**.

- According to the agreement, the parties agreed to **withdraw all armed forces to positions held before 5 August 1965.**
- They also agreed to restore diplomatic relations and discuss economic, refugee, and other questions.
- After a brief relief in **1971**, the influx of refugees into Indian territory during East Pakistan's (now **Bangladesh**) struggle for freedom, forced India to intervene.
 - This intervention resulted in an **all-out war between India and Pakistan.**
- The war started on **3 December 1971** and lasted for **14 days**. The outcome of the war was the formation of a new nation, **Bangladesh.**
- In July **1972**, in order to resolve the border tension and prevent further violence, Indian PM **Mrs Indira Gandhi** and Pakistan's Prime Minister **Mr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto** signed the **Shimla Agreement.**
 - As per the agreement, Indian and Pakistani forces were to be withdrawn to their respective sides of the border.
- In Jammu and Kashmir, **the Line of Control (LoC) of 740km** resulting from the **cease-fire** was formally established.
- Both states agreed to not alter the LoC unilaterally, irrespective of **mutual differences and legal interpretations.**
- Further, both India and Pakistan agreed to refrain from the use of military power and withdraw their forces along the LoC.
- In **May 1998**, both India and Pakistan declared themselves as nuclear powers, escalating the security concerns of both the nations.
- The possibility of a nuclear exchange between the two countries was reduced by signing of the **Lahore Declaration in 1999.**
- It was signed by the Prime Minister of India, **Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee** and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, **Muhammad Nawaz Sharif** in **Lahore, Pakistan** on **20-21 February 1999.**
- The Lahore Declaration reaffirmed India and Pakistan's commitment to peaceful resolution of their long-standing border dispute over the state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Each side pledged to take immediate steps to reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons.
- They also agreed to discuss concepts and doctrines to elaborate measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields, aimed at preventing conflict.
- But soon the clauses of Shimla Agreement and commitments to peaceful conflict resolution were breached by Pakistan Army which resulted the 1999 war.

The Kargil war:

- The Kargil War, also known as the Kargil conflict, was fought between **India and Pakistan from May to July 1999** in the Kargil district.
- As stated, to maintain peace and stability and resolve tension, they called for a bilateral peaceful settlement of the Kashmir issue by signing the **Lahore Declaration in February 1999**.
- However, the Pakistani soldiers and militants infiltrated the Indian side of the **Line of Control (LoC)** in the **northern Kargil district of the then Jammu and Kashmir**.
- The conflict was triggered when infiltrators from Pakistan crossed the LoC and occupied high positions in what is now Ladakh's Kargil district.
- Initially thought to be jihadists when reported to the Indian Army on **May 3, 1999**, the infiltrators' true nature as part of a larger Pakistani state-led invasion became clear over the following weeks.
- This "**Operation Badr**" (code-name of Pakistan) is thought to be the brain-child of **General Pervez Musharraf**, then chief of the Pakistan Army.
- Troops stationed across the Line of Control (LOC) captured fortified positions with a commanding view of **NH 1A in the Drass and Batalik Sectors of Kargil, Ladakh**.
- The three-month conflict was fought along a **170km mountain frontier**, stretching from **Mashkoh Valley to Turtuk** in the **Kargil sector**.
- Between **mid-May and July**, the Indian forces slowly recaptured critical positions from the Pakistanis, in the face of heavy casualties.
- As per official figures, Indian casualties at the end of the War stood at 527 dead, 1,363 wounded and 1 PoW (Fl Lt K Nachiketa, whose MiG-27 was shot down during a strike operation).
- The Kargil War officially ended **25 years ago, on July 26, 1999** with the success of **Operation Vijay** by Indian Army.
 - The Kargil Vijay Diwas, observed annually on this day, commemorates **India's victory against Pakistan**.
- The Indian Air Force also executed "**Operation Safed Sagar**" to aid ground operations.
- This high-altitude mission utilized aircraft such as the **MiG-21s, MiG-23s, MiG-27s, Mirage 2000, and Jaguars**.

- The Indian Navy's "**Operation Talwar**" focused on maintaining maritime security and deterrence. The Navy's preparedness conveyed a powerful warning to Pakistan regarding possible reactions to additional aggression.

Foreign countries that helped India:

- In the moment of chaos, India desperately needed an ally, that's when it turned to **Israel**, a nation with technology and experience in border control and counterterrorism.
- During the war, **Israel** became one of the few nations that offered **direct assistance to India** by providing it with mortars and ammunition.
- India even received **laser-guided missiles** for its fighter jets and surveillance drones.
- Interestingly, the **US openly favoured India**, requesting Pakistan's withdrawal from occupied regions and threatening action for **Islamabad's belligerence**.
- American foreign policy changed as a result of this daring stance, paving the way for greater engagement with **New Delhi**. India also got direct support from **Russia** as well.

Reforms after the Kargil War:

- Just three days after the conclusion of the Kargil War, India established the **Kargil Review Committee (KRC)** on **July 29, 1999**, under the leadership of **K. Subrahmanyam**.
 - The Committee was tasked with examining the sequence of events and providing recommendations for future improvements.
- It identified several shortcomings in intelligence gathering, operational strategies, and the sharing of procedural data.
- Following the formation of the KRC, a Group of Ministers along with task forces and other committees was also set up to follow up on the recommendation of KRC.
 - These included the **Standing Committee on Defence in 2007**, the **Naresh Chandra Task Force in 2011**, and the **Ravindra Gupta Task Force in 2012**.

- Since the Kargil War, the Indian military has undergone significant modernization to address the identified gaps and improve its operational capabilities.
- In **2019**, the position of **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** was established to foster "jointness" among the Army, Navy, and Air Force.
 - The CDS serves as the primary military advisor to the government and is responsible for overseeing the integration of the three services.
- Additionally, the creation of the **Andaman and Nicobar Command** marked the establishment of a **tri-service command**, serving as a prototype for future theatre commands by integrating resources from all three branches of the military.
- The creation of the **Department of Military Affairs (DMA)** under the CDS has streamlined decision-making processes and improved resource management.
- The National Security Strategy was also revisited, focusing on multi-domain operations to address both traditional and non-traditional threats.
- The construction of roads, bridges, and forward bases along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) and Line of Control (LoC)** has improved logistical support and troop mobility in remote and difficult terrains.

Commemoration of Kargil war:

- **The Kargil War Memorial** in **Dras** was established by the Indian Army in **2000** to honor the victory of Operation Vijay in 1999, was renovated in **2014**.
- It is also referred to as the "**Dras War Memorial**" due to its location in Dras, within the Kargil district of Jammu and Kashmir.
- **The National War Memorial**, inaugurated in **2019**, pays tribute to soldiers who gave their lives in various conflicts and missions.

International Current Affairs

World's first Carbon Fibre High Speed Train



Recently: China has unveiled the first **carbon fiber-only** passenger train in history which is noticeably lighter than conventional trains and will help cut pollution tremendously.

- It is named as **CETROVO 1.0** or the **Carbon Star Rapid Transit** and is developed by **Qingdao Sifang Rolling Stock Co** – a subsidiary of **China Railway Construction Corporation**.
- **Liu Jinzhu** is the Chief designer of the train and the train was unveiled in **Shandong province's Qingdao**.

Features of the train:

- The train features a carbon fiber composite body and frame, which reduces the weight of the **car body and bogie frame** by **25 percent** and **50 percent**, respectively.

- This makes the overall vehicle weight **11 percent lighter** compared with conventional trains.
- This in turn leads to less energy being consumed to power the train and less wear on the tracks.
- A **seven per cent** decrease in energy consumption is equivalent to **130 tonnes** of carbon dioxide being reduced.
- Over **100 acres** of trees would need to be planted to reduce an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide.
- The train has a top speed of **140 kilometres per hour (87 miles/hour)** which is much faster than the average speed of **80 kilometres per hour (49.7 miles/hour)** of Chinese metro trains.
- The train is also fully automated and driverless.
- The train's structure including its car body and bogie frame comprises composite materials made from tiny strands of carbon atoms interlinked.
- The carbon fibre is **five times stronger than steel**, but **75 per cent lighter**.
- The cost of the Carbon fibre is consistently falling, which was around **\$400 per kg** in the **1980s**, and is around **\$30 today**.

About Qingdao Sifang Rolling Stock Co:

- It was founded in **1900** under **German occupation**.
- It is one of China's oldest and most esteemed rolling stock manufacturers.
- The company won its **first US contract** in **2014** – to supply metro trains to **Boston**.
- The company in **2018** first said it would build carbon fibre rolling stock which would be "a comprehensive upgrade in terms of energy saving, environmental protection, comfort and intelligence," according to Global Construction.

ICJ on Israel



Recently: The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** ruled that Israel's decades-long occupation of **Palestinian territory** was "illegal".

- The ICJ ruled that the occupation should come to an end "as rapidly as possible".
- In a historic but non-binding advisory opinion rendered by the **15-judge panel, the U.N.'s top court** found multiple breaches of international law by Israel including activities that amounted to apartheid.

Israel's occupied territory in a nutshell:

- To go to the history, **Britain** assumed control of **Palestine** after the defeat of the **Ottoman Empire in World War One**.
- Between the 1920s and 1940s, **Jewish** immigration **to Palestine increased**, driven in part by persecution in Europe.
- Violence escalated between **Jews, Arabs, and British authorities**.

- In **1947**, the United Nations voted to split **Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states**.
 - It designated **Jerusalem** as an **international city** and Jewish leaders accepted the UN partition plan, but the Arab side rejected it, leading to its non-implementation.
- In **1948**, unable to solve the problem, British rulers left and Jewish leaders declared the creation of the state of **Israel**.
- Many Palestinians objected to the UN partition plan, leading to a war in which neighbouring Arab countries intervened which resulted in hundreds of thousands of Palestinians being displaced from their homes.
 - This period was referred as "**Al Nakba**" or the "Catastrophe."
- By the time the fighting ended in a ceasefire the following year, **Israel controlled most of the territory**.
- **Jordan** occupied the **West Bank**, and **Egypt** occupied **Gaza**.
- Jerusalem was divided between **Israeli forces** in the **West**, and **Jordanian** forces in the **East**.
- In a war called the **Six-Day War** in **1967**, Israel occupied territories historically sought by Palestinians for their statehood aspirations. They were -
 - East Jerusalem
 - The West Bank
 - The Syrian Golan Heights
 - Gaza
 - The Egyptian Sinai Peninsula
- In **1973**, **Yom Kippur War** occurred between **Arab states and Israel**.
- In **1979**, **Egypt – Israel Peace Treaty** was signed, resulting in the return of the **Sinai Peninsula to Egypt**.
 - **Egypt became the first Arab country to recognize Israel** as a state.
 - On **April 25, 1982**, Israel's withdrawal concluded and Egypt has since left the Sinai Peninsula demilitarized.
- Israel has since built settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and steadily expanded them after the 1967 occupation.
- While Israeli troops and settlements were withdrawn from **Gaza in 2005**, the expansion of settlements in the West Bank continued unabated.
- Around this time in Palestine, militant groups such as the **PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization)** and **Hamas** emerged with the aim of liberating Palestine.

- **Israel continues to occupy the West Bank**, and the UN still regards **Gaza as occupied territory**, despite Israeli withdrawal from **Gaza in 2005**.
- Israel claims all of **Jerusalem** as its capital, while Palestinians claim **East Jerusalem** as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

What is 'Occupation' under international law?

- Under international law, "**occupation**" refers to a situation when during an **international armed conflict**, a territory, or parts thereof, comes under the effective provisional control of a foreign power, even if it is not met with armed resistance.
- The most widely accepted definition of an occupation has been codified in **Article 42 of the 1907 Hague Regulations**.
- The provision stipulates that a "territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army.
- The occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised".
- However, an occupation must be **temporary** and cannot entail any transfer of sovereignty to the occupying power.
- Once a territory is seized, the occupying power assumes specific obligations toward individuals within the occupied territory.
- These obligations are outlined in the **1907 Hague Regulations, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949**, and norms of **customary international humanitarian law**.
- These obligations include ensuring that **provisions of food** and **medical care** are extended to the population of an occupied territory and prohibition on the use or threat of force against civilians.

International Court of Justice (ICJ)'s Advisory Jurisdiction:

- The ICJ wields **dual jurisdictional powers** — resolving **legal disputes between member states** and **rendering legal opinions** on matters referred to by **U.N. organs and specialized agencies**.
- While advisory opinions issued through the latter are **non-binding**, they carry significant legal weight and moral authority, capable of influencing diplomatic relations.
- In **December 2022**, the **UNGA** adopted a resolution seeking the **court's advisory opinion** on the "*legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.*"

- Introduced by **Nicaragua**, the resolution was passed with **87 votes in favour, 26 against, and 53 abstentions**.
- Israel abstained from participating in the proceedings.
 - It filed a written statement contending that an advisory opinion would be “harmful” to attempts made to resolve the conflict since the questions posed by the UNGA were prejudiced.
- To be noted, The last time the UNGA asked the ICJ for an advisory opinion on Palestine was in **2004**.
 - It was when the court ruled that **Israel’s construction of a wall** predominantly within the occupied **West Bank and East Jerusalem** violated international law.
 - Israel was ordered to halt the construction of the wall and dismantle parts of it, while the U.N. was asked to consider additional measures to end the illegal construction.
 - Despite the ruling, Israel unilaterally altered the wall’s route.
- Nearly two decades later, the situation has only worsened, with the separation wall extending over **700km, and 85%** of its route located inside the occupied **West Bank**.

ICJ’s Findings:

Illegal Occupation:

- Since international law does not specify any **temporal limit for an occupation**, the ICJ noted that the legal status of an occupation cannot be determined by how long a territory has been occupied.
- What does affect the legality of said occupation, the court said, is the occupying power’s “policies and practices and the manner in which they are implemented and applied on the ground”.
- The first Israeli practice that the court examined was its **policy of settlement** in the **West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967**. This, the court said, violated international law.
 - According to the ICJ, “The settlement policy, and Israeli military measures, have pushed Palestinians to leave parts of occupied territories against their will.
- This violates **Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention** which provides that “The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies”.

- The policy breaches **Articles 46 (protection of private property), 52 (general protection of civilian objects), and 55 (protection of the natural environment) of the Hague regulations.**
- It is because Israel expanded its settlements in the occupied territories by “confiscation or requisitioning of large areas of land”.
- The policy’s implementation fails to follow **Article 43 of the Hague regulations**, which mandates occupying powers, “unless absolutely prevented”, to respect the law in force in the occupied territories.
- The court held that Israel treats its settlements and occupied East Jerusalem “as its own national territory, where Israeli law is applied in full and to the exclusion of any other domestic legal system”.
- The court also held that the settlement policy led to violence by Israeli settlers and security forces against Palestinians, which Israel failed to prevent and effectively punish.

Annexation:

- Annexation, the ICJ said, is the **permanent control over an occupied territory.**
- The court found that Israel’s policies and practices in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are “designed to remain in place indefinitely and to create irreversible effects on the ground”.
- According to the ICJ, this is “contrary to the prohibition of the use of force in international relations” and thus affects the legality of Israel’s continued occupation.

Discriminatory legislation and measures:

- The court found that a broad array of legislation implemented by Israel in occupied territories **“treat Palestinians differently”.**
- This, the court said, “constitutes systemic discrimination” based on, “race, religion or ethnic origin” of the-
 - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1954
 - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1954

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965 (ICERD).
- The ICJ said that Israel is under the obligation to immediately end its illegal occupation, cease new settlement activities and evacuate settlers from the occupied territories, and make reparation to all affected people for the damage caused.
- The court said that other states should not recognise the occupied territories as part of Israel.
- It also said to refrain from providing aid or assistance to Israel in maintaining this occupation.

About the International Court of Justice:

- The ICJ is the principal judicial organ of the **United Nations** formed in **1945** that settles legal disputes between States in accordance with international law.
- It is not a criminal court, and it does not try individuals. That is the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- Both courts are in **The Hague, the Netherlands**.
- The ICJ cannot automatically decide all cases involving breaches of international law.
- It can only decide cases that are brought before it by States that consent to its jurisdiction.
- In this instance, consent arises from an article in the Genocide Convention, specifying that disputes between parties must be submitted to the **ICJ** upon the request of any party involved.
- The ICJ is composed of **15 judges** who **serve nine-year terms**.
- The current Indian Judge in ICJ is **Dalveer Bhandari**.
- **Five** seats come up for election **every three years**, with no consecutive term limit.
- **Four new judges** will take their seats in **February**, one of whom is **South Africa's Dire Tladi**.

Assassination of Hamas Leader



Recently: Ismail Haniyeh, the leader of Islamist group **Hamas** that runs the Palestinian territory of Gaza, has been 'assassinated' in **Iran's Tehran**.

- Haniyeh was in Iran's capital Tehran for the **swearing-in ceremony** of the **Masoud Pezeshkian, new President of Iran**.
- Interestingly, no one has taken responsibility of the attack.

About Hamas:

- Hamas, an acronym of its official name, **Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya**, is a **Palestinian Sunni Islamist militant resistance movement** governing parts of the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip since **2007**.
- Its name stands for **Islamic Resistance Movement**, wants to create an **Islamic state** in place of **Israel**. It is **backed by Iran** for funding and arms.
- **Ahmed Yassin** was the founder of Hamas. He was later assassinated in the Gaza city on **22nd march 2004**.

- Hamas rejects Israel's right to exist and is committed to its destruction.
- It has fought several wars with Israel since it took power, fired thousands of rockets and carried out many other deadly attacks.
- Hamas made security raids on **Islam's third holiest site - the al-Aqsa Mosque**, in occupied **East Jerusalem** and **Jewish settlement activity** in the **occupied West Bank**.
- Hamas wants thousands of **Palestinian prisoners freed** and the **Gaza blockade** by Israel and Egypt lifted, which both countries maintain for security reasons.
- Israel has repeatedly attacked Hamas with air strikes and sent troops into Gaza in **2008 and 2014**.
- Hamas, or in some cases its armed wing alone, is considered a terrorist group by **Israel, the US, the EU, and the UK**, among others.

The formation of Hamas:

- From the late 1970s, activists connected with the Islamist **Muslim Brotherhood** established a network of charities, clinics, and schools in the **Gaza Strip and West Bank occupied by Israel** after the **1967 Six-Day War**.
- In **Gaza**, the Muslim Brotherhood was active in many mosques, while in the West Bank, their activities were generally limited to universities.
- While the Muslim Brotherhood's activities were generally nonviolent, some groups in the occupied territories called for **jihad against Israel**.
- In **December 1987**, during the **Palestinian intifada**, **Hamas was established** by members of the Muslim Brotherhood and religious factions of the **Palestine Liberation Organization**.
- Hamas quickly gained a broad following and, in its **1988 charter**, declared that **Palestine is an Islamic homeland** that can never be surrendered to non-Muslims, advocating for jihad to wrest control of Palestine from Israel.
- Hamas's position on jihad brought it into conflict with the PLO, which **recognized Israel's right to exist in 1988**.
- Hamas gained traction by opposing the **Oslo Peace Accords** signed in the early **1990s** between Israel and the PLO.
 - The PLO recognized **Israel's right to exist** and abandoned its goal of liberating Palestine, and it also ceased using armed struggle as a strategy in favor of negotiation.
- Hamas began to act independently, leading to animosity between it and other secular nationalist Palestinian organizations.

- Increasingly **violent attacks by Hamas** on civilian and military targets led Israel to arrest many Hamas leaders in **1989**, including **Sheikh Ahmed Yassin**.
- Hamas reorganized to reinforce its command structure and moved key leaders out of Israel's reach.
- A political bureau responsible for international relations and fundraising was formed in **Amman, Jordan**, electing **Khaled Meshaal** as its head in **1996**.
- Hamas's armed wing was reconstituted as the '**Izz al-Din al-Qassām Forces**.'
- In **1999**, **Jordan expelled Hamas leaders**, accusing them of using Jordanian offices for military activities in the West Bank and Gaza.
- In **2001**, the political bureau established new headquarters in **Damascus, Syria**, and moved again in **2012 to Doha, Qatar**.
- The **United States** designated Hamas a **terrorist organization** in **1997**.
- **The European Union** added Hamas to its list of **terrorist groups** in **2003**, removed amid legal challenges in **2018** and returned in **2021**.
- In the Palestinian legislative election of **January 2006**, Hamas gained a large majority of seats in the Palestinian Parliament, defeating the ruling Fatah party.
- In **June 2007**, **Hamas defeated Fatah** in a series of violent clashes, and since that time **Hamas has governed the Gaza portion of the Palestinian Territories**.
- While at the same time the unity government of which they formed a part in the West Bank was dissolved by the Palestinian Authority.
- Hamas attacked Israel on the morning of **7 October 2023** where waves of Hamas gunmen stormed across Gaza's border into Israel, killing about **1,200** people.
- **Mohammed Deif**, the then leader of Hamas' military wing, announced the commencement of "**Operation Al-Aqsa Storm**".
- There were several seen evidence of **rape and sexual violence** during the Hamas attacks. Since then there is a war going on between Israel and Hamas.

Israel's Response:

- **Israel Defense Forces (IDF)** launched a retaliation **Operation Iron Swords** against the Hamas attack of 7 October.
- Three weeks later, Israel **commenced a ground invasion** and also **bombarded Gaza** from the sea.
- Initial assaults concentrated on northern Gaza, particularly Gaza City and its tunnels, identified as the core of Hamas military operations.
- After a temporary truce in **late November**, the IDF expanded ground operations to southern Gaza, reaching **Khan Younis**, where they believed top Hamas commanders were hiding.
- The IDF also advanced into refugee camps in **central Gaza**.
- According to **Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry**, over 33,000 Palestinians have been killed and tens of thousands injured by Israeli strikes since the conflict began, with most casualties being women and children.

Recent Development:

- **Ismail Haniyeh** was killed when he was visiting Tehran for the inauguration of **Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian**.
- He is also believed to have met Iran's Supreme Leader **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**.
- **The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps** issued a statement saying Haniyeh and his Iranian bodyguard were killed in a raid by the **"Zionist entity"**, referring to Israel.
- Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has ordered **Iran to strike Israel directly**, in retaliation for the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

Ismail Haniyeh:

- Ismail Haniyeh was born on **29 January 1962** and was Hamas's overall leader.
- In the late 1980s, Haniyeh was a prominent Hamas member and was imprisoned by Israel for **three years** in **1989** during the first Palestinian uprising.
- Haniyeh was **exiled** to a no-man's-land between Israel and Lebanon in **1992** with other Hamas leaders but returned to Gaza after a year.
- In **1997**, Haniyeh was appointed head of the office of Hamas's spiritual leader, strengthening his position within the group.
- Haniyeh was appointed **Palestinian PM in 2006** by **President Mahmoud Abbas** after Hamas won the most seats in national elections.
- In **2007**, Haniyeh was **dismissed as prime minister** after Hamas ousted Fatah from Gaza in a week of deadly violence, but he rejected the sacking as "unconstitutional" and continued to rule in Gaza.
- Haniyeh emphasized that his government "would not abandon its national responsibilities towards the Palestinian people."
- In **2017**, Haniyeh was elected **head of Hamas's political bureau**, succeeding **Khaled Meshaal**.
- The US Department of State designated Haniyeh a **terrorist in 2018** due to his involvement with Hamas. Haniyeh had been living in **Qatar** for the last several years before his death.

India's Stance:

- India has **not officially classified Hamas as a terrorist organization**.
- Following the **October 7 attack**, PM Modi conveyed profound shock and support for Israel, without addressing Hamas or Palestine specifically.
- Since then, India has highlighted the importance of achieving a **two-state solution** to resolve the broader Israel-Palestine conflict.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGCs):

- The **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)** is the most powerful branch of the Iranian armed forces. It includes an army, a navy, an air force, and an intelligence wing.
- It **operates independently** of Iran's regular army and is accountable only to the Office of the Supreme Leader.
- The IRGC was established by **Ruhollah Khomeini**, Iran's first leader **(1979–89)**.
- It was significantly strengthened during the presidency of **Ali Khamenei (1981–89)** amid **the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88)**.
- Under Khamenei's leadership **(1989–present)**, the IRGC has become deeply entrenched in the economy and regime security.
- The IRGC's influence allows it to undermine civilian political processes in favor of Khamenei's autocratic rule.

Myanmar armed groups



Recently: Myanmar's military government has extended the country's state of emergency by **six months** as it struggles to maintain its grip on power.

- While the **tatmadaw** – as the Myanmar armed forces are known – has employed heavy weapons, including artillery and airstrikes.
- Army Chief and Acting **President Min Aung Hlaing** proposed the extension to prepare accurate ballots for the 2025 elections and to conduct a population census.

Myanmar:

- Myanmar (**formerly Burma**) is a **Southeast Asian nation** of more than **100 ethnic groups**.
- The name Burma was changed in **1989**.
- It has borders with **India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Thailand**.
- The capital of Myanmar is **Naypyidaw** and the current leader of the country is **Min Aung Hlaing**.
- Myanmar was long considered a pariah state while under the rule of a military junta from **1962 to 2011**.
- A gradual liberalisation began in **2010**, leading to free elections in **2015**.
- The installation of a government led by veteran opposition leader **Aung San Suu Kyi** followed the next year in **2016**.
- But a **2017 army operation** in **Rakhine state** drove more than half a million **Muslim Rohingyas** to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh and India.
 - This was characterized by the United Nations as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing."
- It damaged the new government's international reputation, and highlighted the military's continuing grip.
- This was confirmed when **Aung San Suu Kyi** and her government were overthrown in a coup in **February 2021**.
- It was in February 2021, that emergency was first imposed. By the end of 2022, Myanmar had the **third-highest number** of imprisoned journalists in the world, after Iran and China.

Imposition of Emergency:

- Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military seized power, citing unsubstantiated **fraud allegations** in the **2020 elections** won by **Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD)**.
- The military imposed a **state of emergency for a year**, extending

it as it faced resistance from ethnic minority armed groups and new pro-democracy forces.

- Under **the 2008 constitution**, elections must be held within **six months of lifting the state of emergency**, but the military government has delayed this due to ongoing conflicts.
- Recently, the military government has faced significant defeats, including the loss of **Lashio**, a key trade town, and territory to armed groups like the **MNDAA**.
 - **MNDAA** which stands for **Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army** is an armed resistance group in the **Kokang region of Myanmar** formed in **1989**.
- In **January**, the **MNDAA captured Laukkai**, leading to the surrender of about 2,000 soldiers, marking one of the military's largest defeats in decades.
- Since the 2021 takeover, over **2.7 million** people have been displaced, more than **5,400 killed**, and **27,000 arrested** due to the military's crackdown on dissent.
- The **election commission announced** that the NLD would be **dissolved last year** for failing to **re-register under a new military- drafted electoral law**.
- This year again **Military pledged to hold elections in 2025** after repeated delays caused by extensions of emergency rule and extended the emergency by 6 months.

Current Scenario:

- On July 25, both Myanmar's junta and an ethnic minority armed group claimed control over the town of **Lashio** and its regional military command in northern **Shan** state after clashes.
- Fighting in Lashio, which is home to the military's north eastern command, began on July 3 when an alliance of ethnic armed groups renewed their offensive against junta troops.
- The MNDAA reported capturing both Lashio town, with a population of about 150,000, and the headquarters of the Northeast Military command.
- Northern Shan state has experienced intense fighting since late last month due to the renewed offensive by the alliance of the **Arakan Army (AA)**, the **Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)**, and the **MNDAA**, which disrupted a **Beijing-brokered truce**.

- **Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs)** and resistance groups such as the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) have made considerable gains.
- Singapore and Indonesia have criticized the junta's power grab, leading to division within the **10-member ASEAN bloc**.

Concept of Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs):

- In southern Myanmar, EAOs, including the **Karen National Union**, have made significant advances, approaching key towns like **Myawaddy** near the **Thailand border**, affecting the military's access to resources and revenue.
- Concerns exist about Myanmar's potential **Balkanisation**, with fears of creating new sovereign states from existing territories.
- Major EAOs have not declared independence, possibly to avoid bolstering military support and to instead seek a federal democratic structure with high provincial autonomy.
- The reluctance of EAOs to form new nation-states may stem **from Myanmar's complex ethnic geography**, where no area is exclusively inhabited by one ethnic group.
- Many regions are multi-ethnic, with overlapping claims to territories, such as those between Arakan and Chin groups, and similar issues among the **Wa, Kachin, and Ta'ang** in Shan state.
- The presence of multiple armed groups and fluid ethnic boundaries contribute to Myanmar's fragmented sovereignty, leading to **potential inter-ethnic friction**.

Dominance of Arakan Army:

- The Arakan Army, composed of the **Rakhine Buddhist ethnic group**, controls large parts of Rakhine province and has seized territories near the Bangladesh border, including **Buthidaung**.
- The group is advancing towards key port cities on the **Bay of Bengal** coast, such as **Kyauk Phyu, Sittwe, and Ngapali**.
- Kyauk Phyu is crucial for **China's Belt and Road Initiative and oil and gas pipelines**, while **Sittwe is vital for India's Kaladan project**.

Role of Beijing:

- China interacts with various stakeholders in Myanmar, supporting the military while also maintaining relations with armed groups such as the **Brotherhood Alliance** and **United Wa State Army (UWSA)**.
- Beijing facilitated some ceasefires between the military and EAOs, though these agreements, like the **Haigeng ceasefire in January 2024**, have proven temporary.
- High-profile visits by Myanmar's former president and military officials to China highlight increased diplomatic engagement.
- China's policy includes addressing security threats from online criminal syndicates targeting Chinese citizens near the China-Myanmar border, potentially influencing its support for the **Brotherhood Alliance**.
- **The UWSA** has reportedly acted as a conduit for Chinese weapons to armed groups, while China has also supplied defense equipment to Myanmar's military.
- China's **dual support for both the military and EAOs** helps maintain fragmented sovereignty in Myanmar, ensuring continued leverage over the situation.

India's Potential Role in Myanmar

- India **can offer insights** into federalism and governance based on its own frameworks and agreements, such as the Mizoram Peace Accord.
- India's experience in managing significant projects in conflict zones, **like Afghanistan**, demonstrates its capability to support regional stability.
- Leveraging these experiences, India could contribute to Myanmar's peace and development efforts.

India- Myanmar border:

- India and Myanmar established diplomatic relations in **1951**, shortly after Myanmar's independence in **1948**.

- There are around 2 million people of Indian origin in Myanmar, reflecting strong cultural and historical connections.
- Bilateral trade reached about **\$2.5 billion in 2022-23**, with India exporting pharmaceuticals and textiles, and importing natural gas and oil from Myanmar.
- The border between India and Myanmar was demarcated by the British in **1826**.
- It was without seeking the opinion of the people living in the region.
- The border effectively divided people of the same ethnicity and culture into two nations without their consent.
- India shares a **1,643-kilometer** border with Myanmar.
- This border passes through **Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km) and Mizoram (510 km)**.
- Out of 1,643 km, demarcation of **1,472 km** has been completed.

India-Myanmar bilateral exercises and collaborations:

- **Exercise Maitree:** A joint counter-terrorism exercise.
- **Exercise Indra:** A series of naval exercises with various countries, including Myanmar.
- **Training Programs:** Includes training programs for Myanmar's military under the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)** scheme.
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercises:** Includes joint drills and collaborations on disaster response and humanitarian aid.

46th World Heritage Committee Session



Recently: India has made history by hosting the **46th session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC)** from **July 21 to 31, 2024**, at **Bharat Mandapam** in **New Delhi**.

- This significant event, marking India's first time as host, highlights the country's long-standing commitment to heritage conservation and its active role in the **World Heritage Convention** since its inception in **1977**.
- The **Ministry of Culture (MoC)**, Government of India and its attached office, the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** are the nodal agencies to host the session this year.
- India's active participation in the World Heritage Committee, serving **four terms**, underscores its dedication to international cooperation and capacity-building.
- India's efforts under the leadership of Shri Narendra Modi have led to the successful inscription of **13 World Heritage Properties** in the last decade, positioning India at the **6th spot** globally for the most World Heritage Sites.
- **Vishal V Sharma** is **chairperson** of the WHC and ambassador and **permanent representative** of India to UNESCO.

Highlights of the event:

- The session was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who, aligned with his vision of "**Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi,**" announced a **\$1 million** grant to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.
 - This grant will support capacity-building, technical assistance, and conservation efforts, particularly benefitting countries in the Global South.
- A major highlight of the 46th WHC session was the inscription of **24 new World Heritage Sites**, including **19 cultural, 4 natural, and 1 mixed** property.
- Among these, the **Moidams of Assam** were added as India's 43rd World Heritage Site.
 - Located in the **Charaideo district**, Moidams are sacred burial mounds of the Ahom dynasty and reflect six centuries of cultural and architectural heritage.
- The committee also discussed the state of **conservation of the 124 sites** already inscribed on the World Heritage List, **57** of which are also on the list of **World Heritage in Danger**.
- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) signed an agreement with **Paris-based International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)** to enhance capacity building and research on tangible heritage.
- Minister Shekhawat highlighted an exhibition showcasing **25 repatriated historical objects**, emphasizing India's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage.
 - India's efforts extend beyond its borders, with significant contributions to conservation projects at Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Cham Temples in Vietnam, and stupas in Bagan, Myanmar.

India US Cultural Property Deal:

- India and the United States on Friday signed their first agreement to prevent illegal trafficking of cultural property and return of antiquarian objects to their place of origin.
- The US-India Cultural Property Agreement was signed by **Union Cultural Secretary Govind Mohan** and **US envoy Eric Garcetti** in the presence of **Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**.
- With this, India joins the ranks of **29 countries** who have already signed the agreement with the US.
- There are **297 items** that are lying in the US, ready to be repatriated. India has repatriated **358 antiquities since 1976**, out of these **345** have been retrieved **since 2014**.

- The agreement comes after nearly **two years** of diligent work by experts from both countries.
- In **2023**, the US had offered **1,440 artefacts** in possession of its museums or authorities for repatriation, and a team of experts from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) had visited to examine their antiquarian value.
 - The team found around **300 artefacts** eligible under the “antique” category.

The World Heritage Committee:

- The World Heritage Committee is a committee of the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** that selects the sites to be listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- The World Heritage Committee meets once a year for an ordinary session and consists of representatives from **21** of the **States Parties** to the Convention elected by their General Assembly for a **four – year term**.
 - Extraordinary meetings can be convened at the request of **two-thirds** of the state members.
 - Since **1977**, the World Heritage Committee has diligently convened annual ordinary sessions to address critical issues pertaining to the conservation and management of globally significant cultural and natural sites.
 - In addition to these regular meetings, the Committee has also convened **19 extraordinary sessions** since **1981**.
- At its first session, the Committee adopted its **Rules of Procedure of the World Heritage Committee**.
- The **5 “Cs”** are the strategic objectives adopted by the World Heritage Committee in **2002 and 2007**.
 - Credibility
 - Conservation
 - Capacity Building
 - Communication
 - Communities
- The Committee is responsible for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, formally known as the **Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage**, an international treaty signed on **23 November 1972**.
- The **Bureau of the World Heritage Committee** consists of **seven State Parties** elected annually by the Committee: **a Chairperson, five Vice-Chairpersons, and a Rapporteur**.

- The Bureau of the Committee coordinates the work of the Committee and fixes the dates, hours and order of business of meetings.
- The election of the new Bureau will take place at the end of the next session of the World Heritage Committee.

UNESCO:

- **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) aimed at promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture.
- It was founded in **1945** as the successor to the **League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation**.
- The **first session** of the General Conference of UNESCO was held in **Paris** during November-December of **1946**.
- It is Headquartered in **Paris, France**.
- It has **194** (including US) **Members and 12 Associate Members** and is governed by the General Conference and the Executive Board.
- Three UNESCO member states are not UN members: **Cook Islands, Niue, and Palestine**.
- While two UN member states are not UNESCO members: **Israel and Liechtenstein**.
- **United States** that officially **withdrew** from UNESCO in **2018, rejoined** the organization in **June 2023**.
- **Audrey Azoulay** is the current Director- General of UNESCO.

Global IT Outage



Recently: One of the largest IT outages in history disrupted businesses and governments around the world.

- A major disruption in **Microsoft Corp's cloud services** caused service disruptions to a number of businesses around the world, including in India.
- This outage saw the entire world using **Microsoft applications** and services come to a standstill, including **banking and airline services** in various regions of **Europe, South Asia, and North America**.

What exactly happened?

- Late on July 18, users in the **Central US region** faced problems with **Microsoft's Azure services and Microsoft 365 apps**, primarily related to **service management and connectivity**.
- By July 19, the issue had escalated globally, with users unable to log into their computers, and Windows machines displaying a **"blue screen error."**
- **CrowdStrike (CRWD.O)** is a **U.S. cybersecurity company** with a market value of about **\$83 billion** and is among the most popular in the world.
- Notably, CrowdStrike is known for producing **antivirus software**, intended to prevent hackers from causing this **very type of disruption**.

- According to an alert sent by **CrowdStrike** to its clients and reviewed by Reuters, its widely used "**Falcon Sensor**" **software** caused **Microsoft Windows** to **crash** and display a **blue screen**, known informally as the "**Blue Screen of Death**".
- The firm said preliminary investigations show the outage was caused by a cyber-attack and a failure to properly defend against it.
- The issue was specific to **Falcon** which is deeply embedded with the Windows operating system.
- Major corporations across the world use software developed by CrowdStrike, which is why all their systems faced the outage at the same time.
- In cybersecurity parlance, Falcon is described as "**endpoint detection and response**" (**EDR**) software.
 - It is a complex software, but its basic job is to monitor activity on computers on which it is installed, and constantly scan them for any potential threats such as malware.
- All major businesses around the world, including several Fortune 500 companies, are understood to use the service.
- To carry out its job, Falcon first gets access to deep details of a system.
- This includes, among other things, the communications that computers are sending over the internet, what programs they are running, and the files that are being opened.
- In that sense, Falcon is a '**privileged software**' given its deep-rooted integration at the operating system level.
- Since a number of businesses use systems which run on Windows, Falcon is deeply embedded within those systems — this was the major reason why a faulty code in the Falcon update primarily impacted **Windows PCs**.

Who has been impacted?

- The global tech outage has affected operations in different sectors internationally including at **Spanish airports, U.S. airlines and Australian media and banks**.
 - The **airline sector** was one of the most affected sector.
- The governments of **Australia, New Zealand**, and a number of **U.S. states** faced the issue, **while American Airlines, Delta Airlines, United Airlines (UAL.O), and Allegiant Air grounded flights citing communication problems**.

- In **Britain, Sky News**, one of the country's major television news channels, was off air for hours before service was restored.
- Microsoft said separately it had fixed the underlying cause for the outage of its **365 apps and services including Teams and OneDrive**, but residual impact was affecting some services.
- Meanwhile, the problem has also hit payment systems, banking and healthcare providers around the world.
- Railway companies, including Britain's biggest which runs Southern, Thameslink, Gatwick Express and Great Northern, warned passengers to expect delays.
- In Alaska, the **911 emergency service** was affected.

Which sectors in India were the most impacted by the outage?

- In India, the impact of the outage was most pronounced in the **aviation sector**.
- Hundreds of flights were delayed, and several cancelled, as airline operators found their systems inoperational, forcing them to switch to manual processes.
- **Akasa Air** temporarily suspended online services, like booking and check-in, and reverted to manual operations.
- **Air India Express** said the outage had impacted its airport operations, as well those of multiple airlines and airports globally.
- **Spicejet** said that it was facing "a technical issue in providing updates on flight disruptions".
- The **Ministry of Civil Aviation**, in collaboration with the **Airports Authority of India**, implemented manual backup systems to maintain operational continuity.
- Extra staff was deployed to assist passengers, and address their concerns, the ministry said.
- In India, **at least ten banks and NBFCs** faced minor disruptions, which have either been resolved or are being resolved, the Reserve Bank of India said.
- It added that overall, the financial sector in India remained insulated from the global outage since critical systems of most banks were not in the cloud, and only a few banks are using the CrowdStrike tool.
- Unlike the **London Stock Exchange**, the **Bombay Stock Exchange** was not impacted due to the Microsoft issue.

- **India's nodal cyber agency, Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (Cert-In)** issued an advisory regarding workarounds to the issue after it was reported.

What is CrowdStrike?

- The US firm, based in **Austin, Texas**, is a listed company on the **US stock exchange**, featuring in both the **S&P 500** and the **high-tech Nasdaq indexes**.
- The current CEO of CrowdStrike is **George Kurtz**.
- It was founded a mere 13 years ago, but has grown to employ nearly **8,500 people**.
- The firm was founded in **2011** by **George Kurtz, Dmitri Alperovitch and Gregg Marston**.
- As a provider of cyber-security services, it tends to get called in to deal with the aftermath of hack attacks.
- It has been involved in investigations of several high-profile cyber-attacks, such as when **Sony Pictures** had its computer system hacked in **2014**.
- But this time, because of a flawed update to its software, a firm that is normally part of the solution to IT problems has instead caused one.
- In its last earnings report, CrowdStrike declared a total of nearly **24,000 customers**. That's an indication not just of the size of the issue, but also the difficulties that could be involved in fixing it.
- Each of those customers is a huge organisation in itself, so the number of individual computers affected is hard to estimate.

Microsoft:

- Microsoft Corporation is an **American multinational corporation** and **technology company** headquartered in **Redmond, Washington**.
- Its best-known software products are the **Windows** line of operating systems, the **Microsoft 365** suite of productivity applications, the **Azure cloud** computing platform and the **Edge web browser**.
- Microsoft was founded on **April 4, 1975**, by **Bill Gates and Paul Allen** in **Albuquerque, New Mexico**.

- **Satya Nadella** is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Microsoft. Before being named **CEO in February 2014**, Nadella held leadership roles in both enterprise and consumer businesses across the company.
- Microsoft released **Windows** in **1985**, a year before moving its headquarters to **Redmond, Washington** i.e in **1986**.
- By the late 1980s, Microsoft was the world's largest personal-computer software company.
- The latest version of windows is currently **Windows 11** which was released in **2021** and **Windows 12** is expected to be release until **late 2024**.

Economy

Money Bills



Source- <https://images.app.goo.gl/64hnFob6kkxRDn1A7>

Recently: Chief Justice of India **D.Y. Chandrachud** agreed to list petitions challenging the **Money Bill route** taken by the Centre to pass contentious amendments in the Parliament.

- The Money Bill question was referred to a **seven-judge Bench** in **November 2019** by a **five-judge** Bench headed by the then **CJI Ranjan Gogoi** in the case of **Rojer Mathew vs. South Indian Bank Ltd.**

- The cardinal issue is whether such amendments could be passed as a Money Bill, circumventing the Rajya Sabha.

What is money bill?

- Article **110** of the Constitution deals with Money Bills as it is a bill that, in the opinion of the **Speaker** of the **Lok Sabha**, deals with **taxation** or the **appropriation of public funds**.
 - These funds include the Consolidated Fund of India and the Contingency Fund of India.
- A money bill can only be introduced in the **Lok Sabha**. The Speaker categorising a bill as a “money bill” means that it **need not be passed by the Rajya Sabha**.
- Under **Article 110(1)**, a Bill is deemed to be a money Bill if it deals only with matters specified in **Article 110(1)(a) to (g)** which includes -
 - Taxation
 - Borrowing by the government
 - Appropriation of money from the Consolidated Fund of India, among others.
- **Article 110(1)(g)** adds that “any matter **incidental** to any of the matters specified in **Articles 110(1)(a) to (f)**” can also be a Money Bill.
 - Citing this additional clause, the Modi government has introduced several key legislation as a Money Bill, bypassing the Rajya Sabha.
- The Opposition has argued that this was done only because the government did not have the numbers to get these legislations cleared in the Rajya Sabha.
- Apart from that **Article 110(3)** of the Indian Constitution says the **Speaker's decision** on whether a bill is a Money Bill is considered final.
 - This clause raises questions about whether the judiciary can **review the Speaker's decision**.
- In the **2018 Aadhaar case**, the court ruled that the **Speaker's decision can be subject to judicial scrutiny**.
- This means the judiciary can assess the Speaker's determination, despite the initial appearance that it's final.

Procedure to pass Money Bill:

- The money bill is **first introduced in the Lok Sabha** that is the lower house of the parliament.
- The money bill cannot be introduced in Rajya Sabha.
- The **Rajya Sabha can recommend amendments** if not satisfied which may or may not be taken seriously by the Lok Sabha.
- Voting takes place in Lok Sabha, if the Bill gets a **Simple Majority (50%+1)** by all members present and voting, the Bill gets passed.
- The same procedure is followed in Rajya Sabha but their approval doesn't matter.
- Under **Article 109**, a money Bill requires only Lok Sabha's assent, while Rajya Sabha has **14 days to return it with recommendations**, which Lok Sabha may accept or reject before enacting it into law.
- Lok Sabha after this has to give the Bill with or without the recommendation to the Rajya Sabha or the Bill is assumed to be passed by both the houses.
- The Bill reaches the **President**, he has to give his assent and the Money Bill becomes an Act.
- President cannot return the money bill for **reconsideration** like other bills.

Legislations under challenge for being passed as a money bill:

Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) Amendments:

- The Prevention of **Money Laundering Act, 2002** prevents money laundering in India.
- It provides for the confiscation of property derived from or involved in money laundering.
- Several amendments were made in PMLA in **2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019 through the Finance Acts** of the respective years.
- They were introduced in the Parliament as money bills and get passed without Rajya Sabha approval.
- In **July 2022**, a **three-judge bench** also had upheld the PMLA amendments and the vast powers of the **Enforcement Directorate**.

The Finance Act, 2017:

- The **Finance Act, 2017** was also introduced and passed as a money bill in the **16th Lok Sabha**.
- Along with the provisions of a normal finance bill, the Finance Act, **2017** contained some other controversial provisions
- It amended **25 statutes** for the purpose of merging of Tribunals and authorities and for service conditions of Chairman and members which affects the functioning of quasi-judicial bodies.

The Aadhaar Act, 2016:

- The first major challenge on whether a bill qualified to be a money bill under the Constitution was in the **Aadhaar case**.
- In a **4:1 majority**, the Supreme Court in **2018**, had ruled in favour of the government and had cleared the Aadhaar Act as a valid money bill.
- The **Aadhaar Act 2016** is a law passed by the Indian government to establish a unique identification system for residents of India.
- The provisions of the Act shows that the purpose was to provide for the creation of **Aadhaar Number (Unique Identity Number) to individuals** for benefits provided by government.
- It was claimed that **section 7** provides for the legislative intention of **targeted delivery of subsidies, benefits and services**.
 - The expenditure of which were from the **Consolidated Fund thus comes within the scope of Art.110(1)**.
- Justice Chandrachud (as he was then) had delivered a dissenting opinion on the **Review Bench in 2021** in case related to Aadhaar Act.
- The two questions before the Review Bench had been whether the Lok Sabha Speaker's decision to declare the proposed **Aadhaar law as Money Bill was "final"**.
- The second, whether **the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016** was correctly certified as a 'Money Bill' under **Article 110(1)** of the Constitution.
- Justice Chandrachud, in his dissent, had said the Review Bench ought to wait till the **seven-judge Bench** decided the larger questions on the Money Bill in the **Rojer Mathew reference**.
- But the majority, led by **Justice (retired) A.M. Khanwilkar**, had disagreed with him

- The issue is pending consideration before a seven-judge constitution bench of the court that is yet to be formed.

Consolidated fund of India:

- This fund was comprised under **Article 266 (1)** of the Constitution of India.
- **All earnings received by the Government** are the Consolidated Fund of India.
- All government expense is made from this account, **except outstanding commodities** which are fulfilled from the Contingency Fund or the Public Account.

Contingency Fund of India:

- The contingency fund is composed under **Article 267(1)** of the Indian Constitution
- Contingency Fund of India is utilized at a time when there is a **catastrophe in the nation** — a natural calamity, for instance — and money is obliged to deal with it.
- The fund is administered by the **Finance Secretary (Department of Economic Affairs)** on behalf of the President of India and it can be operated by **executive action**.

Economic Survey of India 2024



Recently: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the Economic Survey 2024 in the Parliament on July 22.

- It was followed by a press conference by **Chief Economic Adviser Anantha Nageswaran**.
- The Economic Survey's conservative growth estimate of **6.5 to 7 per cent is lower** compared to **8.2 per cent** as compared with the last year's data.

What is Economic Survey?

- As the name suggests, the Economic Survey is a detailed report of the state of the national economy in the financial year that is coming to a close.
- An Economic Survey is a comprehensive annual document prepared and presented by the **Ministry of Finance**.
- It is presented in Parliament a day before the **Union Budget**.
- It provides a detailed overview of the economic performance of the country over the past financial year and contains statistical data related to parameters like GDP growth, inflation, employment, fiscal deficit.
- The document also suggests policy measures to address economic challenges and promote growth.

- Even though it comes just a day before the Budget, the assessment and recommendations carried out in the survey are **not binding on the Budget**.
- Nevertheless, the survey remains the most authoritative and comprehensive analysis of the economy that is conducted from within the Union government.
- Its observations and details provide an official framework for analysing the Indian economy.

Who prepares and present the report?

- The Economic Survey is prepared by the **Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) of India and his/her team** within the **Ministry of Finance**.
- It is presented in **Parliament by the Finance Minister of India**.
- In short, The Economic Survey is prepared by the **Economic Division of the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA)** within the **Union finance ministry** under the **guidance of the CEA**.

History of the survey:

- The first Economic Survey was presented for **1950-51 and until 1964**, it was presented along with the Budget.
- Similarly, for the longest time, the survey was presented in just **one volume**, with specific chapters dedicated to different key sectors of the economy as well as key policy areas.
 - This volume carries a detailed statistical abstract as well.
- However, between **2010-11 and 2020-21**, the survey was presented in **two volumes**.
- The additional volume carried the intellectual imprint of the CEA and often dealt with some of the major issues and debates facing the economy.

- From **2022-23**, the survey reverted to a **single volume format**, presumably because it was prepared and presented while there was a change in guard in **the CEA's office** and the current CEA – **V Anantha Nageswaran** – took charge when the survey was released.

What should one look for in this year's survey?

- The Indian economy has struggled to grow at a fast pace since **2017-18**.
- The years immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic may have registered fast growth rates but that was just a statistical illusion.
- Many outside economists have argued that India's potential growth has fallen from **8% to 6%**.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in July this year revised India's growth forecast for **2024-25 from 6.8% to 7%**.
- This increase is due to an improvement in private consumption, especially in rural India, despite challenging global and domestic economic dynamics.
- The **IMF's World Economic Outlook report** has also projected **6.5% GDP growth for India in 2025-26**.
- But some major challenges persist. The economy witnessed historically high unemployment and a sharp rise in poverty and inequality during the Covid years.
- This loss of employment has been significant in the **unorganised sector**, with the closure of many informal units over the last seven years, and the loss of about **16.45 lakh jobs**, according to recent data from the **Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises (ASUSE)**.
- Lastly, this survey, like its predecessor, bears the imprint of **CEA Nageswaran**.

Key highlights of Economic Survey 2024:

India's GDP:

- The Economic Survey for 2023-24 stands out from previous economic surveys in that it provides a more realistic picture of the challenges before India's economic growth.
- As such, despite India's GDP growing at more **than 8%** in FY **2023-24**, the survey pegs the GDP growth rate for the current **financial year (FY 2024-25) between 6.5% and 7%**.
- The projection is in line with estimates from global agencies such as the **IMF** but slightly lower than the **RBI's forecast of 7.2 percent**.
- **India's per capita income GDP** has risen **seven times since 1990 to \$2,500**, but the journey to raise it **to \$10,000** and make India a developed nation by **2047** needs a different approach.

Inflation:

- Retail inflation decreased to **5.4 percent in FY24**, down from **6.7 percent in FY23**, due to effective policy responses amidst both global and domestic challenges.
- In FY24, **29 states and union territories** reported inflation rates below **6%**.
- Core services inflation decreased to its lowest level in nine years during the same period.
- However, food inflation rose from **6.6% in FY23 to 7.5% in FY24**.
- The **services sector** grew by **7.6 percent in FY24**, while the **agriculture sector expanded by 4.18 percent** over the **past five years**.

India's FDI:

- FDI remained resilient, despite a slight decline in new capital inflows to **USD 45.8 billion in FY24 from USD 47.6 billion in FY23**, reflecting broader global economic trends.
- The environment for foreign direct investment (FDI) to grow in the coming years is not **highly favourable**.
- High interest rates in developed countries have not only raised the cost of funding, but also increased the opportunity cost to invest in developing countries like India.

- Moreover, economies such as India have to compete with industrial policies in the developed world involving considerable subsidies that encourage domestic investment.
- Geopolitical uncertainties also continue to play spoilsport.

China's Dependency:

- The Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) underscored how India continues to be **overly dependent on China** for imports, especially for **renewable energy**.
- He also stated that China has not let go of the low-skills manufacturing space that India wanted to occupy.

Other key takeaways:

- The Survey notes that while there has been a boom in telecommunications and Internet facilitated business process outsourcing (BPO), the next wave of technological evolution might bring the curtains down on it.
- The Survey emphasised that the corporate sector had not responded, despite the Union government cutting taxes in **September 2019** to facilitate capital formation.
- The Indian economy needs to generate an average of nearly **78.5 lakh jobs annually until 2030** in the non-farm sector to cater to the rising workforce.
- A constant refrain against the government has been the lack of good quality and timely data especially related to employment. In the Survey, the CEA accepted that this was indeed a gap that was holding back a proper analysis.
- The Survey notes that "social media, screen time, sedentary habits, and unhealthy food are a lethal mix that can undermine public health and productivity and diminish India's economic potential."
- According to the Survey, India has remained on the course of fiscal consolidation amid the global trend of widening **fiscal deficit**.
- The fiscal deficit has been brought down from **6.4 per cent of GDP in FY23 to 5.6 per cent of GDP in FY24**, according to provisional actuals (PA) data released by the Office of Controller General of Accounts (CGA).

- The capital expenditure for FY24 stood at **₹9.5 lakh crore**, an increase of **28.2 per cent on a YoY basis**, and was **2.8 times the level of FY20**.
- The government's thrust on capex has been a critical driver of economic growth amidst an uncertain and challenging global environment, Chief Economic Adviser said.
- According to the Survey, India's external sector "is being deftly managed with comfortable foreign exchange reserves and a stable exchange rate".
- The public distribution of food grains calculated as a percent of the net availability of food grains shows that it fell to 19.4% in FY '23 as compared to 21.6% in FY '22.
- Although, the data from the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)** - which, according to the Department of Food and Public Distribution, is a central government scheme to provide free food grains to about 81.35 crore beneficiaries (i.e. **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)** households and Priority Households (PHH) beneficiaries) - is not included for FY '21 and FY '22.
- Despite global supply chain disruptions and adverse weather conditions, domestic inflationary pressures moderated in FY24.
- Measures undertaken by the Union Government such as open market sales, reduction in prices of LPG cylinders, a cut in petrol and diesel prices as well as a raising in policy rates by the RBI have helped in moderating inflation.

Union Budget 2024 – 25



Source- <https://nvandco.blogspot.com/2024/07/is-union-budget-2024-too-harsh-for.html>

Recently: Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** presented her **seventh straight Budget and government's first budget** after the recently concluded Lok Sabha Elections.

- The Union Budget 2024 proposes a slew of changes in **taxation policies**.
- These include giving **income tax relief to boost spending** and **rationalising the capital gains tax rate** and holding period of various assets.

What is 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**" 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.

Elements of the Budget:

Revenue Budget:

- This section details the government's estimated revenue from various sources such as taxes, non-tax revenues and capital receipts.
- It shows how much money the government plans to earn from taxes, non-tax revenues, and other sources.

Capital Budget:

- This section details the government's proposed spending on various **capital projects**.
- The projects such as infrastructure development, capital investment in public sector enterprises, and other long-term investments.
- It shows how much money the government plans to spend on long-term projects like building new roads, bridges, and airports.

Plan and Non-Plan Expenditure:

- The budget also separates its expenditure into two parts, Plan and Non-Plan expenditure.
- Plan expenditure includes **funds allocated for specific government schemes**.
- Non-plan expenditure includes **regular expenses** such as **salaries, pensions, and administrative costs**.

Fiscal Deficit:

- The budget also includes an estimate of the fiscal deficit which is the **difference between the government's total expenditure and its total revenue**.
- The government aims to reduce the fiscal deficit to maintain financial stability.

Tax Proposals:

- The budget also includes proposals for changes in tax laws and tax rates, which can have a significant impact on businesses and individuals.

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. This 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.

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**.
- **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.
- 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**.

Secrecy of the Budget:

- Budget making is a secret process and is done by the Finance Minister along with high-ranking officials.
- People involved in budget-making are put in a **lockdown** and are refrained from using their mobile phones until its representation.
- The budget goes for printing once it is approved by the Prime Minister.
- The security measures of this top-secret affair were breached once in **1950** when **John Matthai** was the Finance Minister.
 - A portion of the **1950 Union Budget** was leaked when printing of the budget used to still take place at **Rashtrapati Bhawan**.
- Following the leak, the venue of printing was changed to a government press on **Minto Road**.
- The then finance minister Matthai had to resign post the budget leak, as he was accused of being serving interests of higher powers and affluent people.
- From **1951 until 1980**, the Budget was printed at a press on Minto Road.
- Since 1980, the **North Block basement at Delhi's Secretariat Building** has become the permanent place for printing the budget.

- As per tradition, every year the Finance Ministry hosts a '**Halwa ceremony**' around **9 to 10 days** before the Union Budget is presented in the Parliament.
- What makes the ceremony significant is that it initiates the '**lock-in**' for the ministry staff to prevent leaks, lasting until the financial statement is tabled.
- To maintain secrecy and to leave no room for leaks, the North Block basement is transformed into a fortress.

Interim Budget:

- Earlier, The central government presented an interim budget in **April 2024**.
- 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**.
- The Centre must refrain from announcing schemes influencing voters or presenting an Economic Survey, but the government can revise tax rates through an interim budget.
- 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.

Highlights of the Budget:

- The annual income between **₹3 lakh and ₹ 7 lakh** will now attract a **5 percent tax rate**.
- The government has revised a system introduced in **2020** where the **annual income of up to ₹ 15 lakh** is taxed between **5 percent to 20 percent**, while income of over **₹ 15 lakh were taxed at 30 percent**.
- The Budget also increases **the standard deduction** for **salaried employees** to **₹ 75,000** from **₹ 50,000** earlier.

Capital Gains Tax:

- The government raised the tax rate for **equity investments** held for **less than one year to 20% from 15%** and for shares held for more than **12 months to 12.5 percent from 10 percent**.
- **Short-term capital gains tax (STCG)** on listed equity, equity-oriented mutual funds and units of a business trust has been increased to **20 per cent from 15 per cent**.
- **While Long Term Capital Gains Tax (LTCG)** on these securities is proposed to be hiked to **12.5 per cent from 10 per cent**.
- Long-term capital gains up **to ₹ 1.25 lakh** annually will be exempt from tax, up from **₹ 1 lakh currently**, as per the changes proposed in the Budget.
- In the case of listed bonds and debentures, LTCG is proposed to be reduced to **12.5 per cent from the existing 20 per cent**.
 - STCG rate remains unchanged.
- In the case of unlisted bonds and debentures, LTCG will be levied at applicable slab rates against a flat **20 per cent rate currently**.
 - STCG rate remains unchanged.
- In the case of other assets (property, gold etc), LTCG is proposed to be levied at **12.5 per cent** without indexation benefits against the existing rate of **20 per cent with indexation**.

- STCG rate remains unchanged.
- The government will abolish **angel tax** for all classes of investors in startups to "bolster the Indian startup eco-system".
- The government announced a reduction in the **corporate tax** rate on **foreign companies to 35 per cent to attract foreign capital flow.**
- It proposed a reduction in the rate of income-tax chargeable on income of foreign companies (other than that chargeable at special rates) from **40 per cent to 35 per cent.**

Significant Announcements:

- The Union Budget 2024-25 identified **nine priorities** for generating ample opportunities
 - Productivity and Resilience in Agriculture,
 - Employment and Skilling,
 - Inclusive Human Resource Development and Social Justice,
 - Manufacturing and Service,
 - Urban Development,
 - Energy Security,
 - Infrastructure,
 - Innovation,
 - Research and Development and Next Generation Reforms.
- India-funded projects in the neighbourhood received the bulk of the allocation for the **Ministry of External Affairs** under the Union Budget.
 - **Nepal** secured an allocation of **₹700 crore**, which is a jump of **₹150 crore** from previous year's allocation of **₹550 crore.**
 - **Sri Lanka**, which has a number of India-funded projects, has received **₹245 crore**, an improvement of **₹95 crore** over last year's funding of **₹150 crore.**
- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman allocated about **₹ 1.50 lakh crore** to the agriculture sector.
- Almost all major schemes for farmers see an increase in allocation compared to previous budgets.
- However, the **fertilisers subsidy** is down by about **₹1 lakh crore** when compared to the actual expenditure in **2022-23.**

- All major tax payer services under GST, Customs and Income Tax have been digitised while all remaining custom services will be digitised over the **next two years**.
- **Vivaad Se Vishwas Scheme 2024** launched to resolve certain pending **Income Tax disputes**.
- For promoting women-led development, the budget carries an allocation of over **₹3 lakh crore for schemes benefitting women and girls**.

PM Internship Scheme:

- The internship scheme, as announced by Sitharaman, will provide **one crore young people** with internship opportunities in **500 top companies in the country**.
- The interns under this scheme will be given a monthly allowance, as well as a one-time assistance amount.
- According to the scheme, the youths will get **₹5000 as monthly allowance** and **₹6000 as one-time assistance**.
- The **first phase** of the scheme will be **for two years**, while the **second phase will be of three years**.
- The proposal says that the companies will bear the cost of training the youth, and **10 percent** of their internship costs their **corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds**.
- The application process will be through an online portal, the details of which are yet to be announced.
- Only those aged between **21 and 24** who are not employed or engaged in full-time education will be eligible for the Budget 2024 internship scheme.
- Candidates who have completed their studies from **IIT, IIM, Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISER)** are not eligible for the internship.
- Towards it, the finance minister said that the Government has allocated **₹2 lakh crore**.

Taxonomy for Climate Finance:

- The Budget includes **developing a taxonomy for climate finance** to enhance the availability of capital for **climate adaptation and mitigation**.
- Climate finance taxonomy refers to a set of standardised regulations and guidelines to inform companies and investors on making impactful investments towards environmental conservation and combating the climate crisis.

- In **January 2021, India** established a task force on sustainable finance under the Department of Economic Affairs, **Ministry of Finance**.
- This task force aims to create a framework for sustainable finance in India, establish the pillars for a sustainable finance roadmap, suggest a draft taxonomy of sustainable activities, and create a framework of risk assessment by the financial sector.
- In **April that year**, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** joined the **Central Banks and Supervisors Network for Greening the Financial System (NGFS)** as a member.
- RBI is also a member of a task force on climate-related financial risks set up by the **Basel Committee on Banking Supervision**, and the **International Platform on Sustainable Finance**.

Reports & Indices

Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020



Recently: Food and Agricultural Organization released the **Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020**.

- FRA 2020 examines the status of, and trends in, more than **60 forest-related variables** in **236 countries** and territories in the period **1990–2020**.
- FAO has brought out this comprehensive assessment **every five years** since **1990**.
- Data submitted to FRA contribute to reporting on SDG indicator **15.1.1** (forest area as a proportion of total land area in 2015) and indicator **15.2.1** (progress towards sustainable forest management).

Global Forest Cover:

- The world has a total forest area of **4.06 billion hectares (ha)**, which is **31 percent** of the total land area.
 - This area is equivalent **to 0.52 ha per person**– although forests are not distributed equally among the world's peoples or geographically.
- The **tropical** domain has the largest proportion of the world's forests (**45 percent**), followed by the boreal (27%), temperate (16%) and subtropical (11%) domains.
- More than half (**54 percent**) of the world's forests is in only **five** countries – the Russian **Federation, Brazil, Canada, the United States of America and China**.
- **Ninety-three percent (3.75 billion ha)** of the forest area worldwide is composed of naturally **regenerating forests** and **7 percent** (290 million ha) is **planted**.
- **Plantation forests** cover about **131 million ha**, which is **3 percent** of the global forest area and **45 percent** of the total area of planted forests.
- The area of naturally regenerating forests has decreased since 1990 (at a declining rate of loss), but the area of planted forests has increased by **123 million ha**.

- **Plantation forests** are intensively managed, composed of one or two species, even-aged, planted with regular spacing, and established mainly for productive purposes.
- Other **planted forests**, which comprise **55 percent** of all planted forests, are not intensively managed, and they may resemble natural forests at stand maturity.
 - The purposes of other planted forests may include ecosystem restoration and the protection of soil and water values.

- The highest share of plantation forest is in **South America**, where this forest type represents **99 percent** of the total **planted-forest** area and **2 percent** of the total **forest area**.
- The **lowest share** of plantation forest is in **Europe**, where it represents **6 percent** of the **planted forest** estate and **0.4 percent** of the **total forest area**.

Findings of the Report:

Global:

- The top 10 countries that have recorded the **maximum average annual net gains** in forest area during 2010-2020 are - **China, Australia, India, Chile, Vietnam, Turkey, the United States, France, Italy and Romania**.
- The world has lost **178 million ha** of forest since 1990, which is an area about the size of Libya.
- The rate of net forest loss **decreased substantially** over the period 1990–2020 due to a **reduction in deforestation** in some countries, plus increases in forest area in others through **afforestation and the natural expansion** of forests.
 - The rate of net forest loss **declined** from **7.8 million ha per year** in the decade **1990–2000** to **5.2 million ha per year** in **2000–2010** and **4.7 million ha per year** in **2010–2020**.
- **Africa** had the **largest** annual rate of **net forest loss** in 2010–2020, at 3.9 million ha, followed by **South America**, at 2.6 million ha.
- **Asia** had the highest net gain of forest area in 2010–2020, followed by **Oceania and Europe**.
- Nevertheless, both Europe and Asia recorded substantially lower rates of net gain in 2010–2020 than in 2000–2010.
- An estimated **420 million ha** of forest has been lost worldwide through deforestation since 1990, but the rate of forest loss has declined substantially.
 - In the most recent five-year period (**2015–2020**), the annual rate of deforestation was estimated at **10 million ha**, down from 12 million ha in 2010–2015.

- There is an estimated **726 million ha** of forest in **protected areas** worldwide.
 - Of the six major world regions, **South America** has the highest share of forests in protected areas, at **31 percent**.
- The area of forest in protected areas globally has increased by **191 million ha** since 1990, but the rate of annual increase slowed in **2010–2020**.
- **Seventy-three percent** of the world's forests is under **public ownership**, **22 percent is privately owned**, and the ownership of the remainder is categorized as either **"unknown" or "other"**.
 - The "other" category is mainly comprising forests where ownership is disputed or in transition.
 - **Oceania, North and Central America and South America** have the highest proportions of private forests.
 - Globally, the share of publicly owned forests has decreased since 1990 and the area of forest under private ownership has increased.
- The world still has at least **1.11 billion ha** of **primary forest**.
 - Primary forests are composed of native species in which there are no clearly visible indications of human activities and the ecological processes have not been significantly disturbed.
- Combined, three countries – **Brazil, Canada and the Russian Federation** – host more than half (61 percent) of the world's primary forest.
- The area of primary forest has **decreased by 81 million ha** since 1990, but the rate of loss more than halved in 2010–2020 compared with the previous decade.
- Most of the forests in Europe have management plans; on the other hand, management plans exist for **less than 25 percent** of forests in **Africa** and less than **20 percent** in **South America**.
 - The area of forest under management plans is increasing in all regions – globally, it has increased by 233 million ha since 2000, reaching **2.05 billion ha in 2020**.

India:

- India has ranked **third** among the top 10 countries that have gained in forest areas in the last decade.
- Between 2010 and 2020, the country added **2,66,000 hectares** of forest area annually.
- The FAO report commended India's efforts in restoring degraded lands and expanding agroforestry through new national policies.

- However, this positive trend in forest cover gains was overshadowed by data on the substantial **diversion of forest** land for non-forestry purposes.
 - From April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2024, as many as **8,731 projects** were approved, leading to the diversion of **95,724.99 hectares** of forest land.
 - **Madhya Pradesh** topped the list with 22,614.74 hectares diverted, followed by **Odisha** with 13,621.95 hectares and **Arunachal Pradesh** with 8,744.78 hectares.
- The forest area managed by local, tribal and indigenous communities in India increased from zero in 1990 to about 25 million ha in 2015.
- The naturally regenerating forest rate is disappointing, according to the assessment.
 - During 2010-20, the rate of increase in naturally regenerating forest was just 0.38 per cent according to the FRA 2020.
- The assessment examined **employment in the forestry sector** (including logging) with data from **136 countries** that represent **91 per cent** of the world's forests.
 - India reported the maximum employment in the forestry sector in the world.
 - Globally, **12.5 million people** were employed in the forestry sector. Out of this, India accounted for 6.23 million, or nearly **50 per cent**.

Food and Agricultural Organization:

- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger and improve nutrition and food security.
- It was founded on 16 October **1945** at **Quebec City, Canada**.
- **October 16th** is observed as the **World Food Day** every year to mark the foundation of Food and Agriculture Organization.
- It comprises **195 members**, including 194 countries and the **European Union**.
- It is headquartered in **Rome, Italy**.
- **Qu Dongyu** is the current Director General of the FAO.

Henley's Passport Index



Recently: The latest edition of the Henley's Passport Index was released.

What is a Passport?

- A passport is an **official travel document** issued by a government that certifies a person's identity and nationality for international travel.
- A passport allows its bearer to enter and temporarily reside in a foreign country, access local aid and protection, and obtain consular assistance from their government.
- A visa is a conditional authorization granted by a polity to a foreigner that allows them to enter, remain within, or leave its territory.
- The Indian passport is a passport issued by the **Ministry of External Affairs** of the Republic of India to Indian citizens for the purpose of international travel.
- It enables the bearer to travel internationally and serves as proof of Indian citizenship as per the **Passports Act, 1967**.
- The Indian passport was first issued in **1920** and the **2021** is the latest version Biometric Machine Readable Passport.

What is Henley's Passport Index?

- It is a global ranking of countries according to the travel freedom allowed by those countries' ordinary passports for their citizens.
- It uses info from a giant travel database to see where you can go with your passport without needing a visa beforehand. This could include visa-free entry, getting a visa on arrival, or getting an electronic travel permit online.
- It started in **2006** as **Henley & Partners Visa Restrictions Index (HVRI)** and was changed and renamed in **January 2018**.
- The Index includes **199** different passports and **227** different travel destinations and is updated **quarterly**.
- The rankings are based on the data from **International Air Transport Association (IATA)**.
- The rankings are based on the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa.

Rankings:

Global:

- **Singapore** rockets to the top spot, with citizens enjoying visa-free access to a whopping **195 countries, in 2024**.
 - This impressive feat makes Singaporean passports the **most powerful in the world**.
 - **Singapore** last year i.e in **2023** topped the index overtaking **Japan** that held the first position for **last 5 years**.
- **France, Italy, Germany and Spain** tied with **Japan** in **second place**, providing passport holders access to **192 countries**.
- Then, in **third place** in the ranking, **Austria, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, South Korea, and Sweden** all have visa-free access to **191 destinations**.
- The **United Kingdom** is the **fourth place**, alongside **New Zealand, Norway, Belgium, Denmark and Switzerland**.
- **Australia and Portugal** shared the **No. 5 spot**.
- While the **United States** dropped down to **eighth place**, with visa-free access to **186 countries**.

- A total of **34 countries** are ranked in top 10 most powerful passports.
- Neighbouring **Pakistan** is positioned at **100th**, providing passport holders access to **33 countries**.
- At the bottom of the list is **Afghanistan** with easy access to **26 destinations**.
- The **UAE** makes it into the **Top 10** for the first time, having added an impressive **152 destinations** since the index's inception in **2006** to achieve its current visa-free score of **185**.
 - This improvement has led to a remarkable rise of **53 places** in the ranking, moving from **62nd to 9th position**.
- Both **China and Ukraine** are among the **Top 10 countries** that have climbed the highest in the ranking over the past decade.
 - Since **2014**, **China** has jumped up **24 places from 83rd to 59th** (with access to **85 destinations visa-free**).
 - While **Ukraine** has advanced by **23 spots, from 53rd to 30th**, with its nationals able to visit **148 destinations** without a prior visa.
- **Russia**, on the other hand, has fallen **seven places** over the past **ten years**, from **38th to 45th position** (with visa-free access to just **116 destinations**).
- The biggest faller over the **last decade is Venezuela**, which has plunged **17 places from 25th to 42nd** on the Henley Passport Index.
- **Yemen** has tumbled **15 places to sit at 100th** on the ranking, while both **Nigeria and Syria** have fallen **13 places to 92nd and 102nd, respectively**.
- **Bangladesh** comes in as the **5th-biggest faller**, dropping **11 places from 86th to 97th position** over the past 10 years.
- **Africa** accounted for **seven of the top ten countries** globally with the **highest Schengen** visa rejection rates in **2022**: Algeria (45.8%), Guinea-Bissau (45.2%), Nigeria (45.1%), Ghana (43.6%), Senegal (41.6%), Guinea (40.6%), and Mali (39.9%).
 - By contrast, only **one in twenty-five applicants** residing in the US, Canada, or the UK were rejected, and one in ten applying from Russia.
 - **Algerians** face a rejection rate **10 times greater** than that for those applying in **Canada**, while **Ghanaians** are four times more likely to be rejected than Russians.

- The global average number of destinations travellers are able to access visa-free has nearly doubled from **58 in 2006** to **111 in 2024**.

India:

- India has improved its ranking on the Henley Passport Index, moving up to the **82nd position** tied with **Senegal and Tajikistan**, with visa-free access to **58 countries**.
- India had previously reached the **80th position in January** when the **2024 rankings** were first announced.
- This progress from past ranks reflects increasing accessibility for Indian passport holders, who can now travel to several countries without a visa.
- India moved two points up this year, standing at 82nd instead of **last year's 84th position**.
- Out of the top **10 countries** on the list, only **UAE** offer visa-on-arrival entry to Indian passport holders, and that too only **for 14 days**.
- While India's passport ranking has improved its relatively low rank highlights the broader issue of global mobility inequality within developed and developing countries.

International Air Transport Association (IATA):

- The **International Air Transport Association** is a trade association of the world's airlines founded in **1945**.
- IATA has been described as a cartel since, in addition to setting technical standards for airlines, IATA also organized tariff conferences that served as a forum for price fixing.
- The Headquarters of the association is in **Montreal, Canada**.
- According to IATA, airlines will connect nearly **5 billion people** over **22,000 routes on 39 million flights in 2024**.
 - The air cargo transported will reach **62 million tonnes**, facilitating an astonishing **USD 8.3 trillion in trade**.
- **Willie Walsh** is the current **Director General** of IATA.

Mercer's Cost of Living City Rankings 2024



Recently: The **2024 edition** of the Cost of Living City Rankings was released by **Mercer**, a business of **Marsh McLennan**.

About the Index:

- The ranking offers insights to help multinational employers plan compensation strategies for their international assignees.
- Mercer's Cost of Living City Ranking includes **226 cities** across the **five continents**.
- It measures the comparative cost of more than **200 items** in each location, including housing, transportation, food, clothing, household goods and entertainment.
- The figures used in Mercer's Cost of Living and rental accommodation cost comparisons are derived from a survey conducted in **March 2024**.
- To ensure consistency in city-ranking comparisons, **New York City** was utilized as the **base city** and currency movements were measured against the US dollar.

Rankings:

Global:

- **Hong Kong** retained the **top spot** in this year's ranking.
- The Asian city, which also topped the annual list in **2022 and 2023**, was closely followed by **Singapore**, in second place.
- Given that **Zurich, Geneva, Basel and Bern** round out the **top six** most expensive cities, Switzerland's high cost of living may correlate with its superior quality of living.
- **New York (US), London (UK), Nassau (Bahamas) and Los Angeles (US)** were ranked on the **7th, 8th, 9th and 10th** positions respectively.
- Asia has the top two cities with the highest cost of living, primarily driven by high rental accommodation costs.
 - In addition to Hong Kong and Singapore, the other most expensive cities in Asia include **Shanghai (23), Beijing (25) and Seoul (32)**.
 - Some of the **least expensive** cities in the region are **Karachi (222), Bishkek (223) and Islamabad (224)**.
- **Five European cities** are in the global top 10 rankings, including four cities in Switzerland.
 - Other expensive cities in the region include **Copenhagen (11), Vienna (24), Paris (29) and Amsterdam (30)**.
- Cost of living in the US remains a significant issue in 2024, with **all US cities** in the ranking placing in the **top 100** and **seven cities** ranking in the **top 20**.
- **Canadian** cities are at the lower end of the ranking for North American cities, as the Canadian economy has shown resilience and is outperforming expectations.
 - **Toronto** is ranked the most **expensive in Canada (92)**, followed by **Vancouver (101)**.
- Mexican cities' cost of living went up significantly from the prior year due to the peso gaining value in 2023.
 - **Mexico City ranked 33**, up from **79 in 2023**, and **Monterrey ranked 115**, up from **155** last year.
- Within **South America**, Uruguay's capital **Montevideo** ranks as the **most expensive** location for international employees **(42)**.
 - It is followed by **Buenos Aires (77, down 32 places)** and **Sao Paulo (124)**.
- **Sydney, Australia, (58)** ranks as the **costliest city** in the **Pacific region**, outrunning **Noumea, New Caledonia**, which has moved up 10 places to 60 in the global ranking.
 - **New Zealand's Auckland** and **Wellington** remain the **least expensive** Pacific locations, coming in at **111th and 145th**, respectively.

- The African cities that placed highest in the global ranking are **Bangui in Central African Republic (14)**, **Djibouti**, the capital of the country by the same name **(18)**, and **N'djamena, Chad, (21)**.
 - The **least expensive cities** in the region include **Blantyre (221)**, **Lagos (225, down 178 places)** and **Abuja (226)**.
- Notably, **Lagos, Nigeria** dropped 178 places to **225**, the **largest change** globally compared to 2023.
- Ranked **15**, **Dubai**, United Arab Emirates, is the **costliest city in the Middle East**.
 - The next most expensive city in this region is **Tel Aviv**, which has dropped by eight places to rank 16th.
 - It is followed by **Abu Dhabi (43)**, **Riyadh (90)** and **Jeddah (97)**.
- **Accra, Ghana** (178th to 98th); **Addis Ababa, Ethiopia** (194th to 138th); **Istanbul, Turkiye** (185th to 130th); **Tirana, Albania** (153rd to 103rd) and **Cairo, Egypt** (217th to 168th) experienced the **largest increase** in their cost-of-living ranking over the last year.
- Between 2023 and 2024, the most significant **decreases** in cost of living rankings were seen in cities in **Lagos, Nigeria** (47th to 225th); **Luanda, Angola** (30th to 158th); **Abuja, Nigeria** (140th to 226th); **Santiago, Chile** (87th to 168th) and **Osaka, Japan** (93rd to 146th).

Indian Cities:

- **Mumbai**, ranked at **136th**, is the most expensive city in India.
- Other Indian Cities that featured in the ranking are – **New Delhi (165th)**, **Chennai (189th)**, **Bengaluru (195th)**, **Hyderabad (202nd)** and **Pune (205th)**.

Reason for the Increased Cost of Living:

- The **cost of housing** is a major factor in the Cost of Living City Ranking.
- Between 2023 and 2024, there was a lot of volatility in this cost around the world, with housing rental prices varying significantly between cities.
- For example, the **Turkish city of Istanbul** saw an average price **increase of 301%**, while **Tel Aviv** saw a **decrease of 22%** and **Minsk, Belarus**, saw a **decrease of 10%**.
- **New Delhi** average rental costs **increased by 13%** and the same average increase was noted in **Miami, Florida**.

- Most of the **top 10** most expensive cities also saw increases, although these were more moderate, coming in at between **3% and 8%** for all the cities except Nassau, Bahamas, which reported no change to the accommodation rental prices.

Environment, Defence, Science & Technology

Axiom- 4 Mission



Recently: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has shortlisted **two** of its four trained **Gaganyaan astronauts** for a mission to the International Space Station (ISS) in collaboration with United States' NASA later this year.

- Only one of the shortlisted astronauts will go on the mission.
- Group Captain **Shubhanshu Shukla** will serve as the **prime astronaut**, while Group Captain **Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair** will be his **backup**.

What is Axiom- 4 Mission?

- The Axiom Mission-4, the **fourth** private astronaut mission of NASA, is a private spaceflight to the **International Space Station** operated by **Axiom Space Inc.**
- The mission is slated for a launch in **October 2024** and is supported by **SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft.**
- Axiom Space has contracted SpaceX as **launch provider** for transportation to and from the space station, and to familiarize the private astronauts with systems, procedures, and emergency preparedness for the Dragon spacecraft.
- It will take off from the **Kennedy Space Centre in Florida** from a **Falcon 9 launcher** and is said to last for **14 days.**
- Axiom Mission-4 follows after the success of **Axiom-1, Axiom-2 and Axiom-3.**
- This collaboration between **ISRO, Axiom Space, and Nasa** is a significant leap forward in international space cooperation.
- The flight crew will include veteran astronaut **Peggy Whitson** and **three** more astronauts.
- The team is expected to include a **Polish astronaut**, revealed to be **Sławosz Uznański.**
- Along with them a **Hungarian** astronaut, **Tibor Kapu** was also added to the list of crew.
- The crew will also include an Indian Astronaut.
 - This is a result of ISRO's **Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC)** closing a **Space Flight Agreement** with **Axiom Space**, a US-based space infrastructure developer for its upcoming Axiom-4 mission to the ISS.
 - It can be recalled that the India-U.S. joint statement during the official state visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the U.S. in **June 2023** envisions a joint ISRO-NASA effort to the ISS.
- The training of both Indian astronauts, also known as "**Gaganyaatri**", will begin in the **first week of August.**
- The astronauts will have to go to the **United States** ahead of the mission to train on the specifics of the ISS.
- During the mission, the 'Gaganyatri' will undertake selected scientific research and technology demonstration experiments on board the ISS as well as engage in space outreach activities.
- This is a historic feat, as so far India has had only one astronaut in space, **Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma** who was aboard the Indo-Soviet mission in **1984.**

About Shubhendu Shukla:

- Shukla, who recently got promoted, was born in **Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh** on **October 10, 1985.**

- An alumnus of the **National Defence Academy**, he was commissioned on **June 17, 2006**, in IAF's **fighter stream**.
- Shukla is a Fighter Combat leader and a test pilot with around **2,000 hours** of flying experience to his credit.
- **Sukhoi-30MKI, Mig-21, Mig-29, An-32, Dornier, Hawk, and Jaguar** are some of the aircraft flown by Shukla.
- At **39**, he is the youngest to be picked as an astronaut-designate.

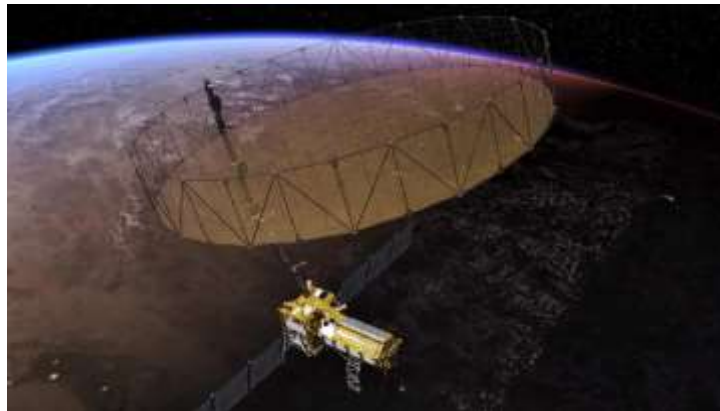
About Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair

- Group Captain Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, the back-up astronaut for the mission was born in **Thiruvazhiyad in Kerala** on **August 26, 1976**.
- Nair who is also an alumnus of **National Defence Academy**, is a recipient of the **Sword of Honour** at the Air Force Academy.
- On **December 19, 1998**, Nair was commissioned to the **fighter stream**.
- He also holds the highest achievement of being a flying instructor and has around **3000 hours** of flying experience to his credit.

India's Gaganyaan Mission:

- The Gaganyaan mission is an ambitious programme, aiming to demonstrate India's human spaceflight capability.
- The mission plans to send a **three-member** crew into a **400 km orbit** for **three days**, ending with a safe landing in Indian waters.
- **Four test pilots** from the Air Force have been selected by the ISRO for the Gaganyaan Mission.
- Their primary training was started at Isro's Astronaut Training Facility in **Bengaluru** for the Gaganyaan mission.
- The mission is unlikely to take place before **2025**, with the first unmanned flight still to take off.
- The first flight carrying humans will be launched only after two successful unmanned flights.

NISAR



Recently: Nasa's work on the radar **antenna reflector** for the **Nasa-Isro Synthetic Aperture Radar (Nisar)** satellite is nearing completion in **California**.

- The American space agency said that the testing is currently underway to ensure that this critical hardware component will deploy correctly following its launch from India.
- NISAR did not figure in the list of missions the Indian Space Research Organisation submitted to the **Lok Sabha** in response to a question on space missions to be launched this year.
 - This shows that the launch, which was slated for the **earlier half of the year**, might not be part of the plan this year.

What is NISAR?

- The **NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar or NISAR** has been built by space agencies of the **US and India** under a partnership agreement signed in **2014**.

- The **2,800 kilograms satellite** consists of both **L-band and S-band synthetic aperture radar (SAR)** instruments, which makes it a dual-frequency imaging radar satellite.
- While **NASA** has provided the **L-band radar**, GPS, a high-capacity solid-state recorder to store data, and a payload data subsystem, **ISRO** has provided the **S-band radar**, the GSLV launch system and spacecraft.
- Another important component of the satellite is its large **39-foot stationary antenna reflector**.
 - Made of a **gold-plated wire mesh**, the reflector will be used to focus “the radar signals emitted and received by the upward-facing feed on the instrument structure.
- Once launched into space, NISAR will observe subtle changes in Earth’s surfaces, helping researchers better understand the causes and consequences of such phenomena.
- It will spot warning signs of natural disasters, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and landslides.
- ISRO will use NISAR for a variety of purposes including agricultural mapping, and monitoring of glaciers in the Himalayas, landslide-prone areas and changes in the coastline.
- By using synthetic aperture radar (SAR), NISAR will produce high-**resolution images**.
 - SAR is capable of penetrating clouds and can collect data day and night regardless of the weather conditions.
 - The instrument’s imaging swath — the width of the strip of data collected along the length of the orbit track — is greater than **150 miles (240 kilometres)**, which allows it to image the entire Earth in **12 days.”**
- The satellite will operate for a minimum of **three years**.
- NASA requires the **L-band radar** for its global science operations for at least **three years**. Meanwhile, **ISRO** will utilise the **S-band radar** for a minimum of **five years**.

The Reflector and the Delay:

- The **drum-shaped reflector**, measuring about **39 feet (12 meters)** across, is one of Nasa's key contributions to this joint mission with the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**.
- NISAR was slated for a launch in the **first half** of this year.
- The satellite, that had been put together in the United States after one of the two radars and some other components had been flown in from India, had been delivered to **Bengaluru** last year.

- However, in further testing, the **12-metre large antenna**, was discovered to be in **need of some improvements**.
- In March, the reflector was transported back from India to a specialised facility in **California**.
- There, reflective tape was applied, and other precautionary measures were taken to mitigate temperature increases that could potentially affect the deployment of the reflector from its stowed configuration before beginning science operations.
- After the successful completion of testing, Nasa plans to transport the reflector to an Isro facility in **Bengaluru, India**.
- At this facility, the reflector will be **reintegrated with the radar system** by teams from Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California and ISRO.
- During this period, a launch readiness date will be determined by ISRO in coordination with Nasa.
- However, it is important to note that the Nisar launch **cannot** occur between **early October 2024 and early February 2025**.
- Nasa said that launching during this window would subject the satellite to periods of alternating sunlight and shadows due to the Sun's position, causing temperature fluctuations that could affect the deployment of Nisar's boom and radar antenna reflector.

ISRO's missions to be launched this year:

- **Six missions** have been listed for the launch in the **next five months**.
- This includes the **first unmanned flight** under the **Gaganyaan programme**.
- The **Spadex**, or **Space Docking Experiment**, mission that will demonstrate ISRO's capability to join or assemble parts of a satellite in space is also expected to be launched.
 - Spadex will lay the groundwork for ISRO's plans to build **a permanent space station by 2030**.
- A **TDS-01 mission**, that is meant to be technology demonstration for an electric propulsion system designed by **Institute for Plasma Research-Gandhinagar**, would also be launched later this year.
- **Navigation Satellite NVS-02**, meant for the country's IRNSS constellation, will be carried by a GSLV rocket.
- ISRO plans to carry out a launch of the newly-introduced **SSLV (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle)** rocket as well.

Exercise Nomadic Elephant 2024



Recently: The **16th edition** of the bilateral exercise between **Indian and Mongolia – Nomadic Elephant** was conducted for 14 days from **3rd July to 16th July** at the **Joint Training Node in Umroi (Meghalaya)**.

- The event was graced by **Maj Gen Ganbyamba Sunrev**, Chief of General Staff of the Mongolian Armed Forces, and **Lt Gen Zubin A Minwalla**, of the Trishakti Corps.

What is Exercise Nomadic Elephant?

- The exercise - 'Nomadic Elephant' - is an **annual training event** between India and Mongolia, which is conducted **alternatively** in the two countries.
- The last edition was conducted from **July 17- 31 at Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia**.
- The aim of the Exercise is to enhance joint military capability of both sides to undertake counter insurgency operations in a Sub Conventional scenario under Chapter VII of the United Nations Mandate.

Contingents:

- The **Indian contingent** comprised of **45 personnel** was represented by a **Battalion of SIKKIM SCOUTS** along with personnel from other arms and services.
- The Mongolian contingent was being represented by personnel **from 150 Quick Reaction Force Battalion** of the Mongolian Army.

How was the Exercise conducted?

- The exercise focused on operations in the semi-urban and mountainous terrain.
- Tactical drills during the Exercise included Response to a Terrorist Action, Establishment of a Joint Command Post, Establishment of an Intelligence & Surveillance Centre, Securing of a Helipad/ Landing Site, Small Team Insertion & Extraction, Special Heliborne Operations, Cordon & Search Operations besides Employment of Drones and Counter Drone Systems amongst others.
- Troops from both nations eagerly interacted, sharing experiences and insights, further strengthening the bonds formed during the training.

India- Mongolia Relations:

- India established formal diplomatic relations with Mongolia on **February 24th, 1955** becoming the **first country outside the soviet bloc** to establish diplomatic relations with the country.
- India sponsored Mongolia's candidacy for membership of the United Nations in **1961** despite opposition from Taiwan and China.
- Mongolia in **1973** became the **second country after Bhutan** to recognise **Bangladesh** as an independent country following the liberation of Bangladesh by Indian troops.
- An **Indo-Mongolian joint declaration** was signed in February **1973** during the Indian visit of the Mongolian Prime Minister **Yumjaagiin Tsedenbal**.
- A **treaty of friendly relations** and cooperation was signed in **February 1994** during the visit of the then Mongolian president **Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat**, to India.

- In **early 2021**, India stepped up on the COVID-19 vaccine distribution to several countries, including Mongolia, to mitigate some of the delays by the WHO

Exercise KHAAN QUEST 2024



Recently: The Indian Army has sent a group to **Ulaanbaatar, the Capital of Mongolia**, to take part in the multinational military drill **KHAAN QUEST 2024**, which will run from **July 27th to August 9th, 2024**.

- The exercise will bring together military forces from around the world to collaborate and enhance their peacekeeping capabilities.

What is Exercise KHAAN QUEST?

- The exercise first started as a bilateral event between **USA and Mongolian Armed Forces** in the year **2003**.
- Subsequently, from the year **2006** onwards the exercise graduated to a **Multinational Peacekeeping Exercise** with current year being the **21st iteration**.

- The **previous edition** was conducted in **Mongolia** from **19th June to 2nd July 2023**.
- The **U.S. Indo-Pacific Command** is one of the sponsors of the drill, which is being held by the Mongolian Armed Forces.
- Aim of Exercise KHAAN QUEST is to prepare Indian Armed Forces for peacekeeping missions while operating in a multinational environment, thereby increasing interoperability and military readiness in peace support operations under **Chapter VII of United Nations Charter**.

Indian Contingent:

- The Indian Army contingent comprising **40 personnel** is being represented mainly by troops from a Battalion of the **MADRAS REGIMENT** along with personnel from other Arms and Services.
- **One Woman Officer and two Women Soldiers** will also form part of the contingent.

How will the exercise be conducted?

- Tactical drills to be practiced during the exercise will include establishment of Static and Mobile Check Points, Cordon and Search Operations, Patrolling, Evacuation of Civilians from Hostile Area, Counter Improvised Explosive Device drills, Combat First Aid and Casualty Evacuation, among others.
- The exercise will enable the participating countries to share their best practices in Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for conduct of joint operations.

Commercial Release of GM Mustard



Recently: The Supreme Court delivered a **split decision** on the environmental release of genetically modified (GM) mustard.

- The **two-judge bench** directed the Union government to come up with a **national policy** on stringent and transparent bio-safety protocols with regard to genetically modified organisms (GMOs).
- The judgment by **justice BV Nagarathna** quashed the **October 2022 decision** of the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)** to allow the environmental release of GM mustard, **DMH-11**.
 - According to her, the decision was vitiated on grounds of **lack of effective consultation** and disregard of the principles of public trust doctrine.
- Dissenting with this view, **justice Sanjay Karol** maintained that he was unable to find any evidence of arbitrariness or irregularity in the manner the GEAC took the decision on GM mustard in October 2022.

- The judge added that the perusal of all available documents on record could not indicate any procedural gaps, leading to the violation of fundamental rights of people.

What are Genetically Modified Crops?

- The Genetically Modified (GM) crops are derived from plants whose genes are **artificially modified**, usually by inserting, deleting or altering genetic material from another organism, in order to give it a new property.
- This genetic modification confers special characteristics to the crop, such as **resistance to pests, tolerance to herbicides, improved nutritional content, or better shelf life.**
- The first genetically engineered crop plant was **tobacco**, reported in **1983**.
- It was developed creating a chimeric gene that joined an **antibiotic resistant gene** to the **T1 plasmid from *Agrobacterium*.**
- The **first field trials** of genetically engineered plants occurred in **France and the US** in **1986**.
 - Tobacco plants were engineered to be resistant to herbicides.
- In **1987, Plant Genetic Systems**, founded by **Marc Van Montagu and Jeff Schell**, was the **first company** to genetically engineer **insect-resistant plants**.
 - It incorporated genes that produced insecticidal proteins from ***Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt)*** into tobacco.
- The **People's Republic of China** was the **first country to commercialise** transgenic plants, introducing a virus-resistant tobacco in **1992**.
- In **1994**, the **European Union** approved tobacco engineered to be resistant to the herbicide ***bromoxynil***.
 - This made it the **first** genetically engineered crop commercialised in **Europe**.
- In **1996** a total of **35 approvals** had been granted to commercially grow 8 transgenic crops and one flower crop (carnation), with 8 different traits in **6 countries plus the EU**.
- By **2010, 29 countries** had planted commercialised genetically modified crops and a further **31 countries** had granted regulatory approval for transgenic crops to be imported.

GM Crops in India:

- Presently, India has permitted only one GM crop – **Bt cotton** for commercial cultivation.
- Bt- Cotton for **insect resistance** has been released for commercial cultivation in India during **2002** by **GEAC (Genetic Engineering Approval Committee)**.
- Cultivation and production of Bt cotton has grown exponentially since then and India has become **second largest producer of cotton** and **leading exporter** within the world.
- The GEAC cleared **Bt brinjal** for commercialization in October **2009**.
- But following concerns raised by some farmers, anti-GM activists and scientists, the govt of India officially announced **moratorium on Bt. Brinjal** on **9 February 2010**.
- The GEAC in **2014**, gave approval for limited experimental field trials of GM **rice, brinjal, mustard, cotton and chickpea** for the sole purpose of generating biosafety data.

Dhara Mustard Hybrid-11 (DMH- 11):

- On **October 18**, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) recommended the “**environmental release**” of the transgenic hybrid mustard **DMH-11** for seed production.

Hybridisation:

- Hybridisation involves **crossing two genetically dissimilar plant varieties** that can even be from the same species.
 - The **first-generation (F1)** offspring from such crosses tend to have higher yields than what either parent can individually give.
- Such hybridisation isn't easy in mustard, as its flowers have both female (**pistil**) and male (**stamen**) reproductive organs.
 - This makes the plants largely self-pollinating.
- Since the eggs of one plant cannot be fertilised by the pollen grains from another, it limits the scope for developing hybrids.

Production of DMH-11:

- The hybrid mustard DMH-11 was **first bred in 2002** by the scientists at **Delhi University's Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants (CGMCP)**, containing **two alien genes** isolated from a soil bacterium called *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens*.
- The **first gene ('barnase')** codes for a protein that **impairs pollen production** and renders the plant into which it is incorporated male-sterile.
- This plant is then crossed with a fertile parental line containing, in turn, the **second 'barstar'** gene that blocks the action of the barnase gene.
- The resultant **F1 progeny** is both **high-yielding** and also capable of producing seed/ grain, thanks to the barstar gene in the second fertile line.
- This system was used to develop DMH-11 by crossing a popular Indian mustard variety '**Varuna' (the barnase line)** with **an East European 'Early Heera-2' mutant (barstar)**.
- DMH-11 is claimed to have shown an **average 28% yield increase** over Varuna in contained field trials carried out by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- GEAC has also recommended the environmental release of DMH-11's parental lines (carrying the barnase and barstar genes) for them to be used to develop new hybrids.

The Current Case:

- The court was dealing with a bundle of petitions, spearheaded by **NGO Gene Campaign** and environmental activist **Aruna Rodrigues** challenging the decision of the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)** that cleared open air release of GM mustard crop- DMH-11.
- The judgment in the matter was **reserved on January 18** when the Centre argued that banning GM crops would harm national interests.
- On **January 17**, the bench made it clear that their focus was on the broader implications of GM crops
- The bench sought to understand the steps taken by the Centre following a report by a Court-appointed **Technical Expert Committee (TEC)** in **June 2013**.
 - This report advised against the open release of GMOs due to unresolved safety concerns.

- The committee, in its report, had observed that GM mustard had never been tested as a **Herbicide Tolerant (HT) crop** because there are no regulatory guidelines and protocols for testing such crops in India.
- In January 2024, when court asked about the weight given to the TEC's recommendations before GEAC's decision on commercial release of GM Mustard, the government stated that the TEC had exceeded its terms of reference and that the regulatory framework had since been strengthened.
 - The Petitioners contended that the regulatory processes remained inadequate and lacked transparency.
- Despite the dissent on the environmental release of GM mustard, the bench was unequivocal in underlining the significance of a **national policy on GMOs**.
 - It directed the Union government to evolve a national policy on GMOs following appropriate consultations with all the stakeholders, including states, independent experts and farmers' bodies.
- Given the divergent views, the matter will now be placed **before Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud**, who will refer it to a larger bench to re-hear the case.
- In the meantime, the government cannot unilaterally release GM mustard as a result of an undertaking, albeit verbal, that it gave the court two years ago, promising not to take any steps on GM mustard till the judgment.

COSPAR Awards 2024



Recently: Two Indian space scientists, **Prahlad Chandra Agrawal** and **Anil Bhardwaj**, were honoured with prestigious awards by the **Committee on Space Research (COSPAR)**, the world's first scientific body dedicated to space science research.

- Mr Prahlad Agarwal received the **Harrie Massey Award** and Mr. Bharadwaj was conferred with the **Vikram Sarabhai Medal**.
- The award was presented during the opening ceremony of the **45th COSPAR Scientific Assembly** in **Busan, South Korea** on July 15th, 2024.

Who is Dr Prahlad Chandra Agarwal?

- Dr Agarwal have been involved with major Indian space programmes including the **AstroSat space telescope** and the **Chandrayaan 1** lunar mission.
- Dr. Agrawal, **83**, was the principal investigator for India's first dedicated multi-wavelength space telescope AstroSat, which the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched on **September 28, 2015**.
 - Approved by the **Department of Science & Technology** in **2004**, AstroSat was built on a **Rs 400 crore** budget.

- It has the unique ability to view celestial objects in **multiple wavelengths** at the same time, thanks to its suite of four co-aligned instruments and an X-ray sky monitor.
- It was developed in a collaboration between **the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR)**, the **Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA)**, **Bengaluru**, and **ISRO's U.R. Rao Satellite Centre**.
- Planned as a **five-year mission**, AstroSat is still producing useful data, most recently resulting in a significant discovery of a black hole binary source.
- AstroSat's observations have been cited in more than 500 scientific papers and have resulted in more than 30 PhD theses.
- Dr. Agrawal is a former senior professor in **TIFR's Space Physics department**.
- After postdoctoral stints at **the California Institute of Technology (Caltech)** and **NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory**, he helped realise NASA's **HEAO-1 A4 instrument**.
- He went on to lead the team that developed the **Indian X-Ray Astronomy Experiment** on board the **IRS P-3 satellite** launched in **March 1996**.
- Dr. Agrawal was a member of the **Lunar Task Force** set up by ISRO to prepare the project report of India's first moon mission, **Chandrayaan 1**.
- He has been a member or chairman of the Governing Councils of premier institutions, including the IIAp, the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences, and the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics.

Who is Prof. Anil Bharadwaj?

- Prof. Anil Bharadwaj is the **Director of Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad**.
- Prof. Anil Bhardwaj is recognised for his outstanding contributions to the Planetary Exploration Program of India.
- Prof. Anil Bhardwaj is a respected space and planetary scientist, having contributed to the development of instruments for Indian planetary and space missions, multi-wavelength observations of solar system bodies, and theoretical studies of planetary atmospheric ionospheric processes.
- He and his teams' scientific experiments have been flown in all the Indian missions to the Moon, viz., **Chandrayaan-1, Chandrayaan-2, Chandrayaan-3 Lander and Rover**, as well as to **Mars (Mangalyaan)** and the solar mission **Aditya-L1**.
- It is only the **second time** that this coveted COSPAR Vikram Sarabhai Medal has been awarded to a **scientist from ISRO**.

- Earlier, **(Late) Prof. U. R. Rao** was decorated with this medal in **1996** at the COSPAR Assembly in **Birmingham, UK**.

The Committee of Space Research (COSPAR):

- The Committee on Space Research (COSPAR), one of the largest forums for space scientists, was established in **1958**, immediately after the launch of the **first-ever satellite** by the **then-Soviet Union** in **1957**.
- It was established by the **International Council for Scientific Unions (ICSU)** and its first chair was **Hildegard Korf Kallmann-Bijl**.
- Every **second year**, COSPAR calls for a General Assembly (also called Scientific Assembly).
 - These are conferences currently gathering almost three thousand participating space researchers.
- The **1st General Assembly** was held in **London, UK**.
- The **45th Assembly (2024)** was held in **Busan, South Korea**, the **46th Assembly (2026)** will be held in **Florence, Italy** and the **47th Assembly (2028)** will be held in **Dubai, UAE**.
- It is Headquartered in **Paris, France**.
- **Pascale Ehrenfreund** is the current President of COSPAR.

COSPAR Awards:

- COSPAR bestows a number of medals and awards each year, some jointly with other institutions or space agencies.
- Scientists who have made an outstanding contribution to space research and who are working in any of the fields covered by COSPAR are eligible.
- Through an agreement with the **International Astronomical Union (IAU)**, recipients of COSPAR awards are honored by the **attribution of minor planets** designated by the IAU Working Group on Small Bodies Nomenclature.

COSPAR Harrie Massey:

- It recognises outstanding contributions to space research in which a leadership role is of particular importance.
- Named after physicist **Harrie Massey**, a prominent figure in space research, the award highlights individuals who have had a substantial influence on the direction of space research.
- The award is given by the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) and was **established in 1999**.

- Along with a medal and citation, the awardee is honoured by having a minor planet named for them, in this case **20064 Prahladagrawal**.
- Dr Prahlad is the **first Indian recipient** of the award for **space research**.

COSPAR Vikram Sarabhai Medal:

- It honours outstanding space science research in developing countries.
- This award is jointly given by **COSPAR and ISRO**, in honour of **Dr. Vikram Sarabhai**, who started the space program in the country and is called as the **"Father of Indian Space Program"**.
- Prof. Sarabhai started space research in the country by establishing **Physical Research Laboratory (PRL)** in **1947**; hence, PRL is known as the **'Cradle of Space Research in India'**.
- The 2024 award was presented by the President of COSPAR, Prof. Pascale Ehrenfreund, and Vice-Presidents, Profs. Catherine Cesarsky and Pietro Ubertini.

Other Awards:

- **COSPAR Space Science Award** for outstanding contributions to space science.
 - 2024 Awardee- Rosine Lallement (France)
- **COSPAR International Cooperation Medal** for distinguished contributions to space science and work that has contributed significantly to the promotion of international scientific cooperation.
 - 2024 Awardee- Dieter Bilitza (USA)
- **COSPAR William Nordberg Medal** commemorating the late William Nordberg and for distinguished contributions to the application of space science in a field covered by COSPAR.
 - 2024 Awardee- Matt Griffin (United Kingdom) and Kanako Seki (Japan)
- **COSPAR Distinguished Service Medal** recognizing extraordinary services rendered to COSPAR over many years.
 - 2024 Awardee- Gerhard Kminek (Netherlands)
- **Jeoujang Jaw Award** - a joint award of COSPAR and the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

- It recognizes scientists who have made distinguished pioneering contributions to promoting space research, establishing new space science research branches and founding new exploration programs.
- 2024 Awardee- Daniel Baker (USA)
- **COSPAR Outstanding Paper Awards** for Young Scientists recognizes first authors under **31 years** of age at the time of submission of the manuscript for publication in Advances in Space Research (ASR) or in Life Sciences in Space Research (LSSR).

Sports:

Olympic Order to Abhinav Bindra



Recently: Olympic gold medal winning shooter **Abhinav Bindra** was on Monday awarded with **Olympic Order** by the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)** for outstanding contributions to the Olympic Movement.

- The award will be officially handed over to him during the **142nd IOC Session** in **Paris** on August 10, a day before the closing of the Paris Olympics.

- Bindra will become only the **second Indian** to win the gold category award after it was first presented to former Prime Minister **Indira Gandhi** in **1983**.
- 22-year-old Manu Bhaker won a historic bronze medal in the women's 10m air pistol event at the 2024 Paris Olympics, becoming the first Indian woman shooter to win this medal.

Who is Abhinav Bindra?

- Abhinav Apjit Bindra is an Indian Olympic **gold medallist**, retired sport shooter, and businessman.
- He is the first and one of only two Indians to win an Individual Olympic Gold Medal.
- Born on **September 28, 1982**, in **Dehradun, India**, Bindra took up rifle shooting in his mid-teens and quickly advanced in the sport.
- He had a legendary career and great contributions to Indian Sports.
- On **5 September 2016**, he announced his **retirement**.

Achievements:

- He won a gold at the **2006 ISSF World Championships**, becoming the first Indian rifle shooter to win a **World Championship title**.
- His most notable achievement was winning the **gold medal** in the men's **10-meter** air rifle event at the **2008 Beijing Olympics**, marking a historic milestone for India.
- He is also the first Indian to have held concurrently the **world and Olympic titles**.
- Bindra has also won **seven medals** at the **Commonwealth Games** and **three medals** at the **Asian Games**.
- With more than 150 medals in his 22-year career, he became the recipient of the **Padma Bhushan** from the Government of India in **2009**.
- In **2018**, Abhinav was bestowed with the prestigious **Blue Cross**, the ISSF's highest honor.

Positions and Responsibilities:

- He served as a **goodwill ambassador** for the **Rio 2016 Olympics** Indian contingent, having been appointed to that post by the **Indian Olympics Association (IOA)**.
- He was a member of the Athlete Committee of the **International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF)** from **2010 to 2020**, serving as its **Chair** from **2014**.
- He was appointed to the **IOC Athlete Commission** in **2018**.
- Bindra's primary outreach to Indian sports is through the **Abhinav Bindra Foundation**, a non-profit organization that works to integrate sports, science, and technology into Indian sports and encourage high-performance physical training.
- Bindra has also been involved in policy-making and athlete development.

What is the Olympic Order:

- The Olympic Order is the supreme individual honour accorded by the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)**.
- It was established in **1975** and is awarded for particularly distinguished contributions to the **Olympic Movement**, i.e. recognition of efforts worthy of merit in the cause of sport.
- Nominations are proposed by the **Olympic Orders Council** and decided upon by the **Executive Board**.
- It is a successor to the **Olympic Diploma of Merit**.
- The Olympic Order originally had **three grades (gold, silver and bronze)**.
- In **1984**, at the **87th IOC Session** in **Sarajevo (Yugoslavia)**, it was decided that in future there would be **no distinction** between the silver and bronze order.
- The **gold order** is reserved for **heads of state** and exceptional circumstances.
- The insignia of the Olympic Order features a collar or chain with the five Olympic rings and the kotinos emblem, an olive wreath.
- Recipients also receive a lapel badge in the corresponding grade.
- **Avery Brundage** from United States is the **first recipient** of the Gold Olympic Order in **1975**.
- **Nadia Comăneci** one of the two only athletes to be awarded the Olympic Order **twice (1984, 2004)**, the other one being the Brazilian **Carlos Arthur Nuzman (1992, 2016)**.

International Olympic Committee:

- The IOC was created by **Pierre de Coubertin**, on **23 June 1894** with **Demetrios Vikelas** as its first president.
- It is the authority responsible for organising the **modern Summer, Winter, and Youth Olympic Games**.
- The IOC is the governing body of the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and of the worldwide Olympic Movement.
- It is Headquartered at Olympic House, **Lausanne, Switzerland**.
- The IOC organises the modern Olympic Games and Youth Olympic Games (YOG), held in summer and winter every **four years**.
- The **first Summer Olympics** was held in **Athens, Greece, in 1896**; the **first Winter Olympics** was in **Chamonix, France, in 1924**.
- Until **1992**, both Summer and Winter Olympics were held in the **same year**.
- After that year, however, the IOC shifted the Winter Olympics to the even years between Summer Games.
- The International Olympic Committee has **111 members currently and 38 Honorary Members**.
- The **Executive Board** of the IOC, founded in **1921**, consists of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) **President, four Vice-Presidents and ten other members**.
 - It manages the affairs of the IOC.
- The IOC Session is the general meeting of the members of the IOC, held **once a year** in which each member has one vote. It is the IOC's supreme organ and its decisions are final.
- **Thomas Bach** is the current President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

AIFF Awards 2023-24



Recently: The **All India Football Federation (AIFF)** recently held its annual awards ceremony, recognizing outstanding achievements in Indian football for the 2023-24 season.

- The ceremony was held in **New Delhi** on Friday, **July 19, 2024** and Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, Olympic medallist Yogeshwar Dutt, India's Davis Cup captain, Rohit Rajpal were among the dignitaries during the ceremony.
- The entire top brass of the AIFF, including the **President Kalyan Chaubey, Vice President NA Haris, Treasurer Kipa Ajay, Acting Secretary General M Satyanarayan**, Executive Committee members, and senior officials of the state associations, were also present.

Who were the Awardees?

AIFF Men's Player of the Year:

- **Lallianzuala Chhangte** was awarded the AIFF Men's Player of the Year for the **second time** in a row.
 - This made him only the **fifth player** to win the award multiple times.

- The 2023-24 Indian Super League Cup Winner scored **11 goals and assisted seven** in all competitions for his club **Mumbai City FC** and was the highest scoring Indian in the ISL.
- For the Indian national team, Chhangte scored against Qatar in Doha in the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers in June 2024.

AIFF Women's Player of the Year:

- **Indumathi Kathiresan** was awarded the AIFF Women's Player of the Year, becoming the first player from **Tamil Nadu** to win the award.
- The midfielder won the 2023-24 Indian Women's League title with **Odisha FC**, scoring five goals in the competition.
- For the Indian national team, she scored against **Estonia** in the **Turkish Women's Cup** in February 2024.

AIFF Promising Men's Player of the Year:

- Young striker **David Lalhlansanga** was awarded the AIFF Promising Men's Player of the Year for his fiery goalscoring form in the season.
- The 22-year-old scored **34 goals** for **Mohammedan Sporting** in last season's I-League, Calcutta Football League and the Durand Cup, helping his side win the former two titles.

AIFF Promising Women's Player of the Year:

- Eighteen-year-old winger **Neha** was awarded the AIFF Promising Women's Player of the Year for her stellar performances down the flanks.
- She scored two goals in **India's SAFF U19 Women's Championship** triumph in **Bangladesh**.

AIFF Men's Coach of the Year:

- **Jamshedpur FC** head coach **Khalid Jamil** was awarded the AIFF Men's Coach of the Year.
- Taking charge of the club midseason, he led the Red Miners to the semi-finals of the Kalinga Super Cup, their best-ever finish in the competition.

AIFF Women's Coach of the Year:

- The AIFF Women's Coach of the Year was awarded to **Sukla Dutta**, who coached India to the **SAFF U19 Women's Championship** title in Bangladesh.
- She also won the inaugural edition of the IWL 2 as the head coach of **Sreebhumi FC**, thus earning promotion to next season's IWL.

Other Awardees:

- Referee of the Year: Ramachandran Venkatesh
- Assistant Referee of the Year: Ujjal Halder
- Most Successful MA (Club Competitions): Indian Football Association (West Bengal)
- Most Successful MA (NFC Competitions): All Manipur Football Association
- Best MA for hosting most AIFF competitions: Football Association of Odisha and Goa Football Association
- MA with most player registrations (men's): Kerala Football Association
- MA with most player registrations (women's): Western India Football Association (Maharashtra)
- Special Award for MA launching new projects: Gujarat State Football Association
- MA with most Grassroots activities: Gujarat State Football Association
- MA with most Youth tournaments conducted: Karnataka State Football Association
- MA with most Coaching courses: Punjab Football Association
- MA with most Refereeing courses: Gujarat State Football Association

All India Football Federation:

- All India Football Federation (AIFF) is the governing body of **football, futsal** and **beach soccer** in India.
- It is a member of **FIFA**, and is affiliated with the **Asian Football Confederation** and **South Asian Football Federation**.
- It is affiliated with the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**, Government of India.

- Before the formation of the All India Football Federation (AIFF), the de facto ruling body for association football in India was the **Indian Football Association (IFA)**.
 - The IFA, mainly governed by Englishmen, was founded in **1893** and ran the game in the **Bengal region**.
- The IFA started efforts to form a countrywide football federation in **1935** when the federation, as well as seven other associations, met at a conference but consensus could not be reached.
- After differences of opinion and other conflicts were resolved, a meeting was conducted in **March 1937** which would serve to be the beginning of the start of the AIFF.
- The AIFF was **officially founded** on **23 June 1937** after representatives from the **nine regional football associations** met at the Army Headquarters in **Shimla**.
- In **1948**, the AIFF gained **affiliation with FIFA**, the governing body for football around the world.
 - Later that year, the national team was officially formed and participated in their first official tournament, the **1948 Summer Olympics**.
- In **1977**, the AIFF started the **Federation Cup** which was the first club based national tournament in the country.
- In **1996**, the AIFF began the **first national league** in the country, the semi-professional National Football League.
 - In **2006**, the AIFF reformatted the league as the **I-League** in an effort to professionalise the game.
- It is headquartered in **New Delhi** and **Kalyan Chaubey** is the current **President** of the AIFF.

AIFF Awards:

- The **AIFF Player of the Year** Awards are the annual football awards presented to the best footballers in India by the All India Football Federation (AIFF).
- The AIFF first announced the award for **Men's Player of the Year in 1992**.
 - **M. Vijayan** was the inaugural winner. He was also the first player to win it consecutively in **1997 and 2000**. He has won the award **three times**.
 - **Sunil Chhetri** has won the award a record **seven times**.
 - No winner was announced in **1998 and 1999**. It was **re-introduced in 2000**.
- The AIFF **Women's Player of the Year** Award was introduced in **2001**.
 - **Bembem Devi** was its first recipient.

- No winner was given out from **2002** up to **2012**.
- In **2013**, the award was **re-introduced** and Bembem Devi won it for the second time.
- **Bala Devi** has won the award a record three times: in **2014, 2015 and 2020–21**.
- **Manisha Kalyan** won the award consecutively for **2020–21 and 2022–23**.
- Along with the men's and women's awards, the **AIFF Emerging Player of the Year** Award for men was introduced in **2013**.
 - A similar award for **women** was introduced in **2015**.

Important Days of the Month

World Zoonoses Day 2024



Recently: The **2024 edition** of the World Zoonoses Day was observed on **July 6th**.

- The day is observed to raise awareness about zoonotic diseases and their impact on human and animal health.
- It is observed to commemorate the day when the first vaccination against the disease was developed.

What is Zoonoses?

- Zoonosis is an infectious disease that is transmitted between species from animals to humans (or from humans to animals).
- Approximately **60%** of **known infectious diseases** in humans and **75%** of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic in nature.
- Transmission- Zoonotic diseases can be transmitted through direct contact with infected animals, consumption of contaminated food or water, inhalation of infectious particles, and bites from infected vectors such as mosquitoes and ticks.
- Some well-known zoonotic diseases include rabies, Ebola, avian influenza (bird flu), Zika virus, Lyme disease, and COVID-19.

Theme:

- Every year World Zoonoses Day is observed on a theme.
- The theme for the year 2024 is **"One World, One Health: Prevent Zoonoses"**.
- This theme emphasises the need to break the transmission cycle to prevent future pandemics like COVID-19.

History:

- In **1885**, World Zoonoses Day originated, when French scientist and Microbiologist, **Louis Pasteur** successfully administered the first **rabies** vaccine to a little boy named **Joseph Meister**.
 - Rabies is one of the deadliest and most widespread zoonotic diseases in the world.

- It is known to spread through species and caused by **Rhabdoviridae virus** that is spread through contact with the saliva or tissue fluids of infected animals.
- It is most commonly transmitted through bites from wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats.
- The day was officially recognized and observed on **July 6, 2007**, honouring the **100th death anniversary** of Louis Pasteur.

Significance:

- World Zoonoses Day is celebrated with the aim of increasing public awareness about zoonotic diseases.
- It is crucial for people to be informed about preventive measures and treatment options for zoonotic diseases.

World Population Day 2024



Recently: The 2024 edition of the World Population Day was observed on **July 11th**.

- World Population Day is observed around the globe to shed light on the challenges and opportunities presented by the world's growing population.
- It serves as a reminder of the urgent need for collaboration and action to ensure a prosperous future for humanity.
- The **United Nations Population Fund** releases a statement every year on the occasion of World Population Day.

Theme:

- The official World Population Day 2024 Theme is – ***"Leave No One Behind, Count Everyone"***.

History:

- It was established by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** in **1989**.
- The UNDP designated this day as an annual event to commemorate the world's population reaching **5 billion** people on **July 11, 1987**.
- The day was suggested by **Dr K.C. Zachariah**.
- It was sparked by excitement on Five Billion Day on July 11, 1987, roughly the day the world's population surpassed five billion.

Significance:

- World Population Day serves as an opportunity to acknowledge the diverse challenges faced by humanity due to population growth.
- It aims to foster global awareness of issues such as overpopulation, reproductive health and rights, gender equality, poverty and sustainable development.

United Nations Development Programme:

- It is a United Nations agency tasked with helping countries eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable economic growth and human development.

- It was founded on **22 November 1965** with the merging of the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (EPTA) and the Special Fund in **1958**.
- It is headquartered in the **New York City**.
- The UNDP Executive Board is made up of representatives from **36 countries** around the world who serve on a rotating basis.
- It is funded entirely by voluntary contributions from member nations.
- **Achim Steiner** is the current head of UNDP.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):

- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), formerly the **United Nations Fund for Population Activities**, is a UN agency aimed at improving reproductive and maternal health worldwide.
- The UNFPA supports programs in more than 144 countries across **four geographic regions**: Arab States and Europe, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa.
- The agency **began** operations in **1969** as the **United Nations Fund for Population Activities** under the administration of the United Nations Development Fund.
- In **1971** it was placed under the authority of the United Nations General Assembly.
- Its name was changed into United Nations Population Fund in **1987**.
- It is headquartered in **New York City**.
- **Natalia Kanem** is the current head of UNFPA.

World Youth Skills Day 2024



Recently: The 2024 edition of the World Youth Day was observed on **July 15th**.

- The occasion highlights the importance of having a skilled workforce in every country.
- It also sheds light on how the ability of a nation to provide young people with the skills they need to alter their lives and communities is critical to the world's future.

Theme:

- The theme for World Youth Skills Day 2024 is ***"Youth Skills for Peace and Development"***.
- It emphasises the integral role youth play in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

History:

- As it moved toward a more sustainable development model, the United Nations recognized the growing importance of skills around the globe in **2014**.
- The United Nations designated **July 15** as World Youth Skills Day to address obstacles to skills and competencies by lowering barriers to employment.
- The United Nations and its organizations seek to guarantee that the skills of young people around the world are recognized and accredited.

Significance:

- Employable young people can be assisted in skilling up through improved collaboration among governments, employers, worker's organizations, and relevant stakeholders.

- On **July 15, 2015**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **Skill India Mission**, to train over **40 crore people** in various skills by 2022.
 - The mission's goal is to provide vocational training and certification to Indian kids to empower them for a better future.

National Flag Day 2024



Recently: The **2024 edition** of the National Flag Day was observed on **July 22nd**.

- This day is significant as it honours the symbol of India's unity, integrity and sovereignty.

The Indian National Flag:

- National Flag of India, better known as **"Tiranga" or "Tricolor,"** is a rectangular flag with **three parallel strips** of **Indian Saffron, White, and Green** having a circular wheel in the middle with **24 spokes** called **Ashoka Chakra**.

History of the Indian National Flag:

- The first Indian flag- It had religious symbols and eight roses on it with Vande Matram written in the middle.
 - It was hoisted on **August 7, 1906** at **Parsi Bagan Square in Kolkata**.
- Second Indian flag- It had partial modifications. It was hoisted by Bhikaji Cama in **Germany**.
 - **Bhikaji Rustom Cama** was the first Indian who raised the flag on foreign soil.
- Third Indian Flag- Bal Gangadhar Tilak used a different type of flag in the year **1917**.
 - The flag had the Union Jack on the top left and Crescent on top right corner.
 - It also had **seven stars**.

Making of the current national flag of India:

- In **1921** a university lecturer named **Pingali (or Pinglay) Venkayya** presented a flag design to Gandhi.
- It consisted of the colours associated with the two principal religions, **red for the Hindus and green for the Muslims**.
- To the centre of the horizontally divided flag, **Lala Hans Raj Sondhi** suggested the addition of the **traditional spinning wheel**, which was associated with Gandhi's crusade to make Indians self-reliant by fabricating their own clothing from local fibres.
- Gandhi modified the flag by adding a **white stripe in the centre** for the other religious communities in India, thus also providing a clearly visible background for the spinning wheel.
- The Congress flag came to be associated with nationhood for India, and it was **officially recognized** at the annual meeting of the party in **August 1931**.
- At the same time, the current arrangement of stripes and the use of deep saffron instead of red were approved.
- To avoid the sectarian associations of the original proposal, new attributions were associated with the **saffron, white, and green stripes**.
 - They were said to stand for, respectively, **courage and sacrifice, peace and truth, and faith and chivalry**.
- During World War II **Subhas Chandra Bose** used this flag (without the spinning wheel) in territories his **Japanese-aided army** had captured.
- After the war Britain agreed to consider freedom for India, although the country was divided and a Muslim-dominated Pakistan was given separate statehood.
- On **July 22, 1947**, the Indian national flag was **officially hoisted**.

- Its stripes remained the same saffron-white-green, but the spinning wheel was replaced by a **blue chakra—the Dharma Chakra** ("Wheel of the Law").
 - The Dharma Chakra, which was associated with the emperor **Ashoka** in the **3rd century BCE**, appeared on pillars erected throughout the Mauryan empire during the first serious attempt to unite all of India under a single government.
- The 1947 flag continues to be used by India, although special versions have been developed for ships registered in the country.
- In **2002**, amendments to the **Flag Code of India expanded citizens' rights** regarding the national flag.
 - Previously restricted to national days, the flag can now be displayed and used on any day of the year, subject to guidelines ensuring respect and dignity.

Significance:

- This day celebrates historical achievement and stands for the ambition, diversity, and togetherness of the Indian populace.
- National Flag Day promotes a deeper understanding of the flag's history and its values for democracy, diversity, and inclusivity, through educational workshops, talks, and exhibitions.

International Tigers Day 2024



Recently: The **2024 edition** of the International Tigers Day was observed on **29th July**.

- This day is celebrated to raise awareness about one of the most majestic and endangered creatures on our planet: the tiger.
- This day provides a platform for people all around the world to emphasise the value of tiger conservation and the immediate need to save these majestic big cats from extinction.

Theme:

- This year's theme for International Tigers Day is - **Call for Action**.

History:

Global Tiger Day, commonly referred to as International Tiger Day, was first established in **2010** during the **Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit** by nations that are home to tigers.

- The **Global Tiger Initiative (GTI)**, a grouping of nations, international organisations, and conservation organisations committed to tiger conservation, organised the summit, which took place in **St. Petersburg, Russia**.
- The **29th of July** was chosen as **International Tiger Day** because it represents the halfway point between the first and last days of the Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit and the ongoing international campaign to rescue tigers.

Global Tiger Initiative:

- The Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) was launched in **2008** as a global alliance of governments, international organizations, civil society, the conservation and scientific communities, and the private sector to work together to save wild tigers from extinction.
- In **2013**, the scope was broadened to include **Snow Leopards**.
- The GTI's founding partners included the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Smithsonian Institution, Save the Tiger Fund, and International Tiger Coalition (representing more than 40 non-government organizations).
- The **13 tiger range** countries lead the initiative (TRCs)
- 13 tiger range countries include: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Significance:

The world's largest and most recognisable big cats, tigers, are in grave danger, and International Tiger Day serves as a platform to raise awareness of this.